

Leadership Characteristics in Church Revitalization

There is a lot of emphasis right now on church revitalization. That is a good thing because so many churches need revitalizing. Thom Rainer says [the figure is around 85%](#).

How do we know when revitalization is actually occurring? The typical markers of revitalization I look for are:

- Attendance growth of more than 20% from the church's ten-year average. (Sustained growth, I should emphasize, not a temporary spike that returns to the norm within a year or two. Over time, most plateaued churches fluctuate within plus-or-minus 20% of a historical average.)
- Significant and sustained increase in annual baptisms.
- Significant and sustained increase in tithes and offerings.
- Significant and sustained increase in mission vision and activity, both local and state/national/international.
- A new-found ability to make big decisions as a church and then follow through on them. (Think strategic actions – *major* ministry shifts, budget reallocations, building projects, organizational restructuring, etc. – as opposed to small tactical changes.)

There are many factors which affect church revitalization. Not all of them are under the control of the church or her leaders. However, in looking at the churches in Bluebonnet Association who exhibit some of the above characteristics, I have observed common leadership traits in the pastors. Let's call these *leadership traits which correlate with church revitalization*.

1) *Focused*. Revitalized churches have a pastor who is focused on revitalization. He does not expect it to happen accidentally. He has a plan for it and is working the plan. This guides him in allocating his time and energy.

2) *Deliberate*. Deliberateness combines both patience and intentionality. It takes a while for revitalization to happen. Moving too fast or pushing too hard causes a blow-up. Not moving or pushing enough preserves the status quo. Revitalization pastors pick their battles wisely and lead the church at a pace that is challenging but doable.

3) *Tough-but-tender*. You better have a thick skin if you want to lead church revitalization. Someone's cheese is going to get moved and you are the rat who will get the blame. Revitalization pastors learn to handle criticism in a way that does not throw them into a personal crisis, stymie the forward movement, or turn them negative toward people.

4) *Appreciate structure and processes*. Revitalization pastors know they do not have all the answers. They also appreciate good organizational structures and decision-making processes that lead to the right answers. I notice that pastors in revitalized churches spend significant time building and invigorating structure and processes. They provide ways for church members to participate in big decisions. This leads to more buy-in.

5) *Learners but not band-wagon joiners.* Revitalization pastors look around to see what God is doing in other churches, but they do not expect things to happen exactly the same way in their church. They learn and contextualize.

6) *Doing the fundamentals well.* Football teams that block, tackle, and execute plays well tend to be successful. Likewise, pastors who demonstrate competence in basic ministry tasks like preaching and pastoral care earn, over time, the credibility to lead the church to attempt big things. Time plus demonstrated competence and integrity equal enhanced leadership capacity.

7) *Tempered reactions.* Antagonists will often arise when significant changes are proposed. Their tactic is to goad the pastor into reacting in a way that will undermine the pastor's credibility. Revitalization pastors have learned not to respond in kind to antagonists. Calmness combined with good processes will ultimately neutralize unreasonable people.

8) *Build connections into the community.* Revitalization pastors look for ways to connect themselves with their local mission field. It might be Rotary Club; it might be coaching little league; it might be serving on a city committee or feeding hungry people. Whatever it is, it builds a bridge between the church and the community.

A few cautions about the above list. First, I do not know how *causal* any of these traits are. I can only say they *correlate* with church revitalization based on my observations. Second, there are spiritual and intangible factors involved in these churches and leaders which are beyond my ability to observe. Third, these leaders exhibit great differences in ministry style and personality. They have commonalities but are by no means copies of one another.

If you are a pastor in a church that needs revitalization, consider using the above list as a tool for evaluating your leadership and considering adjustments. As you start a new year, are there some ways you need to reallocate your time? Are there some practices you need to start, stop, or reinvigorate? Is there a particular leadership quality or behavior you need to focus on in 2019? Determine that you are going to be a better leader at the end of the year than you are at the beginning, and then get going on one or two key changes.

Also, do not forget about Dr. Minton's coaching process. It has been helpful to a number of pastors in revitalization situations. This is a great resource we have in Bluebonnet Association. Take advantage of it.

Finally, hang in there, dear brothers. Work through the difficult stuff. Pray and trust the Lord and don't quit. It's worth it!