

The Church Planter's Toolbox

Ideas and Helps for Great Commission Workers • November 2007

Setting the Pace

If you're not a reader by nature, you may tend to shy away from books that are three inches thick – the best book on any subject, after all, is surely the condensed version. We like to keep things simple and straight forward. That's why my favorite book on leadership, for example, is John Maxwell's *Leadership 101*.

In God's work, the Scriptures are the handbook that perfectly equips us for all God wants us to be and to do (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Pastoral Epistles serve as a course in *Church Planting 101*. Here the Apostle Paul shares an important principle with his church-planting teammates when he says, *In all things showing thyself a PATTERN of good works* (Titus 2:7) and, *let no one despise your youth; but be thou an EXAMPLE of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity* (1 Timothy 4:12).

Paul was saying that we as pastors and church planters need to set the pace if we expect others to develop into fully-functioning believers. For every pastor who



teaches and leads God's people, his example of godly character, Christian living, spiritual growth, and dedicated service is important. For the church planter, it is not just important, it

is indispensable. Because the church is in its formative stages, everything he does will set the pattern for the way its people will think, and how effective its ministry will be.

Let's apply this principle to an important aspect of church planting. Starting a new church is not just a matter of setting up shop so people who are looking for a church will have a place to attend. Church planting is fulfilling the Great Commission to take the gospel to people everywhere, to bring them to

Expanding Your Vision

While sitting on the hillside overlooking the village of Sychar, Jesus challenged his disciples to lift up their eyes and look on the fields which were already white unto harvest (John 4:35). Their vision had been limited to the fields of grain that spread across the valley below them. They didn't notice the long line of Samaritans snaking their way up the mountainside toward the Lord Jesus. Their vision was too small.

Sadly, the same thing happens to church planters—their vision is too limited. They have not taken the time to look into the future to determine what the church God is leading them to plant will look like or how large he wants it to be. Consequently, they launch their church plant without laying an adequate foundation to support a healthy church in the future. By starting too soon and too small, they all but guarantee a ministry that will struggle to survive.

Research indicates that church plants that do not reach the 200 mark by the end of their second year have only a 23 percent chance of doing so. Moreover, new churches that fail to become self-supporting by the end of the second year have only a 17 percent chance of doing so in the future. We must do better. But, what can be done to bring about this needed change?

Enlarge your Vision—*Vision* is defined as a clear and challenging picture of the future as it can and must be. If a man's vision is too small or too hazy, his ministry is unlikely to succeed regardless of how long he stays or how much effort is put into the plant. It is not good enough to say, "I'm gong to start a church." Planters need to have a bigger, clearer picture of the church as it will be one day, the kind of facilities it will have, the ministries it will offer, and the trained leaders it will have in place. Just as Moses motivated the children of Israel with a vision of a "land of milk and honey," so the church planter must motivate himself and his people with a vision of the future as God would have it to be.

Develop your Ministry Plan—Jesus stressed the importance of ministry planning when he told of the man who tried to build a tower without first counting the cost (Luke 14:28). Church planters need to develop a blue print that includes the size, structure, materials, resources, and personnel they will need. Who needs to be recruited? What training needs

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Christ, and then help them learn to walk in obedience to all He has commanded. Evangelism leads to discipleship, and discipleship results in a church being established. Church planting is not about having a place or running a program, it's about reaching people with the gospel.

What can the church planter do to help his core group focus on evangelism?

He can preach and teach regularly on God's love for the lost – the Word will work in the hearts of believers to stir them and motivate them to seek out others and

share the gospel with them.

He can budget funds for outreach – advertising and promotion will help you to find some whose hearts God has prepared.

He can teach a class on personal evangelism – some will respond to the instruction and begin to put into practice the principles you teach.

He can initiate programs to get people involved in outreach – having a structure will help some people begin to think about others.

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Setting the Pace continued

But effective evangelism is more than just a line item in the budget, a course that we teach or a program of the church. Seeking the lost and sharing the gospel must become an integral part of the life of every believer (especially church planters). It is to be part of who we are and how we are to think as children of God. To successfully plant a church, the core group must develop a culture of reaching out to people and building relationships with them in order to win them to Christ. They are unlikely to do that unless you as the leader set the pace by doing the same thing yourself.

As the group grows, there will be some that God will use in an unique way to reach out to unbelievers around them. Their ministry will serve to light a fire in others in this regard. In ministry teams, we can and should bring others around us to beef up areas where we are not strong. But we can't depend upon someone else to do our job for us. In most cases, the church plant will not succeed unless the church-planting pastor and his wife blaze the trail showing where the church needs to go. They must set the pace for its future progress.

Evangelism will become the life blood of the developing church body as it functions and grows – it will become a part of its DNA – only as the church planter models this kind of life. You can't just tell people they need to reach out to others, you must lead them to this way of life by your example. You can't just teach people to evangelize, you must show them how. You can't just preach to create a vision, the vision will be caught from the fire in your own heart and the pattern of your life. They must see it in you, learn it from your example, and follow you as you work to build the church one person at a time.

But some will say, I'm just not a "people person." That's OK. God knew exactly who you were when He selected you for a church-planting ministry. Even those of us of timid temperament can learn to be effective witnesses and allow God to use us to reach others. It is the Holy Spirit's desire to nurture in our hearts the love of Christ, to speak through our mouths the Words of Christ, and to work through our lives to reach out on behalf of Christ to the people around us.

This does not mean that every week you will be telling a story about someone you met, talked with or witnessed to. No! That will soon begin to look like pride. You won't have to tell people what you're doing – they will soon begin to see it. You don't have to talk about people you reach, their new life in Christ and presence in His Body will say it for you. As someone said, "Use your steam to run the engine, not to blow the whistle." If you live it, you won't need to flaunt it. If reaching out to others is a part of your spiritual DNA, it will soon become evident to all.

Christ is building His church. He has chosen to use you. So, determine by the grace of God to set the pace and be the example of a compassionate, caring believer who shares his or her faith regularly with the unchurched around you. "In all things showing yourself to be a PATTERN of good works" (Titus 2:7).

Expanding Your Vision continued

to be offered? How much money needs to be secured? What ministries need to be implemented? What critical mass needs to be attained? What timeframe is attached to each of these?

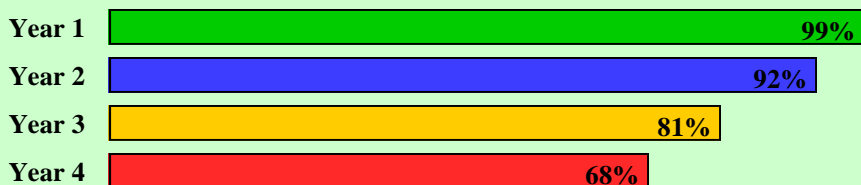
Delay your Public Launch—Many church plants are dead in the water as soon as they launch because they were started too soon. Wise church planters delay going public until they can gather a sustainable core group. Sixty-nine percent of planters who launch with core groups of less than two dozen people tend to develop small, struggling churches whereas fifty-five percent of those who wait until they have more than two dozen in their core group grow rapidly and become strong churches.

Get Training and Help—Successful church planters learn from those who have done it already. The ministries of men like Timothy, Titus, Silas and others were strengthened as they listened to the counsel of the Apostle Paul and learned from his example.

A recent study shows seventy-four percent of successful church planters received one or more weeks of training while planters of struggling churches received less than a week of training. Nearly three-quarters of successful planters seek counsel from a church-planting mentor, and sixty percent meet at least monthly with a group of their planting peers for encouragement and insights.

We can and must do a better job of winning the lost and developing healthier churches. We can do it if we expand our vision to see what God would have our churches to become, and the great potential harvest of souls all around us.

Survivability Rates for New Church Plants



Approximately 68 percent of new church plants survive four years or more.

The church planter who provides leadership training for new members increases the odds of survivability by over 250 percent.

The church planter who conducts an annual stewardship development plan increases the odds of survivability by over 178 percent.

The church planter who meets with a group of church-planting peers at least monthly increases the odds of survivability by 135 percent.

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