

disciple-making in a consumerist culture

How do I as a leader enable 24/7 discipleship amongst those I lead?

A consumerist culture is fun and frustrating. It makes us believe we are at the centre of life, but treats us as though we are simply customers with money to burn. It offers unbelievable choice, but stresses us out as we are overwhelmed by those choices. It suggests that anything is possible, but humiliates those who fail.

This is our world. This is the world we are called to disciple in. It's difficult, but then, let's not fool ourselves, there has never been an easy age in which to disciple people. This is not the first time we have had to face the challenge.

What is our challenge?

1. We need to ensure that everyone realises that 'discipleship' is neither just for new Christians nor is it only for keen Christians. It's simply the normal Christian life; lives working out the implications of the Lordship of Jesus in the midst of our real world, people who bear witness to God's good news in a cynical, spin-weary society.
2. We need to recognise that the reason we are called to disciple one another is because this

Jesus-following life is not natural. The moment we surrendered to Christ was the moment he enrolled us on his cause. Far too often we act (and complain) as though we have enlisted God on our cause. We are a people chosen for God's purpose. The discipleship task is learning what our part is in God's cause.

3. We need to recognise that all too often we have simply assumed that discipleship will take place. We have asked too little of each other and about each other. We have assumed too much. You don't drift into intentional discipleship, it's a focussed learning about what obedience means in this place at this time.
4. We have accepted too much and equipped too little. In too many churches, too many people have found that they can live without any expectation of change or growth. Because we want our churches to be places where everyone knows that they are accepted unconditionally, our tendency is to have low expectations of change. Tolerance has trumped transformation.



Why would anyone take discipleship seriously?

Why should we change? People need more of a reason than simply believing that they need to be a 'better' Christian: more committed, more devout, more enthusiastic. The reason we need to grow as disciples is because we recognise that we have a life to live on the Frontline: the places where we engage with a world that is unaware of the good news of Jesus. Immature followers of Jesus are bad adverts for good news.

So how can I enable discipleship amongst those I lead?

1. I will make it clear that our church's primary mission strategy is implemented by the whole church on a 24/7 basis. It happens in the places they find themselves each day of the week. I will refuse to limit their mission focus to be in their leisure time. Therefore, I will be careful not to create too many outreach programmes and initiatives that will distract all of us from that primary Frontline-focussed strategy.
2. I will not just make appointments to see people who are in pastoral need or who share leadership responsibilities with me. Every week, I will be proactive in making appointments to see people who are not in need, nor heavily engaged in church activities in order that I might learn from people about their frontlines, and grow in understanding how to equip them for life there. I will use every means available to encourage and learn: I will tweet, Facebook, text, email, Skype; offer coffee, beer, food. I will pay the fundamental cost: time.
3. I will ensure that the question of how we can develop disciples is a standing item on our leadership agendas. This will be the test for new activities. If it does not support people in growing for the sake of God's mission we will not pursue it.
4. I will ensure that the preaching explicitly recognises the challenges faced by people on their frontlines and offers appropriate encouragement and equipping.

5. I will ensure that the sung worship does not implicitly offer an escape into a 'spiritual' world. I will work with worship leaders so that they understand how their leading of worship can enable the development of whole-life disciples.
6. I will ensure that the leaders of our small groups understand that they are part of the spiritual formation of the church for the sake of frontline living. This may mean some difficult conversations with people who have their own agenda for their small group.
7. I will have difficult conversations!
8. I will remember that I am serving a missionary organisation, not one that simply offers care. I will act like the leader of a missions organisation; one that has to rely on the missionaries for the success of the mission.
9. I will not drive people, nor load them down with burdens that make their lives more stressful. I will try and help them find a rhythm to life that enables them to thrive as they serve God's purpose.
10. I will remain confident that God is the God of mission, calling us to join with him. I will allow this to take the pressure off myself and everyone else around me. I will not see myself as mobilising the force and then asking for God's blessing. Because of this, I will expect to find stories of fruitfulness that will be an ongoing source of joy and surprise.

I will be part of a disciple-making adventure.

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For more on this, Neil and Tracy Cotterill's Grove book, *Leading a Whole-life Disciplemaking Church*, is available from the [CPAS bookshop](#).

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For reflection:

- What most strikes you from this article and what implications may this have for you?
- Neil talks elsewhere about 'one degree shifts'. What one degree shift could you make in your leadership to help encourage disciple-making in your context?

