

# The Salvation Army Leadership Letter



Issue 27:

## Have you found the missing link?

### *Discovering the key to growing congregations*

Have you ever wondered why some New Zealand churches grow and become strong while most don't? The answer is leadership. Well-led churches grow, under-led churches plateau and die.

*Leadership is the key that opens all the doors – in all churches, including Salvation Army corps.*

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### The corps/church growth leader

Many books have been written on leadership, but reduced to the barest minimum the essential principles are these:

1. Church growth leaders (ie leaders of growing congregations) **come in different shapes and sizes** and grow the teams that grow their churches.

Some have charismatic personalities and some don't, some are extroverts and some are introverts, some have many gifts and some have fewer gifts, some are mainline leaders and some are in other churches, some have travelled widely and some haven't. But no matter how different they are, they all develop great teams because they know that without great teams they can never get to their new future.

2. Church growth leaders **develop a feel for the big picture things** that grow congregations.

They know where they're going and how to get there. They know how to find a compelling vision, shape it so it commands attention and share it so they get people on board. They know that leadership is influence and the key to open every door. Like Maxwell, *they know everything rises and falls on leadership.*

3. **Few church growth leaders start out as great leaders**, most become leaders 'through effort and hard work' as a famous US sports coach put it.

Their strong confidence is tempered by a restlessness that refuses to accept the status quo. And they're realists; they know that although they get closer to their goal every day, they're always changing, their congregation and leaders are always changing and new challenges are always emerging. They're also curious people and always want to find out more and learn from those who're further down the road than they are.

*Church growth leaders are a work in progress and reaching their dream is everything to them.*

4. Church growth leaders **gather wisdom** over time and **develop an intuitive feel** for correct decision making. They also **develop good relational skills** so they connect with people, hear where they're coming from, and motivate them to get on board. They know that to grow a church they've got to be on the ball themselves, have a great team around them and raise up an army of people to carry the day. No general ever won a war fighting on their own.



5. Church growth leaders **have great faith in God**, and like the wartime Churchill, they accept nothing less than victory. So they feed on the Bible daily, pray regularly, focus on the task before them and are passionate about the dream that burns in their hearts.
6. In a word, New Zealand church growth leaders **stand out from their peers** because of their feel for the big picture, their ability to grow teams, their commitment to hard work and upskilling themselves for bigger challenges, their wisdom, their ability to raise up an army of followers and their strong and unswerving faith in God.

*You can be almost as sure that church growth leaders will grow churches as you are that night will follow day.*

## The need for church growth leaders – a dying Church

But why do we need these leaders? Because the national church is dying and even the high performing denominations of yesterday are now struggling to stay on the plateau.

In the kinder world of yesterday, it was easy to grow a church, and the further back we go the easier it was.

In the 50s, when our population was still small, one denomination baptised 10,000 people a year and in 1960 peaked at 120,000 adults at church on Sunday, nearly 80,000 Sunday school children on the roll and more than 20,000 Bible class young people. Today, total attendance is about 37,000, although our population has doubled.

In the benign world of yesterday we trained our pastors and ministers differently, requiring them to do long years of demanding study as I did in the 60s. But at College we never heard about leadership and growing teams, vision and the big picture, or many of the other things that are now absolute requirements to grow a church. Yet because growing a church was so easy then, our pastors and ministers led crowded churches and year after year returned record statistics - until the changing world of today began to challenge the aging church of yesterday, sending it tumbling into the decline from which it has never recovered. Clearly, more of the same will not do; we must replace the leadership model of yesterday with the New Zealand church growth model of today.

In a word, the pastor-centered churches of yesterday must give way to the team-led churches of today, especially as churches move from small to medium size. One senior leader or couple can only look after 70-80 regular attenders. Teams are an absolute requirement to grow much beyond that – and the better the team, the faster the growth.

*We need church growth leaders because the national church is dying and nothing else can save it.*

## Getting started on the church growth journey

Take these steps to start the church growth journey:

1. **Get a feel for the big picture of what leadership is about** because we can't lead a church to victory until we know how the Romans 12.8 leadership gift works.

John Maxwell's little book, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, is the best introduction to leadership. John says that when we become the leader we *ought* to be



on the *inside*, we become the leader we *want* to be on the *outside*. People follow us, and when that happens, we're able to tackle anything in this world (p.XI). He's right. So get the book, read it as he advises and put it into practice majoring on one or two qualities at a time.

*To become church growth leaders we must start with what the gift of leadership is and how it works.* When we miss the leadership basics we go round and round in circles and never discover what to do or how to do it.

2. **Get intensive coaching to speed up your development** because coached leaders grow much faster than others.

I've seen amazing examples of this over the years. With time, coached leaders and their churches return stunning Natural Church Development profiles, break through attendance and new member barriers that totally eluded them, and leaders that others had written off slip into the leadership groove and start growing their churches.

Ask your regional leader or divisional commander about coaching and they'll point you in the right direction. Start now because 'Leadership development really matters, and ... if you give yourself to it, it is the highest leverage activity you can engage in' (Hybels). Why drift aimlessly when you can race towards your new dream?

*To get to your church/corps growth dream, get the best coaching you can – immediately!*

3. **Talk with church growth leaders** who are making it in today's challenging climate, especially those who're winning in churches a size or two bigger than yours.

Ask them about how they handled the challenges you face, grew their leadership team, made the transition from your size to the next size, handled pastoral care and small groups as their church grew, and developed high impact Sunday services.

Rick Warren says 'Leadership can be learned. But it can only be learned from someone who is already a leader. Leaders reproduce other leaders. If you want to sharpen your leadership skills, get up close to someone who is modeling what you want to learn.'

*When you talk to those who've got to where you want to go, you'll cut your travelling time in half.*

4. **Read the 7 Practices of Effective Ministry carefully** (Stanley/Joiner/Jones) and move at once to begin putting the principles into practice.

Maxwell's *21 Indispensable Qualities* is a superb introduction to the leadership gift; *7 Practices* is a brilliant introduction to the leadership task. I saw a senior pastor's ministry transformed when he read Practice #1 on 'Clarifying the Win'. Clarifying the Win is now the starting point for every major activity in his church.

*7 Practices* reminds us *we've got to know where we're going and how to get there if we're to reach our dream.*

5. Finally, to tie all the strands of this great adventure together, **get Willow Creek's These Things We Must Do** (CDLS0504) and listen to it again and again.

In this final talk of the 2005 Leadership Summit, Bill Hybels tells us the four things we



must do to grow a church – and we'll refer to it many times in this series because it's the finest talk I ever heard him give. *These Things* calls us back to mission basics and will be the compass that guides us on the incredible journey we're beginning.

Armed with two small books and a CD, you're now ready to begin the journey that could change your ministry forever, and the time to start is now. **Order** the books and CD, **ring** your local Salvation Army headquarters about a coach, and **begin** thinking about which proven leader you could talk to about growing your church to the next size.

*Do these five things with focus and commitment and you'll grow your church because people will follow you.*

## Going further on the church growth journey

When you're underway and seeing fruit, take these further steps to keep your church growing indefinitely:

1. Get Maxwell's revised and updated ***The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership***, his ***The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*** and (later) the updated third edition of Kouzes and Posner's ***The Leadership Challenge***.
  - ***The 21 Irrefutable Laws*** has had a major upgrade. The Laws have been updated, the illustrations refined, the applications enhanced, and the basic leadership ideas updated for a new generation. Maxwell says these 21 laws are the foundation of leadership so if they are who can afford to ignore them?
  - ***The 17 Indisputable Laws*** is a gem on teams and how they work. For example, Law 5 reminds us that no team is stronger than its weakest link (rather frightening!), Law 15 says the difference between two equally talented teams is leadership, and so on. Great teams grow great churches and the stronger the teams the faster the growth.
  - ***The Leadership Challenge*** is an extraordinary book although it is not for beginners. Andy Stanley (of *7 Practices*) says '*The Leadership Challenge* has been my primary leadership text since 1988' (so it must be good!), and I remember Maxwell said it was the best book on leadership.

Kouzes and Posner say leaders gaze across the horizons of time and imagine the opportunities they and their people will enjoy when they reach their destination. Leaders create something no one else has ever created, see what a completed project will look like before they start it and believe leadership is a dialogue rather than a monologue (p.15).

2. **Grab every opportunity to develop your leadership skills further** – going to conferences and courses that stretch you, reading books that extend you, and booking time with top Christian and business leaders to learn from them as the younger Maxwell did on his way to the top.
3. **Evaluate constantly and celebrate your wins frequently** as *7 Practices* #7 advises us.

To grow a church we need to constantly evaluate what we do and take time out to do it. As the *7 Practices* writers say, 'You can't evaluate something if you stay in the middle of it too long' (p.175).

We should also celebrate our wins at our Sunday services as the *7 Practices* writers



do at their church because 'If you want a behaviour repeated then you need to reward it' (p.181).

You may have already started evaluating your activities and celebrating your wins. To take your church to the next level, you should now evaluate your activities more critically and develop high impact celebrations that carry your church forward to your new dream. The biggest coaching breakthroughs I've had came through setting the bar very high and then working to reach the new standard. Attendance and enrolment numbers rose dramatically.

## Some great leadership challenges

Here are several challenges you will face.

1. **Getting through the church size barriers** is the toughest challenge because more churches come unstuck over this issue than almost any other factor.

The **first** challenge is to get through the 50 barrier on Sundays because churches under 50 tend to be pastor-centred and their services run more like large home groups. Their challenge is to find and grow future leaders, develop pastoral care, and lift the standard of what they do on Sundays because visitors decide within the first few minutes whether they'll come back. Most don't!

The **second** challenge is to get through the 100 barrier because 80% of New Zealand churches never get much past a hundred. By 100, team leaders should be emerging, pastoral care increasingly done by lay people and Sundays be taking on a more professional look with singable songs and life-changing preaching. The larger the congregation, the higher the standard needs to be.

The **next** challenge is to get through the 200 barrier because 90% of New Zealand churches never get much past 200. By 200, strong teams should be leading the mission charge, basic pastoral care be done by the small groups and pastoral care team, and Sunday services should be run 'professionally' with marvellous singing and dynamic life-changing preaching. Churches struggle when any of these emphases are missing.

The **last** significant barrier to get through is 300 on Sundays because Rick Warren says 95% of the world's churches never get past 300. To get past 300 we need superbly run Sunday services, a stunning children's church at the same time as the services, a high-performing leadership team, excellent pastoral care, and cutting-edge weekday ministries.

*To get through the attendance barriers we have to keep raising the bar on Sundays and during the week.*

2. The second related challenge is to **grow the leadership team** so they increasingly lead the church's mission to reach and disciple people for Jesus. This particularly applies to denominations where pastors move every few years. Strong teams make for smooth transitions and the stronger the team the better the transition.

As churches grow in size, the pastor's role changes from being a shepherd to a rancher with several shepherds – just as my Dad ran his 40-cow farm quite differently



to the way my brother now runs his 400-cow farm. At the start Dad did virtually everything on his farm; my brother leads a multi-staff operation where he and his wife run the farm, empower their staff, and steer the farm towards higher and higher performances.

In many ways, 40-cow farms are like 40-person churches, 400-cow farms like 400-person churches, and a 2000-person church (which a friend leads) very like a 2000-cow farm. In both cases, dramatic changes take place as the unit grows through the various barriers.

*Great teams are an absolute requirement to grow churches through the size barriers.*

3. **Mastering pastoral care** is the third challenge because in many churches the back door is as wide as the front door so the church never grows.

Rick Warren says small groups are the building blocks of effective discipleship and pastoral care so he never worries about people who join a good small group. People who enjoy doing discipleship together stay together. The *7 Practices* writers say the same, 'discipleship happens best with a group of friends who are "doing life" together' (p.91). My friend with his 2,000-person church says that their 100+ adult small groups have shut the back door of his church. But even with good small groups, we still have to develop effective pastoral care for people with special challenges and those who aren't in small groups at this stage of their journey.

4. There are **other leadership challenges**, but these are the big three - with the pressing Sunday question part of the larger church size challenge as we'll see later.

## The leadership challenge

The leadership challenge is simple – we either rise to the challenge and grow or decline the challenge and die.

Bill Hybels says, 'Show me a prevailing church anywhere, any continent, any culture; give me three days to inspect it ... I'll find some God-honoring, risk-taking, fired up leaders at the center of that church who are living out the Romans 12:8 leadership gift in ways that are lifting that church to higher and higher levels year after year.

Likewise, show me a diseased or slowly dying church, and give me three days to diagnose it's illness, and I can predict with a great amount of accuracy that I'm going to find the absence of Romans 12.8 leaders ... Churches, if they're left alone, will not get better, they get worse, they get diseased, they die. Churches only get better when they have great leaders ...'

Or as Maxwell says, 'everything rises and falls on leadership'.

However we look at it, leadership is the key to open all the doors and the key to saving the national church.

*Get leadership right and everything else will follow, both in local churches and corps and in the national church.*



## Questions for you and your team

1. **Where are you at in your own personal leadership development** - and what steps will you take over the next few months to speed up your development? (Write your answers down and make yourself accountable to someone, e.g. your regional or divisional leader)
2. **Where is leadership development at** in your church or corps - and what steps will you now take to grow **your present team leaders** – e.g. work through *7 Practices* over the next few months? (Record your assessment and action steps together with any names and dates)
3. **What are you doing to grow your future leaders** – and what steps will you now take to find them, introduce them to the leadership challenge and give them early experience at leading? (Write your answers and action steps down with any names and dates)
4. **Which of the three big challenges mentioned do you and your team struggle with most** - and what steps will you now take to get on top of this challenge? (Write your answer and strategy details down with names etc)
5. Given Bill Hybels' above comments, **is your church growing or dying (one or the other)**, and are there any additional steps I've not mentioned that you should take to lock growth into your church's journey? (Write down your answer and the additional steps you mention with names and dates as needed)