DEVELOPING YOUR
LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

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LifeWay® Leadership

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"EVERYTHING RISES AND FALLS ON LEADERSHIP." - JOHN MAXWELL[1]

If you are reading about development, then the odds are likely you hold a conviction that your church should be developing its people. In fact, research conducted with 1,000 pastors shows an overwhelming majority affirm the importance of training and development for church leaders and volunteers. Yet, that same study reveals less than 30 percent of churches actually have a plan in place to develop their staff members and only 1 in 4 churches require leaders and volunteers to attend the training that is offered.[2] Dig a little deeper and you will likely find that even those pastors and churches with a plan have training best classified as initial onboarding of volunteers, not training classified as ongoing development.

Churches are not alone in this disconnect. *The Global Human Capital Trends 2014* found that "leadership remains the No. 1 talent issue facing organizations around the world." Of these responses , executives "viewed leadership as the highest-priority issue," with 86 percent rating leadership as "urgent" or "important." However only 13 percent evaluated themselves as "excellent" in developing leaders within their organization.[3]

Our call as church leaders is to provide our people with a map for their development, not just a menu of ministry opportunities.

First, we will look at establishing a conviction for leadership development and walk through some development barriers uncovered in our research. Next, we will define what is a leadership pipeline and look at the systems, structures, and content that are vital to the leadership pipeline concept.[4] Then, we will overview the elements of competency-based training and contextualize it for the local church.

CONVICTION FOR INVESTING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

God's hope for the world is the local church. The local church is His Plan A, and there is no Plan B. God's agents of implementation are the people of the local church. New believers, volunteers, lay leaders, church staff members, and pastors are all called to fulfill the Great Commission. Christians are not just to be disciples but are tasked to make disciples. We must never forget that God didn't just save us from something. He saved us for something.

Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that we have been saved "by grace through faith," which is a gift of God and not of our works. Verse 10 emphasizes that with this gift comes responsibility. We are God's workmanship, and He has planned things for each and every one of us to take part and to do. This work is important not only to us as believers but also as church leaders. Paul lays the groundwork for church leaders in Ephesians 4:11-13, "And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness."

These verses remind church leaders that our work is the development of God's people under our care. Nothing is more sacred or more strategic in His kingdom than this responsibility to equip others to serve in ministry. God did not intend for His church to be a community with a gifted pastor and staff members but to be a community of gifted people.

A CHURCH IS NOT JUST A COMMUNITY WITH A GIFTED PASTOR AND STAFF BUT IS A COMMUNITY OF GIFTED PEOPLE.

An inextricable connection exists between discipleship and leadership development. Discipleship and development are two sides of the same coin. One side is character and the other side is competency. Both require a "teachable point of view."[5] When we picture the day-to-day ministry of Jesus, we often think of Him in front of crowds. However, if you look at the life of Christ throughout the Gospels, you will find He spent more time discipling and developing the Twelve than He spent with the crowds. How Jesus allocated His time is both staggering and convicting. The Great Commission calls us to do the same. We must develop, not just do. We must make disciples, not just be disciples. We must build an army, not just an audience.

WE MUST BUILD AN ARMY, NOT JUST AN AUDIENCE.

With the majority of church leaders indicating conviction regarding the importance of leadership development, why are so few actually doing it? In our conversations with church leaders, four main barriers top the list.

1. They don't know how.
2. They don't have time.
3. They don't have a framework.
4. They don't have the resources.[6]

A pastor likely doesn't know how to train people in every ministry area, from preschool to worship to the parking lot. Even if a pastor has time to develop training for his church, most find it impossible to get volunteers and leaders to attend training meetings and events. Many pastors also find it difficult to create a specific scope and sequence of development for new, more advanced, and expert-level leaders. Because of this struggle, most churches often provide one basic training cycle in a given ministry area and train to the lowest common denominator. Sadly, many of these churches allocate more budget money to classroom snacks for toddlers than to ongoing development.

Whenever I meet with churches and ask staff members to compile a list of things that keep them from leadership development, these four barriers remain near the top of the list. You probably resonate with one or more of these barriers and are thinking of a few now. Take a moment and note the top five things that are keeping you from developing the staff members, leaders, and volunteers you need to grow a healthy ministry in your church.

Our Top Five Barriers to Leadership Development:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

The good news is that you are not alone. If we compiled the top five barriers from your church, the church across town, and some of most successful churches in America, then many lists would overlap. The key difference between churches that are finding success in creating a leadership pipeline and churches that are not is that these barriers don't incapacitate them. Out of their conviction, they create a culture and constructs that align to build a people development organization. The reason most churches and organizations have a leadership deficiency today is that they never built a leadership development culture and constructs yesterday. These churches practice leadership placement, not leadership development.

When you practice leadership placement over leadership development, you play a dangerous game. You likely put people in positions beyond their level of competence or sacrifice a good fit for the individual leader. You settle for a warm body instead of a weekly volunteer. In the area of church staffing, you either build staff or buy staff. The additional costs of bringing in someone from the outside are not just financial. A new staff member will spend months building relationships, gaining trust of fellow staff members and leaders, learning systems, and trying to fit in with your culture.

HEALTHY CHURCHES PRACTICE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, NOT LEADERSHIP PLACEMENT.

If you have a clear conviction that people development is at the core of what a church should do and you have a culture that is reasonably healthy, then you are missing constructs. These are the systems, processes, structure, people, and content that you need to build and/or align to develop leaders. If you don't have a clear conviction for development and a healthy culture, then these constructs will only lead to confusion and frustration in your church.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP PIPELINE?

I hear the term *leadership pipeline* used more and more these days. A great bit of confusion exists on what a leadership pipeline is in any organization, especially the church. In reality, leadership pipeline centers on a business book by Ram Charan, James Noel, and Stephen Drotter. *The Leadership Pipeline* shows companies how to build their own leaders by understanding the critical passages a leader must navigate, by providing the appropriate development for navigating those passages, and by building the right systems to ensure a full pipeline of leaders, both now and in the future.[7] Unfortunately, this terminology is often misused, misunderstood, and misapplied to many models and diagrams.

I have had the opportunity to sit with hundreds of church leaders and other organizations to talk about leadership development. When I talk about leadership development, I often reference leadership pipeline. Most leaders will say that they're familiar with the concept. However when asked to draw their pipeline, most illustrate a linear diagram.

This feedback may sound harsh, but a linear diagram is a leadership pipe dream, not pipeline. The diagram is appropriate to convey a process, but people development does not take place along an assembly line. Linear progression fails to address the key issues between success and failure as a person moves through it.

Leadership pipeline represents both competencies at leadership levels and skills needed to transition from one level of leadership to the next.[8] In most organizations, the pipeline is bent in multiple places. Each of these bends or passages represents a change in organizational position—a different level and complexity of leadership—where a significant mind shift must be made. These turns involve a change in job requirements, which demand new skills, time applications, and work values. The number one spot where leaders wash out is along transition points.

When people become skilled individual contributors who produce good results, especially demonstrating an ability to collaborate with others, then they usually receive additional responsibilities. When they handle these responsibilities well and adhere to the organization's values, then they often receive promotions to oversee others.

When this promotion happens, an individual is at leadership passage one, moving from contributing as an individual volunteer or employee to leading others. Though this transition might seem easy and natural, people often trip at passage one. The highest-performing people are often reluctant to change and tend to keep doing the activities that made them successful. As a result, many fail to make that sharp turn, from being an individual contributor to leading others. J. Oswald Sanders notes in *Spiritual Leadership*, "A leader must be able to see the end results."[9] Without a mind shift in behavior, time allocations, work values, and new skills, an individual will fail or flounder.

These leadership passages are lined with core competencies, culture-forming content, and role-based training. We must ensure that everyone knows where we are going and where each individual fits to make the next steps easy, obvious, and strategic.

Communicating next steps is vital because most training is like a cruise to nowhere. Yes, these cruises exist. You begin with no destination and set out to sea. The ship meanders along the water for a few days, without visiting any destination and you end up right back where you started. Unfortunately, this analogy holds true when it comes to training in many churches. If you are lucky, then you get on board and training exists. You may even choose your training from a buffet or get a categorized menu. But the reality is that no one knows where the training will take them. There is no itinerary or port of call. You simply go through the motions and end up right back where you started. May it never be in our local churches.
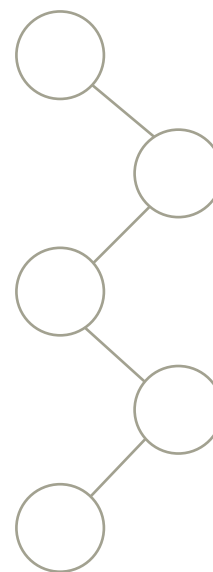
WHERE TO START IN LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

So, where do you start? You begin with your systems. Some of you may want to stop reading right now because you think that I will introduce secular business practices for your church to implement. Please remember that a system is "an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or unitary whole."[10] Think about God's created systems; the solar system, ecosystems, your own circulatory system, and so forth. If those examples don't convince you, consider systematic theology.

ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM

I realize that thinking about the systems at your church is not the most exciting thing in the world. Odds are strong that you have not heard a conference speaker proclaim systems are the secret to success. Even if you have, you likely came back to your church with a conference buzz but immediately felt swamped by the never-ending stream of emails, responsibilities, and the fact that Sunday is coming and occurs 52 weeks a year. Three weeks later, your conference buzz is gone, you have settled back in to your groove, and you never implemented the ideas that sprang out of what you saw and heard.

Still, the truth remains that healthy systems will ensure short-term and long-term success of your church. Systems are not ungodly. Your systems actually reveal your stewardship and how intentional you are with the people God has placed under your care. Systemization begins with auditing and documenting how you do what you do. Mapping out specific church processes and how they interact and overlap reveals more than you dreamed and maybe more than you feel comfortable exposing. These processes show what you value as a church and the gaps between your actual and aspirational values.

I met with a church that had an aggressive multisite strategy for reaching their city. They desired homegrown leadership and that people spent time on the main campus as staff members before they became campus pastors. This church had shifted from study groups on campus to in-home small groups and wanted to use small groups as a farm system for developing church staff members and ultimately campus pastors. During my time with this church, we mapped out and audited their small group systems. We discussed how someone gets placed in a small group, opportunities to serve in groups, how someone applies to lead a group, how leaders are selected, what training is offered to leaders, and so forth. This discussion inevitably revealed other systems within the church.

Even if you never fully implement a leadership pipeline at your church, auditing your systems is one of the healthiest things you can do. Take a look at your processes, forms, training, and so forth. In my previous church, I spearheaded the multisite ministry. By the time we

launched our third campus, I had learned that if we didn't have simple systems in place then we were headed for trouble. Nearly every time our pipeline got clogged and we had to take it apart to see what was wrong, the root cause was a systems issue.

Consider how many leaders serve in multiple ministries at your church. What different processes do they encounter? How many job descriptions do they have? How many leadership applications have they submitted? What varying language is used? I never found it fun or easy to develop a one-page template for job descriptions in all ministry areas. It felt embarrassing that our church used 26 different leadership applications. I thought we would never agree on definitions for the roles of coach and coordinator at our church. The systems audit was messy, to say the least. But we had to consider the number of God's people who had not reached their next level of development because we had not reigned in and streamlined our disparate systems.

Pretend my family will attend your church for the first time this Sunday. What systems will I encounter this week and the following week? What forms will I fill out? What processes will I experience? What procedures will I encounter as I move from the parking lot to check in my kids with your children's ministry? What will I experience as I shift from attending a class to attending a worship service? If offered, what will I gain from your follow-up and meeting for newcomers? How does each system connect to the next?

Pull together your church staff members or leaders and get in front of a whiteboard or blank sheet of paper. Map out a high-level view of the systems and processes a guest at your church will encounter on any given Sunday. For the sake of time and clarity, focus on the systems that connect, engage, and develop people. After you have finished, consider the following questions.

- How are leaders developed in different ministry areas of your church?

- Does each ministry area have a clearly defined process? If so, how are the processes the same? How are the processes different?

- Do you share common training elements and approaches to leadership across different ministry areas? If so, what are they?

- Do you have a common language? How do you know?

- What would be confusing or frustrating to someone going through this process?

- Are there significant ministry silos? If so, where are there gaps between systems?

This audit is hard work, but aligning systems saves time and resources in addition to developing better leaders. There are five key advantages of clarifying your systems and leadership pipeline.

1. People identify their next steps.

2. Provides systems clarity for development.

3. Creates pathways for growth and development.

4. Enables diagnosis of where and why your pipeline is clogged.

5. Aligns language and positions across the organization.[11]

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The leadership structure of a church is a defining factor in developing a leadership pipeline, whether the church is small, mega, or multisite. Structure determines the working relationship between pastors, staff members, leaders, and volunteers as well as the relationships between peers at each level. Structure provides the foundation on which the systems and standard operating procedures rest.

Mostly, either function or division organizes larger churches. A functional structure is often centralized around specialized work and functions. This structure is common in churches with core services like worship production, marketing, human resources, and accounting. On one hand, organizing around specialization leads to operational efficiency and excellence, as employees become specialists. On the other hand, this structure can lead to organizational silos and create communication issues. At the end of the day, a functional structure is designed to produce a low-cost standardization of services.

A divisional structure consists of self-contained divisions. A division is a collection of functions that make up a ministry area. Staff members, leaders, or volunteers are responsible for ministry-specific services to meet ministry needs. Divisions may have their own subgroups such as nursery, preschool, and elementary ministry. The key advantage of a divisional structure is that it delegates authority. Overall health of the area is more easily determined. The disadvantage is that it may increase costs by requiring more leaders to run each division. In addition, emphasis on divisional function over organizational goals may result in duplication of resources.

Analyze your church's ministries. This analysis will determine what type of structure is best for your church. Study the dependency between different ministry areas. Assess your church's methods of communication. How your staff members and leaders communicate with

each other is a key factor in aligning systems and processes. Regardless of how you decide to structure your leadership pipeline, alignment must exist across the organization. Some ministries will require more layers of leadership or more volunteers. However the levels, titles, and basic job descriptions should contain a common language.

Consider your organizational structure. Start with your ministry area. Draw the leadership structure. Outline every position, from the entry-level volunteer to your position to senior leadership in the church. Define the key functions and competencies needed at each level.

KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, AND COACHING

The last piece of the leadership pipeline puzzle is content. If you are looking for leadership content, then you will find abundance. Yet many churches are still looking because a transfer of information does not lead to transformation.[12] Leadership development is not a program or an event. Leadership development is a process that occurs in the context of a relationship.

I use the word competency because training that leads to competency is mastery, not knowledge transfer. When one shows competency, they display proficiency in or mastery of a specific skill or subject. Competencies cannot be mastered in a day. Transformation occurs over the course of time. Three things must converge to see true leadership transformation: knowledge, experience, and coaching.[13]

The process to obtain a driver's license illustrates this convergence. First, you must pass a written test to receive a permit. Next, you learn from experience behind the wheel. Most states require that permit holders spend a specific amount of time in the driver's seat with an experienced driver. Third, that experienced driver provides the coaching piece to help you learn along the way. Once the knowledge, experience, and coaching elements are complete, a permit holder may become a licensed driver. Even after passing a driver's test, some continue to receive coaching because they go too fast or break the rules.

Many churches hand the ministry keys to individuals before they were prepped and ready. We do not hand car keys to someone who has never driven a vehicle because lives on the road are at stake. What a sobering thought to consider how often this handoff happens in a church when eternity is at stake.

Knowledge alone does not lead to competency. Experience without knowledge and coaching can be harmful. Coaching without knowledge or experience leaves nothing to say, no questions to ask, and no experience to debrief. However, when knowledge, coaching, and experience converge, we find a transformational sweet spot where leadership development flourishes.

Putting together a regular cadence of development doesn't have to be complicated. In Carl George's book *Prepare Your Church for the Future,* he describes three types of gatherings that should always be part of a development strategy: vision, huddle, and skills. You have likely seen these components before, but here's how George describes them.

- Vision is an annual or bi-annual large gathering of all leaders to celebrate your wins, ministry stories that display your values, and what you want to embed in your culture. At this gathering, you also cast vision for where you are going next as a body of believers. The person leading this gathering is typically the senior pastor or executive pastor.

- Huddle is a smaller group gathering of 2–3 leaders or can even be one-on-one. The purpose of this gathering is encouragement, coaching, and accountability, led by a seasoned leader or coach.

- Skills is a team-sized gathering of leaders for ongoing training, equipping, and development. This gathering may be led by ministry directors, coaches, or seasoned leaders who are skilled at the competency they are teaching.[14]

Plugging a competency-based development program with a specific scope and sequence provides a map and methodology to move your leaders forward.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Over two years, I have brought together senior pastors, executive pastors, leadership experts, consultants, and my team to develop a leadership pipeline for the church. The pipeline provides a framework of universal leadership competencies vetted by ministry leaders.

I know what you're thinking, *universal core competencies for churches?* Research shows that 70 percent of leadership is transferable from position to position, even across different organizations.[15] The leadership pipeline contains core competencies and learning objectives for every level of leadership in the church.

You will see that this pipeline is not a cruise to nowhere but provides a clear process for development. People need a map, not a menu of training. While a menu provides many choices and options from which a person can choose, a map provides steps and clarity to

guide someone throughout the process of leadership development. As Larry Bossidy notes, "At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies."[16]

A leadership pipeline in the realm of local church ministry may look something like this:

- Lead Yourself
- Lead Others
- Lead Leaders
- Lead a Department
- Lead the Church

My favorite application of leadership pipeline is from Dave and Jon Ferguson, founders of Community Christian Church and NewThing network. Their leadership pipeline moves an individual from Apprentice to Leader to Coach to Director to Pastor/Church Planter to Network Director. From one church, 267 churches and 29 networks emerged over two decades. I know that many of you have seen development processes drawn out on a whiteboard and may think this process is just a theory. However, the example of the Fergusons proves otherwise.[17]

We also recognize that while universal leadership competencies exist, there are role-based skills unique to each ministry area of the church. In addition to leadership pipeline, we have created training pathways that are specific to ministry areas. Each pathway contains three levels of learning: foundational, advanced, and expert. To best equip the people God has entrusted to your care, your church needs a leadership pipeline and each person needs a training pathway. The primary tool for delivery of both leadership pipeline and training pathways content is our learning management system, *MinistryGrid.com*.

EVERY CHURCH NEEDS A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE. EVERY PERSON NEEDS A TRAINING PATHWAY.

We must begin to think not only about the succession of our senior pastor and key leaders but about every level of leadership, including our own. If a bus hit you tomorrow, who would take over your role? Will your current structure, systems, people, and processes run without you? You should, and must, identify the key leaders who are most equipped to replace you. Implementing leadership pipeline in your church helps you to ensure those people are ready and able to do so.

LEADERSHIP
PIPELINE OVERVIEW

Pipeline Level	Leadership Responsibilities	Sample Roles	Discipleship	Vision	Strategy	Collaboration	People Development	Stewardship	Ministry-Specific Competencies
						Core Competencies			
Senior Leadership	Provides vision and sets the strategic direction for the church as a whole	Pastor, Executive Team, Deacon, Elder, Board Member	Teaches theology and serves as a Christ-like example	Creates vision for the church	Thinks strategically about the church as a whole	Works through team leaders	Creates a development culture	Faithfully stewards opportunities with church's resources	Ministry-Specific Competencies vary based on role and ministry area. These competencies progress from task execution to people development to systems management and strategy to church and ministry oversight.
Ministry Director	Oversees a ministry area with the responsibility of leading coaches and leaders	Children's Minister, Worship Pastor, Student Pastor	Understands and applies systematic and biblical theology and teaches spiritual disciplines	Contextualizes vision for ministry area	Designs ministry strategy and implements in ministry context	Works through leaders	Creates a development pathway for ministry area	Faithfully stewards church's resources	
Leader	Provides leadership for a ministry team	Small Group Leader, Committee Chair, Teacher	Knows basic doctrines, practices spiritual disciplines, and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit	Articulates and implements vision for the ministry area	Leads others to unite around and execute ministry strategy	Works through others	Develops others	Faithfully stewards giftedness of others	
Volunteer	Serves on a ministry team	Usher, Greeter, Nursery Worker	Knows the gospel and takes responsibility for personal development	Supports vision of ministry area	Serves effectively in ministry role	Works with others	Displays willingness to be developed	Faithfully stewards personal giftedness	

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