

WHEN IT COMES TO CATALYZING CHANGE IN THE CHURCH, the shortest distance between point A and point B is not a straight line. Compare the process to baseball. You don't hit the ball, jump on home plate, and say, "Here I am!" First you have to touch all of the bases.

The following paragraphs describe six steps that can help you cover each base as you introduce change in a persistent and God-honoring fashion.

#1 AFFIRM EVERYTHING THAT IS AFFIRMABLE

Have you ever held a cat and let it slip a little bit so that it thinks it will be dropped? Just as a cat will dig in and hang on for dear life, so will the church. If you criticize it, it will cling to its habits, traditions, and past with more tenacity than you ever thought possible.

Remember that the church is merely a collection of people. Most people respond better to compliments than to criticism. Thoughtfully identify and affirm the behaviors in your church that honor God and support the vision.

Affirm all of the right decisions and the right commitments and the right values of the past. By affirming everything that you can, you acknowledge and validate people's past efforts and give them a sense of security during the change process.

#2 PREACH AND TEACH BIBLICAL VALUES THAT SUPPORT YOUR VISION

If you are passionate and compelling in your vision-casting, people will follow you...for a while. They will only move toward a vision

until doing so costs them something unless they understand the biblical principles that undergird that vision.

Do not underestimate the importance of teaching the basic biblical values upon which your vision is built—like evangelism, spiritual gifts, and servanthood.

#3 DESIGN YOUR MINISTRY AROUND YOUR GIFTS

Although we might want to meet every need we encounter, if we try to meet needs that we are not equipped to meet, we can spend a lot of time, energy, and resources to produce very little results.

Something that may be a great and noble thing for a church to do may not be the right thing for *your* church to do. Do not make the mistake of trying to copy another church's style. Instead, design your ministry around the unique gifts and abilities that God has given your church.

If the Holy Spirit leads you to make major changes in the way your church does ministry, start by building a bridge between the current biblical values in your church and the new approach.

#4 CONSTANTLY CLARIFY THE VISION

Vision is imperative. It tells you where you are going. Casting vision requires incredible courage because, whenever you try to transition a church, there will always be people saying, "No! Not that way. We should go this way." They may even be people close to you.

But if the vision you have received is truly from God, then you've got to stand firm and keep saying, "This way. This way. This way."

If you think that you are adequately casting vision in your church, triple the frequency of your vision-casting and you will probably approach the right level.

#5 FIND HELP

You never get too large as a church to reach out for help. Fortunately, most people will share their knowledge with you if you ask them humbly.

Most likely, there are members of the Willow Creek Association who have already run the portion of the race that you currently face, and who are willing to share what they have learned along the way.

We have to be eager to ask our questions, and then discerning in how we apply the answers that we receive. James 1:5 promises that if we ask God for wisdom, He will give it.

As you learn lessons in various areas, you, too, can bless others by sharing what you have learned. Be willing and prepared to answer the telephone and say, “Sure, I can invest a few minutes to help you.”

#6 CELEBRATE PROGRESS

There is nothing that fuels transition in a church quite like shining a spotlight on a solitary life that has been touched and changed by the Holy Spirit and celebrating how people’s lives have been transformed by Jesus Christ working through His church.

Celebrating the fruit of your efforts will inspire your teams to continue doing the hard work that change requires.

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You will make mistakes as you implement change. Part of what you learn will come from what you do right, and part of it will come from what you do wrong.

Thank God for what you do right, take responsibility and apologize for what you do wrong, learn what you can from both, and *keep pressing forward as you lead your church through the process of becoming all that God created it to be!*

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