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CL71 explored a responsibility shared by all leaders: the essential task of developing new leaders. Now we focus on the closely linked topic of building teams. As both topics share similar theological and practical foundations, why not begin by reviewing 'Developing leaders – from solo to sustainable' (CL71, pages 4-5)?



leading well – with others!

'Build teams?' John might respond. 'Great idea. But we don't have anything close to a team. We've 14 people in the congregation and all the leadership is on my shoulders. This article isn't for me!'

Maggie may think: 'I'd love to build a team (or teams) but when I arrived in this job the people already in post were not the people I would have chosen. Talk about issues! And none of them looks like moving on soon.'

Jason might add: 'We have loads of committees and councils, but none really functions like a team. I tried to set up a new leadership team, but it became so complicated with the existing committees. It folded after only two years. I'm stuck with what I've got.'

A proposal to build teams into the life of a church may seem like a 'must do' – until you consider the following:

- **Reality check 1** Much currently available 'team building' material deals with start-up situations where the 'leader' selects a team and doesn't have many pre-existing structures to take into account.
- **Reality check 2** Many churches have a variety of ways in which people gather: groups, committees, councils, staff, and maybe teams. To add to the complexity, we often use the words 'group' and 'team' interchangeably, although we may mean different things by them!

- **Reality check 3** In certain denominations, churches have been linked together in 'teams', often for financial or other practical reasons. In my experience, these rarely work well. Consequently many are put off the idea of teams because of a negative experience.

In short, these 'realities' indicate that we often have unhelpful models, confused understanding, and negative experience as the backdrop to our exploration of building teams. Not the most auspicious of starting points!



1. Experience

My personal experience of teams has been overwhelmingly positive, both with regard to church leadership and to other areas of work. I wish I could make it possible for every church leader to experience being part of a great team, where a diverse group of people work well together around a common purpose to achieve exceptional results. People are energised and amazing things happen. But if you haven't had such an experience, or have had a painful, difficult 'team experience', you may need some convincing.

This is where the biblical and practical backgrounds discussed in *CL71* are so important. We noted that the Bible's picture of leadership is overwhelmingly 'plural', reflecting the nature of God and his church. Christian leadership commentator Peter Corney writes: 'The New Testament pattern of ministry is teams. Monoministry is nowhere to be found in the New Testament.' Simply in practical terms, we can't do all the work on our own. There is too much to do, and we don't have all the gifts necessary to fulfil the many functions of leadership.

2. Terminology

My working definition of a Christian team is as follows: 'a small number of interdependent people with complementary abilities who choose to commit to a common purpose in order to achieve exceptional results for the glory of God'.

Rather than talking about 'building teams', I've recently found it helpful to talk about 'leading well with others', which reflects the complexities of the different types of gatherings in churches. We may not technically have a 'team', but we do have others with whom we can share leadership.

Sometimes it will be appropriate to form a 'team' as defined above. But be sure that the task is sufficiently large to justify it. Team-building requires time and energy, and not everything warrants such an approach. There are many occasions when an individual on his or her own, a committee, or a group is a perfectly appropriate way to achieve an end. In fact, sometimes the only available option is to work with what already exists, developing it into something that functions well. The decision to form teams is best made when particular objectives/tasks mean teams represent the most appropriate organisational response.

Diversity of membership, rather than similarity, is at the heart of great teams. I spoke recently to Professor Leslie Francis about his research into church leadership teams. One basic insight is that, despite the acknowledged importance of diversity, most church leadership teams tend to be made up of people very similar in gifts and background to the overall leader. Over the years I've learned to make a deliberate choice to ensure that teams for which I'm responsible include people who differ from me in terms of skills, background and attitudes. To underpin this variety, it is essential that everyone shares a strong commitment to the purpose of the team. Without shared agreement, you'll never get the team to function well.

I recently encountered a church leadership team of astonishing variety. A PhD holder

was sitting beside someone who had left school at 16. A man from a well-to-do background was chatting with a former drug addict from a deprived part of town. There was a significant mixture of ethnic backgrounds. As I observed the team in operation, it became obvious that its members were 'wired up' very differently. Yet all of them were totally committed to the task the team was trying to achieve, and to respecting one another. Later the team leader confessed to me that his job wasn't always easy, then adding that he wouldn't have it any other way. The group's creativity and energy led to exceptional results. They achieved far more together than any of them could have alone.

When it isn't appropriate to form a team, we can still work well together (see the Adair model below). For example, if you lead a children's group in your church, invite someone to share the leadership with you. And if no one is available, make it a priority to develop a future co-leader.

If you are in a small church with a PCC, lead so well with that group of people that it becomes the meeting to which everyone looks forward. If you are the convenor of a mission committee, lead well with others so that the mission of the church is dynamic and effective. If you oversee the youth ministry in your church, gather the group leaders to explore how to improve the work. Whatever the context, part of leadership is to lead well with others.

And what about John's situation of starting with few people and all the leadership landing on his shoulders? Well, that may be workable initially – but not for long. If John is still doing everything after three years, his way of working will restrict the growth and development of those around him. Naturally the situation will reinforce the general assumption that the leader (minister, youth leader or whoever) is the one who does everything.

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- **Extra** Check the website for supplementary material from James on teams.
- **Resource** Don't forget you can download the text of this article (and all *CL* articles) to use as a briefing paper or discussion resource.



- **Podcast** Bishop Pete Broadbent of Willesden talks about teams in a recent CPAS Leadership Focus podcast. Follow the link under Church Resources on the CPAS website front page.



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3. Models

Leadership development thinker John Adair offers a very helpful base-level model for leading well with others. He suggests that every group needs to:

- Ensure that it achieves its task.
- Build and maintain the unity of the group.
- Develop individuals.

Adair suggests that our personal preferences cause us to lean towards one of the three circles. For example, I am a task-oriented person. In any situation I focus on getting the job done. Adair's model reminds me that as a leader I need to give attention to the group and its members. I don't find that easy, but I do know it is important if I am to lead well with others.

Check pages 22-23 for excellent models of team work including Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

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Right for the role?

Most of us aren't in start-up situations and have to take on the people we are given when we begin in a leadership role. Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of leadership is to handle such situations well, especially if we feel that some of those in the 'team' shouldn't be there. How do we act in such situations? Here are a few thoughts.

Look before you leap Is Fred really inappropriate for his role? Check, and then check again. How do you know? It can help to ask questions of others and gain a wider perspective, although you need to choose carefully to whom you talk. Ask yourself: 'If it were an appointing decision, would you appoint Fred again? If he told you he was resigning, would you feel terribly disappointed or secretly relieved? Why?

Identify reasons Why isn't Fred right for the job? It may be that he hasn't yet come to faith – there are many churches where good, God-fearing, church-attending people are in leadership roles, but they have yet to come to a personal faith in Jesus. Or is it a character issue? A competence issue? Has Fred been in the role too long? Does he use power inappropriately? Our course of actions will vary according to our answer to these questions.

If Fred is a square peg in a round hole, create a climate for an honest review where the issues can be explored. Generally it is more helpful to lead people into the right-shaped role than to try to prise them out of the wrong-shaped one. This may well take time, but it is worth it if you can get to a good place with the individual.

It will also send clear messages to others that you care about people and are willing to invest in their development. However, there will be occasions when, for a whole variety of often complex reasons, things won't go smoothly. Then the leader has to make a decision about what to do. Generally we are more likely to make the right decision if we talk with others about it rather than do it on our own. But a decision, however tough, does have to be made.

And what if Fred is a round peg in a round hole – but has simply become tired, or has lost a sense of vision and enthusiasm? We can either re-envision him or relieve him

of his responsibility. Re-envisioning may involve specific and positive affirmation, further training, an invitation to train others, a sabbatical. Relieving him of responsibility is the other option, in which case it may help Fred to identify that a 'season' has come to an end and to explore with him future opportunities for service.

Involve others Don't work alone! It makes sense to involve others in decision and processes which are rarely straightforward, often complicated, and sometimes toxic.

Take time We are dealing with people, who deserve to be treated carefully, sensitively and with respect. Others will be watching.

Take action John Maxwell suggests that one of the hardest decisions a leader has to make is to move someone on from a role for which they are not suited. But he also urges that we cannot afford not to do this when the situation demands decisive action. The implications are too serious: others will suffer; the person concerned will not be treated properly – and people will fear that other tough decisions may be shirked.

And finally

There is an old acronym for TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More. When we lead well with others God is honoured, people are built up, the kingdom is advanced, and wonderful things happen. Leading well with others will enable churches to help every person hear and discover the good news of Jesus Christ. Now that is a purpose worth aiming for!

ADAIR'S MODEL

A Christian team is 'a small number of interdependent people with complementary abilities who choose to commit to a common purpose in order to achieve exceptional results for the glory of God'.

