James Lawrence

Ours is an individualistic culture. No surprise, then, that for most of us the word 'leadership' prompts a mental picture of 'the person in charge' – singular, not plural. Here James Lawrence urges an approach to leadership development that's as countercultural as it is biblical. And he begins with the sad story of Nigel (or Nigella).

developing leaders – from solo to sustainable

Once upon a time there was a church leader called Nigel (it might just as well have been Nigella).

Nigel arrived six years ago to find the church struggling with a stack of problems: high debt, low morale, no children or young people, and traumatic fall-out from a pastoral crisis in the recent past.

Some of the congregation were suspicious of Nigel. Others quietly hoped he would be their saviour. Fortunately, Nigel was certain that this was where God wanted him to be, and he loved the job and the people from day one.

He poured himself into the life of the church, getting to know people, prayerfully discerning a new direction, and working hard to enable action. In the first year there were small, encouraging signs of change, boosting the congregation's level of expectation. By his second year financial giving was rising, a new service had started and people felt cared for. And though a few doubters remained, many people now thought that Nigel really was their saviour.

Came year three and things were buzzing. But, of course, the more Nigel did, the more work there was to do. The more he visited the sick, the more unwell people

there were expecting a visit. The more he reached out within the community, the more there were to be reached. The more he started new things, the more things needed continuing.

Not surprisingly by years four and five Nigel was struggling. Facing exhaustion, he knew he couldn't continue as things were. And yet everything was going well in the church – the bishop (or was it the area superintendant?) spoke warmly of what he had achieved. But Nigel knew that work at this pitch wasn't sustainable. He started looking at job adverts in the church press. In year six, he left to take up a new post.

James Lawrence is director of the CPAS development team. He also directs the CPAS *Arrow Leadership Programme*. He's the author of the *Growing Leaders* paperback book and co-author of the *Growing Leaders* course.

CL web

What went wrong?

The seeds of Nigel's situation were sown before he arrived at the church. He described his sense of call to ordination as a call to 'ministry'. He was trained to be 'the minister', both on his course and during his previous post as an assistant minister. And the template on which he based his ministry was that of the solo leader. Not grasping the key differences between 'ministry' and 'leadership' contributed to his early departure from the church.

It doesn't have to be like this. If only Nigel had realised that Christian leadership is corporate, shared and rarely a solo performance.

With this in mind, the CPAS leadership 'doughnut' model suggests that every leader has to give priority to the development of others in leadership – for two main reasons.

Theological

In the New Testament leadership is plural – there are only two references to leadership in the NT that are in the singular. Theologian Gilbert Bilezikian comments: 'Throughout the New Testament, church leadership is presented as a collective ministry. Even when the indefinite term "leader" is used in the context of Christian community, it receives a plural reference.' Why is this? The New Testament's main metaphor for the Church is the human body, emphasising the interdependent, communal aspects of many parts making a whole. And this links with the mystery of God's nature – God in three persons: Trinity, God in community.

So the nature of the Church (the body) reflects the nature of God, people in community mutually dependent on one another. And the nature of leadership reflects the nature of the Church, a collective leadership that recognises the need for people to lead in community.
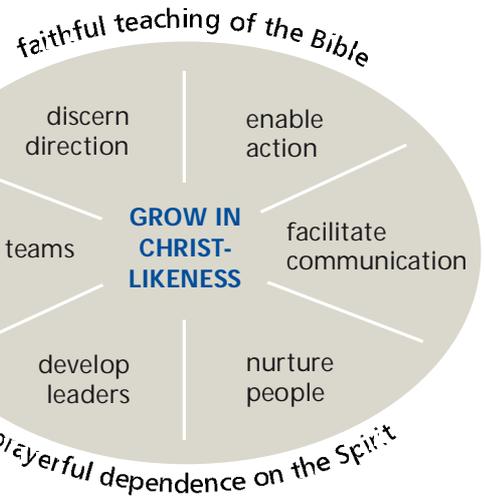
Practical

Two statements capture the practical reasons for leadership in community.

● No one leader has all the gifts necessary for leadership. Research consistently shows that even the most talented leaders don't have everything required for effective leadership. And to be honest we don't need the research. Study the lives of great leaders, or reflect on your own leadership. Clearly, for effective leadership we need

people to share leadership with us so that we complement one another, offering different skills and gifts.

● No one leader can possibly do all the leadership required in a growing church. In a small church (and if you only have one congregation) it may be possible for the vicar or minister to do everything. But if a church grows there quickly comes a point where the growth is limited by the time and gifts of a leader. We all know this. But often we struggle to do things differently. Here are a few suggestions of how to take a new approach:

1. Embrace a Jesus-like philosophy. 'For the sake of many, invest in a few.' This doesn't mean we ignore everyone else. Jesus didn't. But it does mean that we direct our energies towards a few people to help them develop as leaders (Mark 3).

2. Engage others. Make a point of discussing leadership with those with responsibilities in the church (wardens, deacons, church council) about your role as overall leader. It is so important to have the backing of the PCC (or whoever) that developing other leaders should be priority for your use of time.

3. Teach on the difference between leadership and ministry. Ministry is any activity which serves the needs of people (for example: preaching, visiting, evangelism). Leadership is any activity which directs, facilitates or influences the ministry of others (e.g. vision, strategic thinking, planning, training). The mix of these two things will differ according to a variety of factors, but it is essential that the leader recognises that his or her role is to 'equip the saints for works of ministry' (Ephesians 4:11), not to do the entire ministry themselves (see the website pages for further information on this).

4. Follow Jesus' example. Jesus chose twelve people, invested in them and entrusted them with responsibility (Mark 3). 'Identify, invest, entrust' is a great framework for developing leaders. The web pages contain further thoughts on each of these three stages.

faithful teaching of the Bible

discern direction

enable action

build teams

GROW IN CHRIST-LIKENESS

facilitate communication

develop leaders

nurture people

prayerful dependence on the Spirit

5. Use resources. Thankfully there are quite a lot of resources available to help develop leaders. I've listed a variety of them on pages 22 and 23.

6. Make it a lifelong habit. Developing leaders isn't something we can do for a few years and then move on to something else. It is core, central to what is required of leadership – that we grow others around us into leadership roles, that we share

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leadership with others. And as that which is being led increases in size and complexity, so does the need for a corporate leadership.

Growing others in leadership takes time. Had Nigel (or Nigella) appreciated this, that much-applauded 'progress' would probably have been slower than described above. But it would have been far more sustainable.

For your sake as a leader, for the sake of those you lead, and for the sake of those who don't yet know Christ, develop leaders!

Develop leaders: This is the third in a series of themed issues of *Church Leadership*, exploring the various aspects of the CPAS 'leadership doughnut'.