

WHAT TO DO WHEN PEOPLE WANT A CHURCH TO GROW...BUT NOT CHANGE

JANUARY 22, 2014 IN [LEADERSHIP,MISSION,STRATEGY](#) WITH [10 COMMENTS](#)

I've heard it several times this week already this week from different sources.

One of the tensions many of us wrestle with as leaders who are trying to navigate change happens when people tell us:

I want our church to grow. I just don't want it to change.
Every time I hear or read that, my brain says "Ugh".

As much as I think that's a dumb reality to live in, it's a reality so many of us face in leadership.

How do you respond when people want a church (or organization) to grow, but not change?

Here, Eat This Bacon Cheeseburger

The problem you and your organization are facing is a challenge a lot of us experience in life.

Isn't wanting to grow but not really change actually like saying "I want to lose weight, but I really want a bacon cheeseburger"? Well, yes, it's *exactly* like that.

People hire personal trainers all the time to help them lose weight.

A trainer's *message* is not revolutionary.

It is almost never "just take this diet pill and you will magically lose 50 pounds while eating cupcakes." Yet most of us want to believe that we can take a pill and eat cheeseburgers and cupcakes and lose weight. At least I do.

A good personal trainer's advice is always some variation of "eat smaller portions, eat healthy foods, exercise and make sure your calorie input is less than your calorie output".

And people pay them money—lots of money—to tell them what they already know to be true.

You're not that different as an organizational leader. Really.

Six Things You Can Do

As a leader, don't try to navigate change in a congregational meeting. You will get stuck in the mud before you know what's happening. 50 people or 500 people won't agree on anything. And they will certainly never agree on anything courageous. (I talk more about navigating the dynamics of change in my book, [Leading Change Without Losing It](#)).

Sit down with your real leadership team—your board, your key staff, or even a new group you form for the purpose—and start the conversation.

As you lead that conversation, here are 6 things you can do to tackle the challenge of leading a group that wants to grow but doesn't want to change:

1. Tell The Truth

Usually we hire trainers, coaches, counselors and consultants to tell us the truth we kind can't see or, often, already know but won't face.

That's my job and your job as the leader of an organization: we need to help people see the truth.

So what's the truth about wanting to grow but not wanting to change?

It's quite simple. ***Your patterns, habits and level of effectiveness as a church got you to where you are now.***

If you want your current level of effectiveness, keep doing what you're doing right now.

If you don't want your current level of effectiveness, change.

It actually isn't much more complicated than that.

Sometimes great leadership is simply about pointing out the truth that nobody else wants to talk about.

You need to do this in love, but often our desire to be loving kills our need to be truthful.

So, as a leader, help people see the truth.

(DS note: another issue to be very truthful about – "Why do we want our church to grow? To save the church? To strengthen the church? Or because people need Jesus?")

2. Plot Trajectory

Learning how to plot trajectory is one of the best skills a leader can bring to the table.

Plotting trajectory is simply mapping out the probable course or path an organization, person or object is on. This is critical because usually, when it comes to people and organizations, we're not sure where we're headed.

To plot trajectory, ask two questions:

If we continue doing what we're doing today, where will we be 1 year, 2 years and 5 years from now?

If we change X, where will we be 1 year, 2 years and 5 years from now?

Sure, you don't know for sure where you end up, but if you start asking the question, you'll be amazed at what you discover. Try it.

3. Ban Delusional Talk

Those of us who resist change are often delusional.

I can continue to be rude to my spouse and our marriage will get better.

I can slack off at work and get a better performance review.

I can get abs of steel in a workout that lasts 60 seconds.

Most of us become crazy people when we're fighting change.

So, as a leader, ban *delusional talk around your table*.

Call it out. In love, let people see how crazy their thinking really is.

I understand you think your program is amazing but it has an attendance of 3. What are we going to do about that?

I know you love Southern Gospel music but most of the teens we want to reach don't.

I realize you love our organization just the way it is, but the average age of our attenders is 65.

I know you think a new building will solve all our problems, but why can't we solve them in our current half-empty facility?

Don't let your leaders be delusional.

4. Get an Outside View

Familiarity breeds contempt and distorts perspective. If your team doesn't immediately respond healthily to a call for change, you might be ripe for an outside voice to help you arrive at a new place.

This would be the perfect time to read a book together, attend a conference, or (best yet), hire a consultant. If the future is at stake, it's not a bad investment to spend the money on an outside perspective.

(DS note: in our conference, our ONLY church revitalization program is the Fruitful Congregation Journey. Contact your DS and or Church Development Staff to sign up. If you are not willing to do this, then you are not really willing to grow.)

5. Offer Constant Feedback

As you move through these conversations, keep people honest. It will be hard. But you need to do this.

Continue to point the group back to the truth. Honestly, gracefully, but truthfully. Just keep snapping people back to reality.

I say this because it will require herculean effort to ensure you don't end up hoping for a diet-pill and cupcake solution. There is probably little gain without significant pain.

6. Draw a Line and Call it For What it Is

At some point you have to stop talking and start doing.

Here's my suggestion. If you've been in an honest dialogue for at least a year and are not making progress (that is, you haven't made a plan for change you are ready to act on), you have come to a moment of truth.

At some point, you just need to tell everyone where you have landed.

So our plan for change is to implement X, Y and Z by this date. Let's do it!

Or

So essentially we have decided that we will not grow. We are content with the status quo. We will not change. And we will live with the consequences of stagnation, decline and decay.

Guess what? 99% of leaders will never utter the second statement.

And that's why they're stuck. That's why they're perpetually frustrated.

But that second statement is exactly what you need to say if that's your reality.

And then—are you ready?—you need to decide whether you want to lead that organization.

This isn't easy at all, but I do think it can help leaders who feel stuck leading an organization that says it wants to grow but doesn't want to change.

What do you think?



About Carey Nieuwhof: Carey Nieuwhof is lead pastor of Connexus Community Church and author of the best selling books, *Leading Change Without Losing It* and *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*. Carey speaks to North American and global church leaders about change, leadership, and parenting.

- See more at: <http://careynieuwhof.com/2014/01/what-to-do-when-people-want-a-church-to-grow-but-not-change/#sthash.9iKwnaJt.dpuf>