

INVESTING IN YOUR TEAM THROUGH MENTORING



by Gene Roncone

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Many church leaders are so focused on getting the most out of their staff that they fail to steward and invest in them. One of the surprising results of a recent survey I did of over 600 ministers in our Network was from associate pastors. They said they felt “trapped” in their current role because no one was investing in them for the future. They were paid well, treated well, and resourced well for their current roles but felt they had an expiration date stamped on their foreheads because no one was mentoring them for the future.

Like the length of the stride of a giant and a small person, not all of us are equal. Some have a longer “leadership stride” than others—not because they are better people but because they were born with “longer legs.” MUCH of leadership is learned with very little given at birth. Mentoring your team is an effective way to lengthen their stride.

There is one thing every staff member wants, needs, and will absorb sacrifices to obtain: mentoring. But how do we know who is ready for this costly investment, and what are the best ways we can do it? Following are four ways to mentor in a way that invests in your teams.

1. Mentor Wisely

How do you choose people to mentor? That was the question I was asked in response to a Facebook photo I recently posted about my weekly cohort that prepares leaders for their first lead pastorate. It started me thinking about lessons I have learned regarding mentoring over the years.

Mentoring has risks. Mentoring others is a labor of love that involves hard work and many risks. What are those risks? It takes a lot of time, patience, and money. I do not like wasting those things, so I am selective of the people I mentor. Furthermore, not everyone who wants a mentor is ready for one. Your organization’s momentum can also be stifled due to your being distracted by an incompetent, sluggish, or overconfident apprentice. Few things are as disappointing as a failed mentorship. I have had my fair share of those in whom I have invested time, money, and emotional support—only to be disappointed. However, the ones who grow make up for the disappointment of those who do not.

Not everyone is ready. I look for people who have given me the confidence that my sacrifice and investment will be worth it. After Moses was told that he would not be leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land, he prayed that God would appoint a new leader for the nation. The Lord instructed Moses to mentor Joshua for leadership.

*Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is **the spirit of leadership** and lay your hand on him (Numbers 27:18 NIV, emphasis added).*

What is the “spirit of leadership”? Scholars are not entirely sure, but the context suggests that there are four characteristics people we mentor should have:

- **A history of faithfulness.** Joshua had already proven himself faithful to God, Moses, and the nation’s mission. He had served faithfully as Moses’ assistant since Mount Sinai (Exodus 33:11). He was not influenced by negative peer pressure and was willing to be among the courageous minority (Numbers 14:5-9). He won battles, raised up military commanders, and constantly grew into his calling. He had already proven himself to be faithful in leadership positions.
- **Successful followership.** As strange as it may sound, the best leaders are those who have been successful followers in prior seasons of their development. The capacity to follow reveals that a potential leader is capable of being loyal to something other than themselves or their own ideas or passions. It also shows that they know how to be on the implementation side of the leadership equation. Anyone can dream dreams that others must fulfill, but successful followers see the big picture and know how the parts need to be connected in order to get things done. Not all followers are leaders, but all outstanding leaders have a history of faithfully following in different contexts.
- **Proven results.** Joshua had more than God’s confidence; he also had Moses’ confidence and the trust of clan leaders from each of Israel’s tribes. Why? He won battles, brought wins to the table, and had a track record of success (Exodus 17:8-13). If something was entrusted to Joshua, it became effective, grew, and contributed to the nation’s overall success. Unfortunately, we live in a day when optics are valued more than results. Leaders are often judged more by their talk, vocabulary, and appearance than their track record. A leader without results is nothing more than an untested theoretician. Unproven theoreticians usually have ideas, vocabulary, and speech that is more impressive than the results column on their résumés. However, Joshua was capable of delivering results.
- **Divine giftings.** The Lord said Joshua had “the spirit of leadership.” Scholars are uncertain as to what that may mean. There appear to be two options. The original Hebrew word used for “spirit” could be applied to mean both “courage for leadership” or a “God-given gift of leadership.” Either way, it appears Joshua was anointed by God in a way that empowered him with courage and leadership. I personally think it implies the overlapping of natural talent and supernatural anointing. Joshua was blessed to have both.

Create “triple win” scenarios. The best way to maximize the benefits of mentoring is to create rewarding scenarios on three fronts: the mentor, the mentee, and the organization. For example, I lead a weekly cohort that trains sharp associates to be future lead pastors; but I also give them assignments to fill pulpits when tired pastors need a break. I benefit from satisfying my love for mentoring. Those I mentor benefit from being mentored by a seasoned leader. The Network benefits from having a stronger leadership pipeline and from pulpit support for our smaller churches. This approach is based on the principle that any significant investment of time, energy, and resources should simultaneously benefit more than one area of the organization. It

also helps to minimize potential losses and regain resources invested in the mentorship and creates multiple points of benefit.

Leaders are busy, and our time must be reserved for the worthiest mentees. Make sure you plant the seeds of time, sacrifice, and energy in soil most likely to yield fruit.

2. Mentor Prayerfully

I have had many team members over the years. Some I deserved, and others I did not. Many were pleasant, and a few were invaluable. I have had the driven pushed by ambition, the wanted called by invitation, the covetous motivated by money, and the gifted powered by talent. However, few things bless leaders more than valiant men and women whose hearts have been stirred by God to accompany us.

Shortly after the inauguration of King Saul, some were unimpressed with his potential; yet God blessed him with a group who followed for reasons other than the obvious.

Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched (1 Samuel 10:26 ESV).

God gave Saul these mighty warriors despite Saul's own inexperience and limitations. Sadly, Saul proved unworthy of them in the end. This keeps me praying for two things: my heart and the hearts of those who will journey with me in ministry.

My Heart. The sobering truth of Saul's lack of stewardship has me praying for:

- **Humility.** To understand its importance, timing, and situational application.
- **Security.** To work with those who are smarter, more gifted, and more impressive than I.
- **Gratefulness.** To know it is God and not I who provided them, motivated them, and called them to accompany me.
- **Repentance.** To repent when I lead in ways that make me unworthy of their valor and loyalty.
- **Faith.** To release them when the kingdom needs them elsewhere.
- **Courage.** To push them, hold them accountable, and maximize our combined potential.
- **Appreciation.** To honor them for their faithfulness to God and willingness to journey with me.

Their Hearts. 1 Samuel 10:26 has me praying for those who may journey with me into the future. May they be men and women whose hearts have been touched by God to be:

- **Learning leaders** who are willing to invest in their own development, earn excellence, and benchmark with colleagues to excel in what God has presently called them to do.
- **Problem solvers** who do not have all the answers but are willing to study obstacles, gain perspective, and collaborate with others.

- **Practical strategists** who can think through process and lay out steps to get us where we need to be.
- **Relational leaders** who inspire others, welcome accountability, and lead on the wings of relationship.
- **Driven spirits** who are willing to work hard, persevere, and push forward.
- **Loyal warriors** who are not distracted by the political, electoral, and tribal nature of organizations.
- **Dream catchers** who can be inspired by the vision God has given me and be tribal story tellers in our mission.

I printed off these two lists and keep them near me in times of prayer. We labor in a day where ministries are built on the sandy soil of charisma, celebrity, and cosmetic mirage. However, 1 Samuel 10:26 shows us the powerful potential of a followership propelled by the rocket fuel of the Spirit's inspiration. Every leader needs people who willingly and passionately follow under the inspiration of God. Abraham had 318 highly trained men. Saul had men who had been moved by the True God. 2 Samuel 23 and 1 Chronicles 10 both list a roll call of leaders who boldly and courageously served David's vision. **At the end of the day, however, it is the humble heart of a leader and the touch of God upon followers that facilitate winning teams.**

3. Mentor Transformationally

People do not want to feel stuck—especially high performers. If you are not becoming part of their success and promotion quotient, then you are a transactional leader who is only trading services for remuneration. However, transformational leaders mentor someone to prepare them for their next level whether it is with them or not. They prepare people for their next promotion.

How to mentor transformationally. Transformation mentoring has the following characteristics.

- **Uniquely aligned.** There are different motivating factors for each team member. Just like good parenting requires a parent to recognize the uniqueness of each child, so does mentoring different members of your team.
- **Stretching experiences.** Exposure to executive tasks outside their portfolio that stretch their capacity and perspective.
- **Mentoring assignments.** Customized assignments that require them to grow skills they do not have but that help the church at the same time.
- **A seat around the table.** The need to include them in power meetings and executive leadership information loops.
- **Financing their education.** Not necessarily college but learning seminars, books, and online learning opportunities or mentoring cohorts.

Ways to mentor transformationally

- Bring them into decisions and genuinely ask their thoughts. By that, they see how you are making those decisions and what factors matter.
- Transparently allow them to see the good, the bad, and the ugly to help you be better.
- Push them to work hard AND play hard.
- From time to time, ask penetrating questions to see how they are doing.
- Give them a seat at tables they do not deserve to sit at.
- Trust them.
- Have hard and clarifying conversations with them; get things out in the open.
- Provide big opportunities with guardrails.
- Teach them lessons and disciplines you have learned while allowing them to be themselves.
- Give them access to you and teach them how not to abuse it.
- Reward hard work with time off or small bonuses. Do not reward everyone the same! Instead reward people in proportion to their contribution to the team and ability to grow.

What to mentor.

- The cost of leadership (financial, emotional, physical, spiritual, and personal cost of being a leader with a long stride).
- How to collaborate and lead strong and diverse personalities.
- Pastoral counseling.
- How to make a budget from scratch.
- How to make an agenda and chair a church board meeting.
- Ministerial ethics.
- Pastoring the expression of spiritual gifts in a worship service.
- How to have a personal devotional life.
- Water baptism, baby dedications, weddings, and funerals.
- How to plan an annual business meeting.
- Execution and the art of getting things done.
- Preaching.

Benefits of transformational mentoring. When we are transformational mentors, we reap the benefits of team members who are loyal and who have longevity. We also widen and lengthen our leadership pipeline. In addition to these, we also provide greater options and opportunities for team members as well as our ministry. But most of all we duplicate kingdom thinking.

4. Mentor Futuristically

The Assemblies of God is experiencing the most profound transition of lead pastors in our organization's history. Seasoned lead pastors are retiring, resigning, and retreating in the wake of post-Covid realities. Unfortunately, many are not leaving well. Of utmost important to

recognize is that we are ALL interim pastors whether it is for a 5- or 20-year tenure. The best leaders prepare their church for the season after they are gone. Mentored succession is perhaps the grandest expression of the “triple win” mentioned earlier. That can be achieved on several levels of ministry tears, but is most beneficial when achieved at the highest levels of leadership.

There are many examples in God’s Word of godly leaders assuming the responsibility for a smooth transition of leadership. Before his passing, Moses prepared Joshua and made sure there was a seamless transition of power and leadership (Deuteronomy 31). Jacob assembled his sons to instruct them about life after his departure (Genesis 49:1). Joseph took the time to encourage his sons and instruct them in what to do after he died (Genesis 50:24). David accepted the challenge of preparing his successor to succeed (1 Chronicles 22:1-16) and surrounded him with a capable team (1 Chronicles 22:17-29). Before retiring, he gave Solomon and the tribal leaders a written plan to move forward in building the temple (1 Chronicles 28:19). Before leaving Ephesus, Paul gave detailed instructions to the elders on how to carry on without him (Acts 20:22-38). Before returning to heaven, Jesus told His disciples He desired even greater kingdom success for those who followed Him (John 14:12).

Mentored succession is the most effective way for a church to grow and thrive through an eventual pastoral transition. There are several books authored by pastors who have successfully navigated the uncertain waters of mentored succession. Although each story is different, I have noted common denominators and intentional processes that were employed in the handoff. They can be summarized in the following seven stages of varying length.

Stage 1: Embracing Change. This stage involves the current pastor’s being ready, willing, and able to let go. This may be the most critical step because it requires the leader to accept the reality of letting go of responsibility and influence. Some can let go of one of those, but a smooth transition requires a leader to gracefully release both. Bryant Wright compares the process of knowing when it is time to let go to how an individual knows they have found the right person to marry. You just know.¹ Honest self-reflection, repeated years of plateauing or declining ministry, waning vision, a prolonged period of being in maintenance mode, and decreasing energy and physical ability all play a part in coming to grips with this reality. One leader’s moment of enlightenment was when he realized he had not killed or birthed a new ministry in over five years. However, at the end of the day, all leaders must be open to hearing God’s voice and moving forward with the same faith and surrender they possessed in their early days of ministry. Age never relieves us of our obligation to live by faith.

Stage 2: Finding Joshua. This stage involves identifying a potential successor. There are many ways leaders have achieved this, but the process includes a few common denominators. In most all cases, the successor exhibited a history of faithfulness, successful followership, proven results, divine giftings, and the ability to cast vision and lead people. However, potential to do these things is not enough. They must also have a history of results.

Stage 3: Wading into Culture. This stage involves a testing time where the potential successor is given a portfolio, placed on the teaching team, and then works on staff to determine if they

are compatible with the pastor, board, other staff, and church. At the end of this time, the lead pastor and board decide if the potential successor can advance to the next stage.

Stage 4: Testing Compatibility. This step involves the potential candidate's continuing in a determined portfolio while being exposed to every major facet of the church's administration, ministries, neighborhood, and community to develop cultural and organizational mastery. The goal of this important step is to determine cultural, philosophical, theological, and stylistic compatibility. The prophet Amos warns about ignoring this season: *Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?* (Amos 3:3 NLT).

Stage 5: Organizational Confirmation. This stage involves the potential candidate's being informed of the succession plan and being interviewed and considered by the board as "pastor-elect." To gain organizational confirmation, some may even present this plan to the church members and ask them to endorse the board's sentiment through a vote. If selected, the pastor-elect continues to serve as the second-in-command and right arm to the lead pastor until the lead pastor resigns or retires at will.

Stage 6: Facilitating Success. This stage is a scheduled season where the lead pastor employs their authority, credibility, and trust to implement changes the successor will need to be successful. This may include alterations in staff, structure, and finances that play to the successor's strengths and backfill their weaknesses. This allows the board and pastor to help the pastor-elect by giving them the highest likelihood of future success. Walter Harvey's book compares this stage of mentored succession to an alley-oop pass in basketball. Harvey claims mentored succession requires the predecessor to set up plays that selflessly allow their successor to slam-dunk the ball and energize both the team and the crowd at the same time.²

Stage 7: Launch Day. This stage is when the formal succession occurs after the lead pastor resigns, retires, or dies. At that time, the pastor-elect is immediately presented to the church as a candidate. The previous pastor's role is to transition into their own new phase of ministry while lending influence to their successor. Jeff Adams pastored Graceway Church in Kansas City, Missouri, for 33 years. After a successful handoff to his successor, Jeff said, "My success is inseparable from that of my successor . . . I was to use my influence to be the bridge for him to the congregation. I was to withdraw all of the funds from my credibility bank and use them to pave his road to success."³

The people we work with are not expendable and disposable cups with a seasonal purpose. They are God's entrustments to us that we must steward. Like the unwise steward, we can bury them in the ground; or like the wise steward, we can invest in them and increase their value for the Master's use.

¹Bryant Wright, *Succession, Preparing Your Ministry for the Next Leader*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN, 2022, p. 22.

²Bishop Walter Harvey, *Alley-Oop, Keys to Pastoral Succession*, Walter Harvey Ministries, 2021.

³Will Heath, *Embracing Succession, Helping Ministry Leaders Confront the Personal Side of Transition*, CrossLink Publishing, Rapid City, SD, 2020, pp. 64-65.