

Balanced Team Leadership in the Church

Every local church urgently needs healthy balanced leadership. It is generally agreed that Scripture presents a plural godly mature masculine leadership (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1), and that their role is to guide the congregation in such a way as to satisfy the desires of Christ, the head of the Church. The personal qualities of these men are listed in the New Testament, and their responsibilities and manner of work are also described in some detail.

Leaving aside important though technical issues such as how you call these men (if anything), how they become leaders, to what degree they are publicly recognised and if some are (or should be) more influential than others, what I wish to show here, is that if these men saw themselves not so much as a **group** but as a **team** of leading brothers, they would be more effective in carrying out their God given task.

1. A committee or a team?

Some view a leadership role within an assembly as **status** within a congregation. Biblically, leadership is not a position but labour, a task, a humble service to God and to fellow brothers and sisters (1 Timothy 3:1). It is hard work. Lack of clarity on this point will lead to spiritual tyranny.

As brothers gather for a local leadership meeting, it is very important how they view themselves. Even local churches where respect, trust and genuine dialogue exists between its leaders, I would suggest that most function as a **committee**, each brother representing certain interests, doctrinal emphases, families or perspectives within the congregation. Often they seek the Lord's mind on issues by means of a general **consensus**. Usually, these men try to see themselves as **equals**,

recognising, and sometimes simply tolerating, the fact that they are different, but by no means capitalising on such differences.

A **team**, however is different. It recognises that God has made each leading brother distinct, with unique gifts and strengths and therefore with a unique contribution to their common task. Therefore, each leading brother knows he has a distinctive role or contribution within the leadership process, and each role is recognised and appreciated by the rest.

2. Assembly Leadership Types

Since the early 1980's, much attention has been given to the concept of **teams** in European commerce and industry. Many studies have been carried out to identify personal features that hinder or enhance group efforts. Some of these secular authors suggest they are producing something revolutionary and new, but, I would suggest, they are simply observing and describing what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote about the internal workings within the "one body" in 1 Corinthians 12. We read that each body member is different from the other, each member is necessary for the balanced functioning of the whole, the parts complement each other and work harmoniously as they carry out their diverse functions for a common good. This body imagery applies to all aspects of church life, including leadership. The fact that large sectors of Christianity have adopted old secular heavily hierarchical structures reflects a departure from the simple Biblical model. But even here, many are moving back.

Given my experience of being involved in the formation of new Christian assemblies on the mission field and from observing how others function (or don't function) in different countries, I suggest 5 distinct roles or leadership types. A congregation may have more than or less than 5 leading brothers, as some men may be of the same type and some men may display characteristics of more than one type.

But I would suggest that these 5 distinct types, which cover areas of responsibility, should be recognised and balanced in order to create a healthy leadership team.

1. Creative-Visionary type: This is a brother with a strong sense of calling. He seeks to keep informed of what is going on in the wider picture and usually fosters many contacts inside and outside his local church. He combines Scripture with current and future needs and proposes new ideas, improved ways of doing things. He is creative and revolutionary and his proposals and ideas frequently damage the "peace" within an otherwise comfortable leadership meeting.

2. Coordinator-Delegator type: This is the brother who usually looks at his watch and gets the meeting going. If minutes are taken at the meeting (which I recommend), he will probably take the book himself or rapidly suggest someone else. He seems to have a natural ability to keep the meeting from stagnating, helps reach decisions, and ensures there is clarity on who is responsible for putting into action agreed decisions. When this brother can't come, the discussions are usually repetitive and the meeting drags on!

3. Implementer-Action type: It is delightful to have some of these brethren within assembly leadership. No sooner a new seating arrangement has been agreed, they change the seats round! This is an energetic, reliable and disciplined man of God. He is not afraid of obstacles, but can sometimes be too rigid in reaching an agreed goal. He can't wait for the meeting to end to get on with the real work!

4. Pastoral type: In a real way, all leading brothers must have a pastoral heart, that is, a deep love for the Lord's people and desire to serve them (1 Peter 5:1-4). But it can be readily observed that some have a special God given broad heart coupled with good social skills. This is the type of person who just loves visitation. He knows the name of most believers in the congregation (even the elderly sister's cat's name!), and is interested in and remembers what they are doing. He is the natural person to turn to in moments of family crisis. He gets quite upset when someone is being criticised unfairly. He reminds fellow leaders to be practical and realistic, that they are caring for real people, hurting people, frustrated people, tired people, and vulnerable people. Reflecting the broad loving heart of the Chief Shepherd, he constantly stresses that each person and each case is different and worthy of special attention.

5. Quality Control type: Again, all leading brothers "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught" and be able to "refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). But even here one can notice a difference between brothers. Perhaps you have noticed the single minded brother, sometimes somewhat passive and sober. He knows his Bible well and frequently asks uncomfortable questions about what is being proposed. He can be old or young, and not necessarily the most "educated" or "intellectual" in the assembly. But he deeply feels that Christ is the head of the Church and we should be careful not to disappoint Him. He appears instinctively suspicious of any change or anything new. He sees the dangers associated with each option, and it is not unusual for him to ask for a decision to be postponed to the next meeting to allow more time to think and pray over the issue. In a time of change in which we live, the role of **Quality Control** should be greatly valued and appreciated. Its function is just as important as any of the other 4 types.

3. Who is who?

In sport, commerce and industry, balanced teams may be formed by choosing a variety of people with skills and personalities to best achieve a desired outcome. In the assembly, it is the Holy Spirit who gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11, Ephesians 4:11) and desire (Philippians 2:13), and selects those men who are to oversee or lead the flock (Acts 20:28).

Yet we are not to remain passive in the process. We are called to "eagerly (or earnestly) desire spiritual gifts" (1 Corinthians 14:1), and in the context of local church leadership, we are given a trustworthy saying "If anyone sets his heart (or aspires) on being an overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). It is then the responsibility of the individual and of the congregation to recognise what the Holy Spirit is doing among them (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). As the group of leading men work together, solve problems and seek from the Lord direction for their local church,

the gifts and strengths of these different brothers become quite apparent. It is not a matter of giving each leading brother a role within the team of leading brothers, but of simply recognising the unique contribution each one makes. Slowly a **group** of leading brothers can be transformed into a **team** of leading brothers.

Which one or two of the 5 Assembly Leadership Types best describes you? Think about it. Think also about what contribution each of the other men make in the process of leadership. Write their names and broad characteristics down and attempt to classify them in one or more of these Assembly Leadership Types. This exercise, done alone or with others, has the following benefits:

(1) Personal development: Every type has its inherent weaknesses. The **Creative-Visionary** type can move too fast and separate himself from the congregation. The **Coordinator-Delegator** type is in danger of manipulating others. The **Implementer-Action** type easily becomes impatient and the **Pastoral** type may become too soft and tolerant. The **Quality Control** type may become distrustful, judgmental and critical of the other brother's motives and spirituality.

Identifying your own type will help you work at improving your contribution, mayor on your strengths and work at avoiding your natural weaknesses.

(2) Appreciation of others: Identifying the contribution of your fellow leading brothers, will help you be more flexible, patient and accepting of the observed differences and their diverse contributions. It will help reduce our instinct of being so judgmental of those who differ from us, slow us down or try to introduce change.

(3) Interdependence: Viewing and accepting each other as a team of diverse types of leading brothers encourages interdependence and the ever important growth in mutual trust. Leaders can learn to trust, lean and rely on each other.

(4) Maintain balance: It is very possible that you may identify **gaps** among the brothers who are leading. If any of the 5 types is missing, the congregation will suffer. The lack of a **Creative-Visionary** type brother or influence leads to stagnant congregations. The lack of a **Coordinator-Delegator** type may manifest itself in lack of decision capability and discouragement. Without an **Implementer-Action** type, many good things are discussed and agreed, but little happens. If the **Pastoral** type is weak, the leadership tends to disconnect from the congregation, and without the influence of the **Quality Control** type, unwise quick decisions may be made or the assembly may follow popular trends and drift away from Scripture.

Once the leading brothers become aware of any **gaps** among them, they can pray that God would raise the weak or missing types among them, and meanwhile, seek collectively to cover the **gaps** and restore a healthy balance to their leadership.

4. Two examples

The leadership within a local church, for example, may lack a **Creative-Visionary** type brother. This deficiency is felt in the lack of someone who would generate new

ideas, who would suggest ways out of sticky disagreements, who would motivate the setting of long term goals, who would see opportunities and suggests original ways forward, who would inject spark and freshness into the leading process. What can be done? Until a Creative-Visionary type emerges, try to copy and adapt good ideas used by others. Communicate more with local brothers and sisters and try to draw creative ideas from the congregation, be it through an open forum, a questionnaire or simply personal conversations. Perhaps some Creative-Visionary type brother could be invited from outside for a weekend, not to do things, but to listen and share vision and ideas.

Sometimes the local leadership may be lacking in **Quality Control**. Perhaps changes are occurring too rapidly in an attempt to follow “success stories”, or necessary Biblical changes are dismissed while seeking to be faithful to “our tradition”. The leadership seems to lack that uncomfortable type that questions everything, who slows down the decision process in order to ensure a Biblical outcome or who insists on a necessary Scriptural change until something happens. One who constantly reminds the team to be true to Scripture. What can be done? Until the Quality Control type emerges, it may be wise to consciously avoid taking big decisions in a hasty manner. On important matters, it could be a good policy to agree to arrive at **temporal decisions** at the leadership meeting, and only reach **final decisions** at some future meeting, providing time for further Bible study, reflection, prayer and broader consultation.

Conclusion

Plural godly mature masculine leadership was practised and taught in the Apostolic Church. But the divinely intended full benefits of plurality in leadership are by no means automatic. The effectiveness of plurality will be enhanced if leading brothers try to function more as a **team**, each recognising his own unique type of contribution and the type of his fellow leading brothers. Together they will seek to cover any **gaps** in order to provide a balanced leadership. Let’s not forget that the day will come when we shall stand before God and give an account on how we have led His people (Hebrews 13:17). Our families, the congregation, the unchurched and the next generation will all benefit from any improvements we can make. It is definitely worth the effort.

Philip Nunn
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London, UK

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