



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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Large Churches, Consultants, and Global/Local Churches

Last Wednesday, the Editor's Board of Leadership Network's Interventionist Network met to discuss a wide range of issues related to innovation, leadership and shifts in the church and culture. The Editor's Board includes consultants, regional denominational leaders and others who work with local congregations across the nation. The following highlights were a part of their discussions.

Is there a future for the large church? Yes, according to trends in church membership. Large churches are getting larger and there are more of them. The challenge for large churches is to stay small while growing, and to provide the mechanisms and opportunities for people to connect relationally despite size. *The critical issue for many large churches is succession planning and the need to prepare for the next senior pastor beyond the founding or long-term pastor.* There is also another wave of large churches coming. While the first wave centered on scale or growth in numbers, this second wave will be focused on scope or the relational depth found within the congregation.

What are the critical factors in the selection and use of an external church consultant? Trust in the consultant's abilities is the key factor in selecting a consultant. Other important factors include their experience as a practitioner and the scope and depth of their exposure to a wide range of church models and situations. The best times to use an external consultant include: (1) when the church is at a crossroads in terms of strategic direction or major financial decision; (2) the final months when a pastor is leaving or the first three months of a new pastorate; and (3) when the church has experienced a significant period of growth. The single most important factor, from a consultant's perspective, is the church's readiness for change or its sense of urgency for the future. Another factor is working with the leadership team, not just the senior pastor. What a consultant cannot do is implement change. That role belongs to the church's leadership. A consultant can be a catalyst for change, ask the right questions and help clarify issues, but the pastor and other leaders must be the facilitators of the change.

Global/local churches and leaders. Leadership skill sets are shifting from training or growth skills to reproductive or multiplication skills. Leadership is more relational and experiential than organized and intellectual. The role of church leaders is to equip "the saints" for ministry rather than to get them to help staff do ministry. Power is diffused rather than concentrated and the leader's role is based on influence rather than position. Proclamation comes from the demonstrated power of a changed life, and the leader's right to be heard is earned through service and the story of his or her life.

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