

Old Rules / New Rules - Expectations in Church Life

Leadership that works!

Leith Anderson's *Leadership That Works* is a book that I have read, re-read and benefited from. His clear and accessible style and the issues he deals with will make this book a profitable read for any in church leadership – or those who aspire to it.

He covers topics like why leadership is so hard, the myths behind leadership, why nothing seems simple anymore... to name a few, and then goes right through to 'finishing well'. In this article I give particular attention to **expectations in leadership** basing the series on the chapter in his book which deals with **why the rules of leadership are changing**. I'll be giving his perception of the situation and the rules as he sees them – both old and new - then giving my own response to each of them.

Managing change (a constant in our experience) in the midst of what Anderson calls an 'epidemic of excellence' brings us into conflict with a series of expectations. These can be from ourselves and also from our churches! Often these expectations are couched in terms of 'vision'. Conflicting vision and conflicting expectations – these can seriously compromise our achievements as leaders and churches. I trust that you will find the series helpful.

Great Expectations!

When there are multiple (and often conflicting!) visions within the same church the leader's task becomes complicated. Rising levels of education, increased travel, living in more locations and meeting others from diverse places and backgrounds – all these serve to **exponentially raise people's expectations of their church leaders**. From this situation arises a division over the rules that govern church life.

Old rules and new rules of church leadership

Leith Anderson points out that the new rules of church leadership aren't available in a definitive list – they are **continually changing**. He gives some examples and points out that sometimes the new rules are a new version of the old rules!

Old rule: **Faithfulness is sufficient**

New rule: **Effectiveness is expected**

Leaders born before 1950 will commonly honour other retiring leaders with praise for their **faithfulness**. This encompasses loyalty, showing up, working hard, not complaining, and tolerating less-than-the-best pay and working conditions! Those born after 1950 will major on **effectiveness**!

This isn't to imply that earlier generations reward incompetence, nor that today's leaders aren't faithful. But it does recognise that the pendulum has swung toward an **expectation that leaders not only show up but know what to do and get those things done before they leave**. If they are ineffective their employment is more likely to be terminated than previously.

And if a veteran leader is asked to stand down for not doing a 'good enough' job, his response will often be, 'But I've worked here for 20 years. I took a pay cut when the budget was short – I've given my life to this organisation.' - explaining

why he should stay under the old rules which no longer apply. The new rule asks, 'What have you done lately that has made a difference for good?'

My response:

I believe that the clash of this old rule/new rule is increasingly found in today's churches – for good or ill! I also think *it should be possible to find a middle road where loyalty and service are honoured while recognising that any under-performance is an issue that needs to be addressed.* **My observation on this is that we can lean toward an overly pastoral attitude to the needs of the individual leader while overlooking those he oversees.** Honest dialogue is required to ensure that we are caring biblically for our 21st century flocks and continuing to build integrity and strength into the churches.

Godliness

Old rule: ***Godliness is assumed but not required***

New rule: ***Godliness is required but not assumed***

In the past it was assumed that if a pastor had done theological college training and had been ordained, then he was **godly**. A good pastor carried out the duties of preaching, visiting, marrying, burying and pastoral care – and didn't do anything bizarre. Following increasing revelations of moral failure and financial impropriety in the media, this view has been undermined.

Churches and para-church organisations moved godliness up to the top of the priority list and increased their diligence in assessing the **character and spirituality of leaders**. *The leader is expected to have a close personal relationship with God that is lived out in prayer, chastity, financial accountability, integrity and relational authenticity.* Any flaws are less likely to be given the benefit of the doubt. And full-time Christian ministry isn't the only area of leadership subject to scrutiny – integrity is a major issue for all areas of public life, both for great and small!

My response:

This is a good development, *the heart of leadership* is to live a life of **example**, and the *primary leadership requirement* in the New Testament is that of **character**. Too many pastors fall due to moral or financial failure - have a look at my resource paper on Marriage, Sex and Leadership.

Learning

Old rule: ***Pastors are 'prepared' for ministry***

New rule: ***Pastors are life-long learners***

This is another rule that applies in all areas of working life. The pilot who trained on a DC-3 won't be competent in a Boeing 777. And you wouldn't necessarily want the doctor who graduated forty years ago operating on your child unless she had continued with her professional qualifications, assessments and training. *If a church leader assumes that past degrees, experience and success are all that is required to lead today's church, then he will be wrong most of the time – and they could be the biggest liability he brings to today's opportunities.*

My response:

I love this change in attitude; I am keen to be a **life-long learner!** Your ability to grow spiritually, in skills and in emotional capacity directly affects your ministry goals. *What are you planning to do this year to ensure you are growing as a person and a leader?*

Relationships

Old rule: ***Reason is more important than relationships***

New rule: ***Relationships are more important than reason***

In the 20th century a high value was placed on **reasoning** – science, rationalism and deductive reasoning were all brought to bear on issues. We looked to leaders to be **smart** and provide all the answers – smart people! In the church we admired men who could expound at length on **doctrine, apologetics and pass on knowledge** to us. *This would still be an important thing in today's church – intellectual credibility is still vital in the world and in the church. However, the **importance of relationships** has soared! Church leaders must be able to get along with people – those who are insensitive, distant, unfriendly and who alienate people are unlikely to retain the positions for very long.*

My response:

Church leadership is a people business, and **relationship is at the heart of the Godhead and all good leadership** - *this is another new rule that receives the Steve Tibbert thumbs up!*

Centres of influence

Old rule: ***The centre of influence is the denomination and the bible college***

New rule: ***The centre of influence is the large church and seminars/conferences***

This is a change of emphasis rather than a reversal, but **it is so profound that denominational leaders who don't see this risk total malfunction in their leadership roles.**

Newcomers to an area always used to select a church by denomination. Such *loyalty empowered the denomination* – denominational officials looked on local churches as 'branch offices' of their church. The 'central' organisation probably controlled the appointment of clergy, selected missionaries, owned buildings, confirmed clergy credentials, set rules and took a percentage of the offerings. Budgets were set centrally and often an adversarial relationship developed between church and denomination. Seminary training and socialisation was also in their hands. For 3 or 4 years *future ministers were educated by academics rather than practitioners who often majored on scholarship rather than pastoral skills*. Pastors needing advice contacted their college lecturers or read books written by the college faculty.

The assumption now is that **denominations exist to serve the local church rather than the other way around.** *Church leaders today are more likely to look to large churches – sometimes within their own denomination and sometimes beyond. These churches are well known, frequently studied and have become pace-setters for many areas of church life, including preaching, worship and church structure and organisation. These large churches often offer seminars where other churches can 'dip in' and receiving training and direction. They are accessible, affordable, practical and enormously influential.*

My response:

Who is shaping the Christian landscape? Is it theological colleges or denominations, or even networks or streams of churches? In the last 10 years in the UK, I believe large churches have become the pace-setters. Time will tell if this trend will bear lasting fruit.

One word of warning. In a desire to grow, we should work hard to maintain strong theological roots. It's relatively easy to get a lot of people to attend a popular event such as a high energy church meeting (or even a rock concert or sporting fixture) it is an entirely different challenge to shape peoples' lives in a biblical way, establishing godly values and commitment.

Role of preaching

Old rule: **Preaching is more important than church ministries**

New rule: **Church ministries are more important than preaching**

This rule change is one of the most difficult to take on board as the key issue *is not the decreased importance of preaching but the enormous increase in the value placed on church ministries.*

Because of the high value placed on preaching in the past and the fact that the senior pastor would preach most of the time, churches often became known as 'Pastor X's church' – the high visibility of this role in church life, as compared to other tasks, also led to the joke about ministers only working one day a week!

Today preaching is like the role of a great quarterback in American football – important, if not vital, but unlikely to deliver success if part of a weak team. *The pastor depends on other team members for support and also watches from the sidelines as other team players fulfil their roles.*

Music in worship, teaching and training, children's work, youth ministry, pastoral care, evangelism, social outreach ministry, discipleship, finance and facilities – all come into the team roles. **Quality in these areas is highly valued and attractive to church members** – and may carry a weaker preacher. *The opposite is not true – a strong preacher is unlikely to be able to carry weak ministry teams.* People choose churches and stay there for many more reasons than in the past and most of these reasons are spread over church ministries.

My response:

I disagree on this one, probably because I am a preacher. **I would prefer to say that now both are equally important.** It is true that some churches are built to a preaching gift, other to a worship ministry, but those that seem to really progress combine **excellent preaching** and **high quality church ministries.**

The Leader and the Team

Old rule: **Ministry depends on the leader**

New rule: **Ministry depends on the team**

The days when one man could build a church alone are gone – **it takes a team.** This is most evident in **church planting.** *In the US, research shows that 60% of new churches close within 5 years* – this has led to new approaches and more

strategic developments involving sending in a team, with a full-time pastor, admin assistant, worship leader with musical ability and a children's/youth worker. These latter posts are often part-time. **The inclusion of a second full-timer specialising in youth work, music or outreach significantly increases long-term success and though initially expensive proves less costly in the long run.**

Under the old rule the pastor functioned as a 'prima donna' of the church. Other leaders were simply an extension of that pastor. Under the new rule **the team recruiter and team builder** is the order of the day. ***Blessed is the church with leaders who are adept at recruiting and motivating the very best!***

There will be a **strong theology of spiritual gifts**, based on Eph 4:11-12 and 1 Cor 12-14, and a belief that every Christian has **equal worth in the church** and that each person has **individual but interdependent functions**. The leader acts more like a coach or orchestra conductor than a boss/owner/star. **This type of leader gets great satisfaction out of the successes of others and doesn't make it appear as if he is the reason for success.**

My response:

Once again, I would prefer to say **both are equal in importance**. I totally agree that it is all about team, no one man or woman can cover all the bases, one man ministry is dead. However **John Maxwell**, writing on what he calls the principle of the Lid (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of leadership – John Maxwell – Thomas Nelson, 2007) states *'the team will only function if the team leader has the gift and capacity to lead the team effectively'*.

Measuring Success

Old rule: ***Success defined by narrow comparison***

New rule: ***Success defined by broad comparison***

One of the ways we define ourselves is by comparison with others – we say we are short because others are taller, or rich because others have less money. *And church members have always compared their church leader to other church leaders!* In previous decades this would have been done within a locality or within a denomination, now church leaders are held up against **a standard of nationally known equivalents**, some of whom appear on the media, or within the Christian world of book writing or song writing. CDs, DVDs, magazines all contribute to their fame. As a result, *although the current pastor may be considered better than those of previous years by some, they may also be considered less effective or less gifted than another current leader elsewhere.*

My response:

This is so true. All pastors are compared with the greatest preachers and leaders in the world. We have accepted that in the new world of internet and instant download and access to the wider world - **this is how it is.**

Credentials and Performance

Old rule: ***Credentials are very important***

New rule: ***Performance is very important***

Under the old rule you were unlikely to be allowed into the pulpit unless you had **appropriate qualifications** and **recognised credentials**. As in certain professions, a uniform (the military, medicine) and/or a licence (medicine, teaching) were required. Without them people would not have followed the lead. The new rule recognises **gifted leaders** who may have no formal qualification but who have **great ability to preach and lead** – some will be famous for their success. At the other extreme, *low performers with plenty of credentials will have increased pressure to change or to leave.*

My response:

I like this one, because I have no credentials, failed at school, was poor at exams, and have no letters after my name. I also believe the *true test of leadership is 'followship'*, so this works for me! ...And – it worked for the disciple Peter.

Conclusions

I hope this series taken from **Leith Anderson's Leadership That Works** encourages you to get the book and read it! After **Bill Hybels** and **John Maxwell**, this is the best writer I have read on Christian church leadership.

I think it will be very interesting to look back in a further decade and see if any of the new rules have become old rules! One of the arts of leadership is the **ability to discern trends**, *adopting the ones which are in line with scripture and that will bear fruit in your context.*

At **King's Church, Catford** we are embarking on a new philosophy of ministry and going **multi-site**... time will prove if this becomes a fruitful 'new rule'!

Summary of the Rules:

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New rule: Performance is very important

***Steve Tibbert
Kings Church Catford
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