

RAISING YOUNG LEADERS

BY PETE WYNTER AND HELEN DUNN (PETE AND HELEN ARE A PART OF [ONELIFE](#), A CHARITY DEDICATED TO DEVELOPING YOUNGER LEADERS. PETE ALSO OVERSEES [LEADERSHIP COLLEGE LONDON](#).)

I'm an 'ambience' man. Whenever we have friends over for dinner, you'll find me spending too much time hiding mess, getting the lighting just right, picking the perfect tunes to accompany the feel we are looking for, and lighting enough candles to heat the house. I'll be rushing around until there's a knock at the door, at which point I'll slow right down and embody the relaxed vibe that's been created just in time for our guests arrival. 'Come on in,' I'll say, as if our home always looks like this! The stage is set for a great night ahead.

I wonder what kind of environment you are seeking to establish? The environment we create makes a huge difference. It sets the tone, reveals the intention and communicates the level of expectation. Sometimes we create it intentionally, often we create it without even realising what we have done.

Environment stretches way beyond the physical, it's much more than lights, music and candles! It's a conceptual thing as well, particularly when we begin to consider leadership. I wonder if the environment we create is an effective space for raising and establishing effective leaders? The clearer we become about how to do that, the better we become at developing a leader-rich culture. We can deliver brilliant leadership training, improve people's competencies, give them examples of great leadership, but if the environment is wrong then it will count for very little. It's like planting an acorn but never giving it the water and light it needs to grow.

So, what are the environmental 'must-haves' for seeing leaders raised up? You'll know some for your own context, but here are three essentials to kick start the process:

1. SAFETY

In our cotton wool society where health and safety has made things dangerously risk averse, I can almost hear your sighs of agony at the suggestion that safety is an important environmental factor, but sadly we don't give it enough credit in the leadership world. When people feel safe they become more open and ready to try new things. I'm more likely to jump out of a plane if I've got Bear Grylls strapped to me. Why? Because I feel increased safety. I trust him. If we want to raise up leaders we have to ask a tough question: do people



feel safe around my leadership? If they do then they are more likely to follow, more likely to learn and more likely to make the big jump into becoming an effective leader in their own right.

A huge part of letting people feel safe around us is first letting them really know us. That includes our failures, our initiatives that didn't go to plan, that time we made the wrong call or when we just did something really stupid. People need to know that it's okay to fail and that they have someone with them who has experienced failure and will be there to help them pick up the pieces at the end. As scary as it sounds to spread the word of our misjudgments it will also bring light to places of shame, and freedom to places of captivity within those we are trying to raise up as well as setting a culture of safety within our context.

2. ENCOURAGEMENT

Being given the gift of courage to have a go is the first step in every leader's story. If you want to raise leaders you must set your heart, words, tone and body language to communicate encouragement at every turn. If people around you know that their faltering efforts will be met with a warm smile then they won't be put off by the pressures and responsibilities that they think go hand in hand with leadership.

This doesn't mean we have to pretend that everything everyone does is amazing all the time, it won't be. If we want our encouragement to be meaningful to those around us we need to make sure it's honest and not generic. This might sound like I'm contradicting myself – be the most encouraging person out there but don't do it too much? Well, the truth is that even in the midst of a failed mission or outreach, conflict or communication, there will be something to encourage. It might be the heart of the person behind it rather than the actual idea. Or it might be the resilience or the hope that someone has. We need to be experts at encouraging others even in the most hopeless of situations, realigning minds with what God says and sees.

3. AWAKENING BELIEF

We all get weighed down by the day in, day out realities of life, but every now and again someone spots something in us and sparks the belief that we are more than we have presently become. Of course we are, but we forget that all the time. As part of your encouragement, tell people what's possible. Call the very best out of people in a bid to maximise their potential. Don't just tell them once, keep telling them until they can see it too. If they can catch even the faintest glimpse then you're on the journey from possibility to reality. We need to inspire people to follow the vision God has given them, the truth is that all too often people don't think that they are the one called to live out their vision. It's our job to awaken the belief that God has given them the abilities, gifts and favour to join him in the transformation of our society.

Next time you're talking to someone about their workplace, school, university or home why not ask them what they would like to see God do in that place? They might take a moment to answer but I guarantee you will find some gold. God has placed leaders in every context and sphere and if we can ignite the belief that we, the Church, are called to be dreamers for a reason then we will start to see something incredible happen.

Make an extra effort with the environment the next time you have friends over, and as you watch them enjoy the time with you even more, take a moment to consider what environment you are creating for leaders to grow and thrive around you. Don't be surprised that when you start doing this you will start to see people stepping out into their full potential and maybe even start doing the same for those they lead!



FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you currently rate yourself on each of the above categories within your leadership?
2. Which of these areas do you find the hardest to engage with? Choose one you want to grow in over the next month, tell a friend and ask them to keep you accountable in actively pursuing it.
3. Who have been the most influential people in your life? Can you see where they have used any of these ideas?