

COMMON OBSTACLES TO RUNNING GROWING LEADERS

cpas

GROWING LEADERS

We recently did some research among those interested in the Growing Leaders courses about what prevented them from actually running one. This brief article identifies what they said and offers some thoughts about the obstacles they identified.

1. Busyness

There is so much to do as leaders, a never ending list of opportunities and expectations. Some things cry out for our immediate attention, but growing others as leaders is rarely heard above such cries. Yet I want to suggest it is a vital priority, for three reasons.

- First, practically one leader cannot possibly meet all the needs of leadership. If we don't grow others as leaders we easily become the bottleneck, with leadership limited to our time, energy and gifts; whereas if we invest in growing leaders we multiply leadership capacity and create succession for the future.
- Second, theologically leadership in the New Testament is plural. It reflects the nature of the church, that we are to lead with others within the body of Christ. Therefore even if we arrive in a situation where there is no one else to share leadership, one of our priorities will be to develop others to share the leadership with us so that we may fulfil the biblical pattern.
- Third, missionally we need to resource Christians for leadership in every aspect of their lives; at work or school, in their homes, within the clubs and organisations they support. In an age where there is considerable cynicism about leadership, Christians can make a difference.

Whilst never easy to sort out the urgent from the important in leadership, I think growing others as leaders is one of those things which is both, and therefore making time for it is a leadership priority. How do we do this?

Our suggestion is to work with others who have leadership responsibility (this may be a PCC, eldership, Ministry Leadership Team, Church Wardens) in clarifying the purpose of the church (why we exist) and the priorities of the Minister (what we expect him/her to do). A simple exercise is to ask the group to come up with reasons why growing others as leaders might be important. Then use this list as a basis of a discussion about what currently you do to invest in leadership development. If we do this with others, they can be part of the decision (and therefore more likely to own it) which allocates resources towards developing leaders. They will stand with you as you explain to others why you may not be able to do something you have been doing because you need to give time to this aspect of your role.

2. Not Enough People To Do It

This may mean two things; either we don't have enough existing or potential leaders to form a group, or we don't have sufficient resources to run a course.

In small churches there may not be enough people to constitute a Growing Leaders course. We recommend the ideal size for a course is between eight to 24 (however, some have run it with as few as two people). In such situations we recommend you link with other churches and between you identify a small number of people from each church who would benefit from such a course. This



has been done in a variety of ways – across an Anglican deanery, within a benefice, across an ecumenical area.

If you don't have sufficient resources to run a course, again we suggest linking with others. You may also be able to invite a church that has already run Growing Leaders to help you get a course established, or even join in with theirs.

3. Not a High Priority

A third common reason people give for not running Growing Leaders is that they don't see it as a priority. And indeed it may not be. Every leader has to discern what are the priority things to invest in at any point of time. At this time growing others as leaders may not be one of them. However, at some point it is likely to become a priority, as developing leaders is one of the things that leadership focuses on. When is that time likely to come?

Some research suggests that growing leaders is one of those factors that leads to growth in a church, simply because it multiplies leadership enabling more things to happen. Therefore rather than waiting for when it feels as if it is needed, being proactive and growing leaders as a strategic way of facilitating growth may be a better way forward.

4. The Courses Aren't From Our Tradition

The courses have been written and produced by an evangelical organisation, but many churches who aren't from that tradition are using them. When we wrote the material we wanted to make it accessible to as many people as possible, within the Anglican tradition and those churches of other denominations, whilst being faithful to the tradition from which we come. We also recognise that every church is located in a particular setting, has their own unique story, and a particular spirituality. For that reason we have tried to make the materials 'comprehensive (everything you need to run the course) and flexible (so you can adapt them to your own situation).

How do you handle the danger of Growing Leaders – Youth Edition being perceived as elitist?

This is very much down to how we talk about the course and the language we use as we talk about leadership. Just because God does not call everyone to leadership, it does not mean that those who are called are in some way superior to others. We need to be careful that we don't inadvertently communicate this. This is particularly an issue for young people who have perhaps seen leadership positions being 'earned', where it has been given to classmates due to successes or good behaviour (e.g.. prefects, sports captains).

It is important that the course is not hidden from the young people not taking part but at the same time it is essential that it is not talked about as if it is a priority over everything else that is going on.

Use the exploratory evening session as a way of letting anyone who is interested in the course come along and find out what it is about. Chances are that people will realise that it's not for them and not want to apply anyway. This openness is vital for keeping good relations amongst the young people.

As you invest in those who are growing as leaders, make sure you, or some of your team, focus on developing those not doing the course. Growing Leaders – Youth Edition needs to fit into an overall youth strategy for the church and so



there needs to be ways to nurture every young person not just those called to leadership.

Don't just talk about the course to the rest of the church; make sure you communicate what else is going on amongst the youth group.

Christian leadership is about being servant-hearted, so we need to make sure that the way we portray leadership fits in line with this and doesn't raise it up on a pedestal or make it somehow superior to other gifts.

Further Information

Of course there are other reasons people may not run a course, and if we can be of any help as you explore these please do get in touch.

