

Learning about Leadership Reshapes Where the Faithful Meet: A Green Church Is Elevated onto Solid Rock

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Many people who have worthy dreams are stumped when it comes to knowing exactly how to accomplish the results they imagine. If everyone knew how to turn worthwhile aspirations into reality, the world would be a much kinder, gentler place.

However, such a transformation can occur more easily than most people think: Age-old lessons about how to lead effectively (with or without formal power and adequate resources) are well documented in excellent books and articles, and those lessons can be learned by anyone who is determined to improve.

It's especially easy for those with significant authority but limited resources to do better by learning these lessons. Let's consider an example of a Christian minister who learned more about leadership to encourage you to learn what you need to know in order to turn all your excellent dreams into reality.

Demands on ministers often leave them with little time to read the Bible and pray for the guidance they need to shepherd their congregations. Most ministers wish they could increase the time they spend in both activities. As their congregations grow in size and needs the problem gets worse. Where will they find the time to gain more leadership knowledge and skills needed to help them to attract and organize the assistance they need to have more time for Bible study, prayer, and leading new initiatives?

The Bible teaches that each person receives different gifts from God to serve Him as described in Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-12 (NKJV):

“But to each one of us grace was given
according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore He says:

*‘When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.’*

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets,

some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry,
for the edifying of the body of Christ,”

Reverend Jeremy Mahood, Ph.D., minister of All Nations Church in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, shows how the spiritual gifts to serve God can be increased in effectiveness by making further study and practice a priority.

His father was the minister who founded the church where Reverend Mahood now leads the congregation. His parents devoted some of their meager wages to piano lessons when he was six and soon realized that making beautiful music was in his blood.

While other boys spent endless hours playing ball or hockey, the future Reverend Mahood was just as likely to be enjoying practice time with the 88 fascinating keys of the family’s piano. Since practice helps makes perfect, he was soon launched into an active musical life at church and elsewhere.

Because he felt called by his religion and to music, he began college by seeking a degree with the double major of theology and music. The musical part of his development flourished while the theological part didn’t. Before long, he was enjoying a very successful career as a performer while being pulled away from his religious roots. Clearly, all that learning about music, one of his gifts, had redirected his life.

Later, Reverend Mahood had a crisis of faith and meaning, and he headed back to college where he quickly completed a bachelor’s degree in experimental psychology. He returned home planning to work for a year with his father in the church, searching for his life’s purpose. More than 30 years later, he is still engaged in ministry for that church.

During those years in ministry, he continued to seek out new opportunities to learn, earning a master’s degree in counseling psychology to help him to better serve the congregation. His thirst for helpful knowledge was still great, and he next sought the opportunity to accomplish more by studying for a doctorate in leadership. Because of his busy schedule, Reverend Mahood decided to enroll at Rushmore University, an online school, where he would have more flexibility in his academic work schedule.

Encouraged by Rushmore to apply leadership lessons gained through study, the reverend began using Monday staff meetings to discuss leadership concepts, to propose new accountability models, and to brainstorm better ways to accomplish new projects. As a result of these experiences, he greatly valued the hands-on aspects of his learning.

In particular, a course in communicating within large organizations had a large influence on him and ultimately the church. From that course, Reverend Mahood learned a communications process that he has successfully employed to help lead his congregation through a major change to accomplish more for the Lord.

As a result of that change, the church is in the process of planning a large new facility, through a program called Building on the Rock for Tomorrow, that's quite different from Fraser Auditorium at Laurentien University where All Nations Church currently holds services. God got the ball rolling for this project by directing a man to the church who offered to swap his fourteen acres of cross-topped rock overlooking Sudbury for four acres in town that had been bought by the congregation in the 1980s as a building site for a new church. Due to lack of enough land to serve all the needs of the growing congregation, that building project had never commenced.

That advantageous land swap was just the beginning of the heavenly favor this project has received. God further blessed the exchange by leading a father-and-son law firm, Sinclair and Sinclair, to provide free legal services and moving the hearts of the local planning commission to make supportive decisions that facilitated the new church's plans. A local advertising agency, 50carlton, provided all of the design and descriptive materials for the new church's fund-raising campaign. Perry + Perry, an architectural firm, donated its services for designing the site, building, and related facilities. The city of Sudbury also put in a free water line to the site. Before beginning to build, the church's out-of-pocket cost for this project was only \$12,000.

Naturally, everyone in the church was excited about the new site. All you have to do is visit the location to be inspired. But what kind of building should the church erect? Most churches adopt a style that's traditional and

features vaulting walls leading to high steeples that point toward heaven. Those look great, but they are expensive to build, maintain, and operate.

The architectural firm proposed a possible alternative: three monolithic domes interconnected by a central foyer. These domes will house a dual-purpose sanctuary and auditorium with over 900 seats, a pavilion for children and youth which will also contain a gymnasium and church offices, and a children's center to be added later.

Monolithic domes are very low-cost to construct, maintain, and operate while being easy on the environment (green). As a result, the new facility can be a positive example to the Sudbury community of making good use of His resources.

Many churches find it all-but-impossible to agree on building a new facility due to differences of opinion and the costs involved. Imagine how much more challenging it is to move the church quite a distance, to need a large budget, and to adopt an unusual architecture. Yet Reverend Mahood has been able to lead his flock to this new opportunity through excellent communications. You can get a sense of how effective those communications are by visiting the church's Web site and joining the reverend for driving- and helicopter-based video tours of the new site as he enthusiastically describes the opportunity.

Good communications worked well for Reverend Mahood, and they can work well for you in accomplishing your dreams. My research has shown that poor communications by leaders are the most common reason for slow human progress in many important activities. Here are some suggestions to help you communicate better as a leader:

- Reduce the number of subjects covered by messages.
- Simplify the messages.
- Provide powerful experiences along with the messages.
- Establish many more regular channels and patterns of communications.

--Get more feedback on how well the message is being understood and adjust what is communicated to reflect what you learn.

--Repeat communications more frequently where the message hasn't made the necessary impression.

--Vary the delivery by using different formats.

--Share indications of the subject's significance to underscore your message (yelling "Fire" in a crowded theater in the presence of fire and smoke will quickly empty the room).

--Change the behavior of leaders to be more consistent with what they say and write.

--Adjust rewards and other feedback systems to emphasize the message.

--Have more people be messengers (ideally everyone in the organization spends some time communicating--both talking and listening--to everyone else to help reinforce the meaning and importance of the message).

What else do you need to learn to help lead others to accomplish your worthwhile dreams?

When do you plan to start learning?

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Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University who works with many doctoral candidates who wish to accomplish their dreams. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your effectiveness, visit

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