

Article 4 – August 2012

how do I keep going as a leader?

The demands

Leadership is demanding. There are demands from individuals in our churches, from local church structures, from the wider church institution, and this is not to mention the demands from the busy personal and family lives we all live today.

For the busy, hard pressed leader life is a juggling act keeping all the balls up in the air without dropping any. When they do drop (and they do!) that is when we tend to pause and reflect. We might ask; 'What went wrong?' 'How do I keep going?' 'What motivates me?'

If we keep dropping the balls we have a problem! It can feel as if we lurch from one crisis to another never quite in control of our own lives, or comfortable with the level of demand upon us.

In this article I want to suggest some ways to keep going as a leader, so we handle demands

wisely and think strategically about sustaining our ministry for the long term. No one wants to drop everything and deal with the level of fallout this brings, so how do we keep going?

Keep going with Jesus

When I first started out as an ordained leader my mentor, a clergyman in Bath at the time, gave me some advice. He said, 'It is your relationship with Jesus that will keep you going, John!' I have never forgotten those simple words and often bring them to mind.

I know when I am feeling down, or hard pressed, that my relationship with Christ must be the heart of my life. Whatever has happened I have always to focus on Jesus and take time out to re-connect with the Saviour and bring his grace to the situation.

Long term this personal relationship with Christ must be the driving force of our ministry. It needs our serious time and engagement at a personal level. We are called to be people of deep spirituality. This starts from our own journey with Jesus and not from our place of ministry service. I'm always amazed when I ask leaders how their journey with God is going how soon their conversation turns to their work!

Remember; we are disciples first and leaders second! If you need help with your discipleship then seek out support from a trusted source and be accountable for your relationship with Jesus.

Keep going with training and development

It is very easy to ossify in ministry. If we don't carve time for learning new things, developing new skills and meeting new people we can very



easily settle into a rut, which can be dispiriting in itself.

Making time for personal development is a must in ministry, as it brings a wider perspective and allows us to be refreshed and developed by other people. Use that training budget to its maximum and carefully plan time for new things into your diary. What training course have you recently completed, even if it is just a refresher?

I have been in my post a while now but have booked onto a course in the autumn, which has taken much time out of the day to day demands, but it should pay dividends in the long term. I am really looking forward to it and am enthusiastic to see how it will serve my future work!

Keep going with admin

One Archdeacon I knew said to me that 'good administration is thoroughly evangelistic.' This was a comment that took me by surprise at the time! Admin is not the most exciting thing and sometimes we can use it as an excuse to bury our heads in the study away from other demands. However, if this is an area you find difficult then seek some practical help. It can be very liberating to have an efficient office that handles enquiries quickly and well, and releases you to focus on other ministry and wider vision. No one wants a leader sinking in paperwork!

Keep going with your personal contacts

Too many leaders lose touch over time with valued family and friends. Often they don't realise this is happening until it is too late and damaged relationships are the result. Loving those who love us, care for us and will support us when work is tough is worth its weight in gold. This also applies to contact with people outside the church.

Too many Christian leaders know relatively few people in a meaningful way outside the church. Is it time for you to join a local club because you want to and not for any other motive? Nurturing your contacts and spending time with family is

time well spent. Living on the job, for many leaders, unhelpfully blurs the boundaries of public leadership and private life. How is your public/private balance and do you need to redress it?

Keep going with leadership colleagues

Isolation is a real difficulty for those in leadership. We need to receive from supportive colleagues, lay and ordained. If you are in a difficult leadership place where this support is thin on the ground then maybe it will help to look elsewhere. Can local ministers help, or offer support? To withdraw into our shell is not the answer and will leave us frustrated and resentful of the level of responsibility we bear. Leadership is best shared and a wise leader will grow and cultivate a team around them to share the load.

Keep going by looking forward

I recently met a minister who is just retiring from over 40 years of very productive leadership in the same post. As I left I asked myself what was my abiding impression of this person and what had kept him going? My answer was simply that he kept looking forward to what God was going to do next.

It sounds simple but he displayed an almost child-like quality of trust that the Holy Spirit would lead him and his community. He was also prepared to deliver the ministry to which he and the whole community were called. The result was he could point to at least four different phases in the life of the church, each one distinctly different. He finally came to the difficult decision that it was time for him personally to move on!

The lesson is to look forward. This is optimistic, positive and important both in our work and for our personal circumstances. How long is it since you seriously assessed your future direction, or talked and prayed this through with a trusted adviser? Keep looking forward and be open to whatever new direction God may have!

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For reflection

- **Thinking about deeper spirituality:** why not take the opportunity this month to review your patterns of personal prayer and if need be do something in a new way.
- **Thinking about the Bible:** when did you last attend a training course that developed your theological knowledge? Use this month to plan next year's training activity and look for a course that will feed mind and soul.
- **Thinking about personal contacts:** review what you need to do to nurture your personal relationships during this summer season.

