
Healthy Leaders Are Built in Community

An ancient African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Similarly, it takes a spiritual community or family to build a leader.

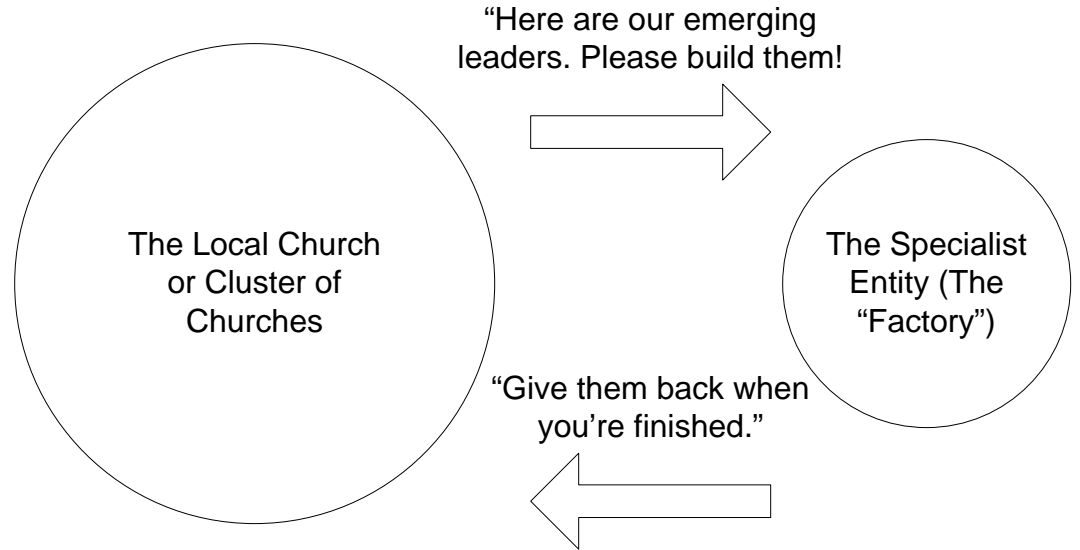
God sovereignly raises up His leaders, but we also have a responsibility in the matter. We have to work at it. It does not happen automatically. Leader development is the responsibility of the entire local church. Churches must consciously, actively and deliberately build the present and next generations of leaders. In most churches, leader development is left entirely up to chance. What differentiates a church that raises up leaders from one that does not is a clear priority for, and some means of ensuring, developmental opportunities for its people. Churches that are serious about the present and future intentionally build leaders!

Moreover, this responsibility is not simply delegated to the “Leader Development Department.” It is a community responsibility.

A Comparison of Three Approaches

In the traditional approach to building leaders, the local church sends its emerging leaders to a specialized, independent, external entity (Bible school, seminary, non-formal training program, etc.) – the “central factory” – that takes responsibility for training them and then sending them back¹:

¹ If they ever make it back; many do not.



This “factory” approach has greatly hindered the work of Christian leader development in several ways²:

- By limiting the numbers of leaders who can be trained to however many the relatively few specialist entities are able to cope with.
- By removing the students from the contexts of life and ministry that are vital to their development as people and as leaders.
- By siphoning off key leaders who, after their training in a city seminary, for example, do not return home since they prefer the new lifestyle or the greater opportunities now available to them. Many will try to find pastoral jobs in the city; if they’re not able to do that, they simply obtain “regular” jobs there. This “brain drain” is a problem facing churches in many developing countries.
- By discouraging and disabling the local church communities from assuming their vital responsibility for building their own emerging leaders. Sadly, this disconnect continues long after graduation, with the

² This is not a wholesale criticism or rejection of theological education. Some Bible schools, seminaries and non-formal training programs are very good, some are very poor, and there are many in-between. The ones that are disconnected from the life and ministry of the local church and who are entirely academic in their focus are addressed here.

leader forever looking to outside influences for his growth and development.

- By introducing woefully inadequate declarations of qualification, confusing diplomas with actual capability.
- By introducing a spiritual “caste” system into the church: the degreed professionals are distinguished from the “lay people” who, in many cases, are actually more qualified to do the real work of the ministry.
- By wasting significant resources – financial resources spent in maintaining institutions, and years of people’s lives spent studying many things that have no relation to useful ministry skills or inner spiritual capacities.

Thus, the “central factory” approach has undermined both the quantity and the quality of our Christian leaders, while damaging the spiritual and social dynamics of our churches.

We would never dream of sending our natural children off to another (more “expert”) family to be brought up and then sent back to us when they’re adults! Even though we recognize that some families are, in fact, better than others in raising children, we would not consider that the advantages of this “expertise” might outweigh the irreplaceable benefits of a child being raised by his own parents in his own family.

Strangely, however, when it comes to our spiritual sons and daughters, this is exactly what we do – we send them off to the “experts.” We think we’re supposed to do this! We must change our thinking: just as the natural family takes responsibility for bringing up its own children, so the church needs to reclaim this God-given responsibility of building our own leaders.

One of the main reasons why local churches see themselves as fundamentally incapable of building leaders is because they have been trained to view leader development as necessarily involving institutions, buildings, tenured professors with big degrees and salaries to match, accreditation, desks and dormitories, libraries containing thousands of books, etc. However, if our goal in leader development changes from scholarship alone to the development of the whole person, then

immediately we recognize that not only is the local church capable of building its own leaders, it is in fact, *the only place where it can properly occur!*

This is how church leaders were built in Acts – there is not a single instance of a seminary or Bible school that functions remotely from and independently of the local church. Biblically, the local church or cluster of churches is the primary unit of leader development.

The church has lost her ability to build and care for her leaders. This is a core reason for today’s leadership crisis around the world. The following are recent statistics³ concerning pastors in the U.S.:

- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 46% say they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.

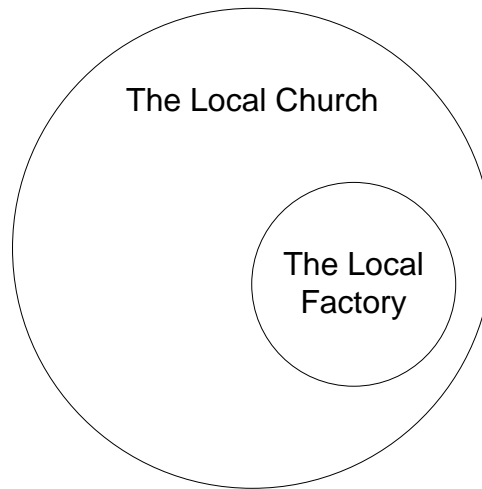
Why do we keep doing our training the same way, when we know it is not working well?

A second approach is when the church has its own internal “Bible school” – in effect, a “local factory” – that takes responsibility for training new leaders. This is becoming a very popular approach today with the spread of church-based theological training; in essence, the seminary is brought to the church.

This has many advantages over the “central factory” approach, since the “local factory” will probably be more in touch with the church’s own doctrines, beliefs, values and vision. Moreover, the participant will be able to maintain his existing relationships while he goes through his learning, and he will be

³ H.B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003).

considerably more likely to continue his life and ministry as a part of the church when he completes his learning.



However, this approach still has significant downfalls:

- The local church itself is still not vitally and personally involved in the building process. By itself, this represents a critical and fatal shortfall of the approach.
- Usually this approach represents an attempt simply to “relocate the seminary” to the local church. Much of the actual content of the training remains academic and theoretical. Moreover, since the local church lacks the resources of the seminary, the quality of this content is frequently diminished.
- This places too great a burden on the local leaders so that they are forced to compromise either the quality of their training work or the quality of their usual ministry responsibilities since they don’t have the time and energy to do both well. A healthy building process needs to involve the whole church community, not only the “professionals”; moreover, it must be integrated into the life and ministry of the church and not become merely “one more thing” the leaders now have to do.
- It obscures and distracts us from the fact that much leader development – perhaps the most critical – does not occur formally but casually in the context of the relationships

and ministry responsibilities and opportunities of the local church.⁴

- This approach often maintains the educational “caste” structure of the traditional system, in which advancement within the church is tied not to proven spirituality or ministry capacity but to an academic degree obtained by writing papers and passing exams.

A third, and much healthier, approach is when leader development takes place in a “learning community” that is connected immersively and pervasively to the church community. In this model there should be considerable “cross-linking” between the church community and the learning community and no “walls” between them. *Leader development is integrated into the life and ministry of the local church or cluster of churches.* Thus, the biblical model is not only “church-based,” it is “church-integrated” or “church-engaged.”



The learning community cannot do it properly by itself. It takes a family to build a leader – a large family. Leaders are not

⁴ In many nations, where do the young people learn to play soccer? The homes, local parks and streets form the organic and spontaneous environment for skill development, mentoring and practice. Why can't the church adopt a similar model? Ted Ward once asked the author, "What was the hardest thing you ever learned to do?" After some thought I replied, "To speak." "That's right," he said. "The hardest thing people ever learn to do is to communicate in their first language, and they do it without going through a single course or class!"

formed in isolation but in community. If they are to be healthy, they need the nurture and support as well as the genuine accountability of the community. They need the spiritual mothers and fathers, the role models, the friends and the organic ministry opportunities that only the local church community can provide.

Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them... (Jer. 30:21)

We must move from the “factory” approach back to the “family.”

The Role of Community in the Life of a Christian Leader

Community serves a twofold place in the life of the Christian leader:

1. The healthy leader is *built* in community. No healthy leader will ever be built in a vacuum. Even the hottest embers grow cold in isolation.

It is relatively easy to live victoriously when we are all by ourselves. The “spiritual lone ranger” is not tested as deeply as the man who lives in community. It is easy to be patient when no one is irritating us! It is when we come together that we have the opportunity to be patient, kind, forgiving and loving; to walk in servanthood and grace toward one another. As someone said, the Christian life would be easy if it weren’t for the devil and people! In reality, we only really mature and grow as Christians in the context of community.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Prov. 27:17)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in

the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:9-14)

The healthy leader is built in community.

The leader is built in community. Jesus grew in community, subject to His parents and a part of the community around Him (Luke 2:41-52). Paul was built in community in the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and then in the church after he was saved (Acts 9:19, 27). According to church tradition, even the somewhat individualistic John the Baptist matured in community.

2. The leader *leads* in the context of community (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

...in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Rom. 12:5)

The healthy leader leads in the context of community.

He never grows to the point where he no longer needs vital relationships with others around him. Effective Christian leaders lead in a context of community – not as tough “ministry islands” off by themselves. In the body of Christ, no members are independent (1 Cor. 12).

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12)

Jesus had friends and He needed them. Jesus needed their fellowship and support.

...My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. (Matt. 26:38)

He was grieved when they fell asleep in the garden (Matt. 26:36-45).

Paul also had friends, and they nurtured and strengthened him:

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also... (1 Cor. 16:15-18)

Significantly, Stephanas was Paul's own convert! Paul was not too proud to receive nurture and support from his own spiritual son. Onesiphorus also was a friend to Paul and strengthened him in "many ways," doubtless including emotionally and spiritually:

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know

very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus. (2 Tim. 1:16-18)

Romans 16:1-16 mentions several of Paul's "dear" friends and even a spiritual "mother" in verse 13!

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. (Rom. 16:13)

If Jesus, the Son of God, and Paul, the mighty apostle, needed friends, who are we that we do not? It is not a sign of strength to be by yourself in leadership. It is a mark of weakness. Leaders need friends!

Thus, community serves a twofold place in the life of the leader:

1. The healthy leader is built in community.
2. The healthy leader leads in community

This does not refer merely to an ideological commitment to "community" but to genuine, committed, nurturing and accountable relationships. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "He who loves community destroys community. He who loves the brothers builds community." The author has known people who loudly declared their great love for "New Testament church life"; it was people they were not too fond of!

Biblically, spiritual maturity is a corporate experience:

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.(Eph. 2:21-22)

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge –

that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:12-13)

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:16)

Healthy leadership does not exist as its own separate entity apart from or above the entire community.⁵ Neither should leader development exist as a separate entity apart from the entire church community.

The Entire Community Must Take Responsibility for Leader Development

In most Western organizations today, we love specialization and compartmentalization. Consequently, as we have already mentioned, it is common for us to entirely delegate the task of leader development to some “specialist” person or group – whether inside or outside the church. We identify the emerging leader who needs to be built and then send him to the “experts” to “do it” for us.

However, if it is to be done right, the existing leaders themselves must participate in the teaching and building of emerging leaders. They should not merely delegate this role to others. Leaders must personally act as coaches, role models, teachers and mentors. They must share their lives

Leaders must personally act as coaches, role models, teachers and mentors.

⁵ Please see *Healthy Leaders: SpiritBuilt Leadership #2* by Malcolm Webber, for more on the role of the community in the life of a leader.

with those around them – their mistakes as well as their victories. True leaders are builders of leaders. Of course, as part of their general strategy of development, they may send the emerging leaders to a profitable training seminar or give them a good book to read, or receive advice or help from a consultant, etc., but they will not pass off the overall *responsibility* to anyone else. Leaders are best built by leaders in the context of normal life and ministry.

The ministry of an in-house learning community can be powerful, but it must be coupled with a broad responsibility across the church family to raise leaders.

Communities build leaders. It is not only the individual teaching or mentoring leader who is responsible for building the emerging leader. The entire church contributes to the growth of every new leader. In a variety of ways, a healthy church community works together (albeit not always consciously nor necessarily well) to give the emerging leader the experiences, challenges, learning opportunities, exposure to multiple leaders, role models, relationships, accountability, feedback, support, encouragement, prayer support, exchange of life, etc. that he or she needs.

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (Rom. 15:14)

...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. (1 Cor. 14:26)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16)

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (1 Thess. 5:14)

The builder must take steps to establish and maintain the appropriate overall environment for optimal development. Building leaders means working with the entire community, not only with the emerging leaders themselves – during the formal building process and also after the formal process. The process of building leaders is never finished.

The learning community should not attempt to replace the spiritual community in the building process, but the two must work integrally.

The role of the spiritual community in building leaders is twofold:

- During any formal process, the community must take responsibility for and must participate in the process.
- After any formal process, the community must take responsibility for the ongoing (and never-ending) building of the emerging or existing leader.

The Healthy Church

In the New Testament, the church is compared to the human body (e.g., 1 Cor. 12). When a part of someone's body is not functioning properly, that person is, by definition, sick or unhealthy. Thus, a simple definition of a "healthy" human body is one in which every member is functioning properly. In the same way, a healthy church is, quite simply, *one in which every member is functioning properly.*

There are many popular, and valuable, models of what constitutes a "healthy church." For example, a healthy church will have inspiring worship, need-oriented evangelism, loving relationships, etc. *If every member functions properly then the local church will have all these components.*

But, what does it mean to “function properly”? In Ephesians, Paul shares a clear revelation of this:

From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:16)

There are three things that each member must do in order for him or her to be considered “functioning properly.”

First, each member must “grow.” Personally and directly connected to the life of the Head (“from Him the whole body...”) each member of the church must grow in spiritual maturity. In the church around the world, we’re not doing too badly in this regard. Many Christians do take personal responsibility for their own spiritual lives. They know that God has called them to grow, and not to remain spiritual babies.

Second, each member must serve, or “do its work.” Every member of the church is a “minister”; we all have a calling from God and the corresponding gifting. For the last couple of decades, there has been much teaching on “finding your gifting,” etc., and the church has improved considerably in this regard. Many believers now have a clear vision for their own personal involvement in the ministry of their local churches. Of course, “serving” does not only involve “official ministry activity” but, even more importantly, also serving one another in the broad, practical context of daily life and relationships.

Third, each member must “build” others: “the body builds itself up.” This has been the critical missing element in many churches. We have not taken deliberate, personal responsibility for building others. Usually we “delegate” that responsibility to others. So, for example, the children are taught spiritually at Sunday School, the new believers go to discipleship class on Tuesday night, the emerging leaders are sent off to Bible school, etc.

However, biblically, we *all* have responsibility to build others. Parents are responsible to build their children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-21). Existing believers are responsible to build the new disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The older women are responsible to build the younger ones (Tit. 2:3-5). The mature men teach the younger men (2 Tim. 2:2).

A healthy church is one in which every member grows, serves and builds others. We must have all three. And all three must come from life – the indwelling life of Christ in each believer’s life (John 15:4-5; Eph. 4:16) as he or she grows, serves and builds.

This is a profound paradigm shift for many believers and churches. It is a shift away from a program mentality to a people mentality. However, if we can create a church culture in which every believer takes responsibility to grow, serve and build, our churches will transform their worlds!

Church-Integrated Leader Development

If a healthy church, like a healthy body, is one in which every member is functioning properly, with every member growing, serving and building others, then the primary task of leader development is not so much to implement curriculum as it is to *create culture*.

“Culture” refers to shared beliefs, values, attitudes and actions. In a healthy church there is a *culture of leader development*. The primary task of leader development work is to create this culture and then to oversee it, nurture it and protect it.

If we can nurture and sustain cultures of “people-building” in our local churches, then we will be able to effectively address the current leader development crisis.

In Acts, the local churches, or clusters of churches, were the primary units of leader development. Typically, the churches did not send off their emerging leaders to be built somewhere

else by someone else. Just as parents are, quite naturally, the best ones to build their own children, so churches in the New Testament themselves embraced the responsibility and privilege of building their own spiritual sons and daughters. Timothy, for example, was built in the life of the local churches at Lystra and Iconium before Paul took him along as part of his apostolic team (Acts 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15).

The local church is the most natural and most potent place to build the whole person. In the local church there is an extraordinary transformational environment of spiritual, relational, experiential and instructional dynamics. In the normal life and ministry of the local church there can be leaders building leaders, spiritual mothers and fathers, role models, examples, mentors, coaches, responsibilities, challenges, prayer and worship, the Presence of God, sufferings, instruction in the Truth of God's Word. All of this is already present in the local church – at least potentially.

Thus, as previously stated, the primary task of leader development is not so much to write and implement academic curriculum on biblical topics as it is to create and sustain culture – a culture within the local church of purposefully and wisely interacting with the spiritual, relational, experiential and instructional dynamics of the organic life of the church.

Before the church was established, Jesus built leaders this way – in His learning community of disciples. Paul did this in his team. The local churches in Acts took responsibility for building their own sons and daughters in an experiential collage of diverse people, relationships, influences, assignments, tasks, responsibilities, duties, opportunities, pressures, crises, blessings, sufferings, rejections, successes, mistakes, etc., that all worked together to build the emerging leaders.

But, how do we get there?

Today, the idea of “church-sponsored theological instruction” is becoming increasingly popular.⁶ While this represents a major improvement over the traditional practices of disconnected biblical teaching in remote academic institutions, yet it is still not the New Testament paradigm. The New Testament pattern is more along the lines of “church-integrated leader development.” Here are two key contrasts:

First, true leader development is not only a class lecture or a small group session that is “sponsored by the church” and that occurs in a room in the church building on Tuesday nights or all-day Saturday. Leader development needs to be *integrated* into the life of the church – truly owned by the church, occurring across the life of the church, all week long.

This is a difference of *process*. If our purpose was merely to get the right information into the heads of our emerging leaders, then lectures followed by papers and small group sessions to discuss the information (with degrees at the end to prove the information was mastered) would be sufficient. But if our goal is the building of the whole person, then a much more complex process is necessary – we need a transformational collage of spiritual, relational and experiential *as well as* instructional dynamics.

An effective leader development process is not a neat series of courses but a fiery immersion in real-life, real-time experiences, reflecting the complicated and fundamentally difficult nature of Christian leadership, bringing deep heart issues to the surface to be dealt with, and compelling the emerging leader to look utterly to God for everything in his life and ministry.

We need a culture of leader development – shared beliefs, values, attitudes and actions – across the life of the church, all week long. This is the healthy church: parents building their children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-21), existing believers building the new disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), older women

⁶ The following general comments are not directed at any *specific* program, whether formal or non-formal.

building the younger ones (Tit. 2:3-5), mature men teaching the younger men (2 Tim. 2:2), people building people, leaders building leaders. Thus, church-sponsored is not enough; leader development must be truly church-integrated or church-engaged.

Second, “theological education” of the mind is entirely insufficient. The whole person must be built, with broad and deliberate attention given to the nurturing of spiritual life, relational capacity (including marriage, family, and relationships with others), character, vision and calling, as well as practical ministry capacities. The leader himself or herself must be built.

This is a difference of *goal*. The goal of New Testament leader development is not merely intellectual mastery of some biblical ideas, but rather transformation of life – the holistic building of the leader.

These are some of the many powerful advantages of this biblical paradigm:

First, in our experience, when local churches rediscover the organic New Testament pattern of church-integrated leader development, it affects the church as much as it affects the emerging leaders. Here is a recent testimony from an Asian church network leader:

When we followed Jesus’ leader development principles, the result has been a great flourishing of vigor and life in the church. All the members are functioning, building each other and growing together, thus bringing great growth and revival to the whole church.

Second, while church-sponsored theological instruction is usually accomplished in a limited time of training, church-integrated leader development is an ongoing, lifelong commitment to growing, serving and building together.

Third, church-sponsored theological instruction usually revolves around the set curriculum (“one size fits all”), whereas church-integrated leader development can effectively respond to the individual needs and callings of the emerging leaders.

We recognize that church-sponsored theological instruction is a sincere and significant improvement over traditional leader development approaches; however, the New Testament model is not so much church-sponsored theological instruction but rather church-integrated leader development.

If we can shift away from our Greek-rooted fixation on academic curriculum⁷ and instead learn how to create and sustain organic cultures of healthy people-building within the life of our local churches, then, by God’s grace, we will be able to effectively address the current leader development crisis.

Practical Implications for Builders

Our leader development efforts must not be conducted apart from a living community of people in which the emerging leaders function and participate.

First, those emerging leaders who are being trained must be formed into a community themselves, and not be allowed to exist as separate individuals. In our traditional systems of education, the individual students arrive at the class, sit at their separate desks, listen to the lectures, participate in whatever group tasks are required of them, then leave and go their own separate ways until the next class time. Whatever relationships and community they do form during their schooling are usually incidental and are rarely integrated into the schooling itself.

The best “leadership school” is *a transformational, learning community* in which all the participants take responsibility for

⁷ For more on this, please see *A Christian Critique of the University* by Charles Habib Malik, and *The Rise of Christianity* by W.H.C. Frend (Chapter 11 is especially illuminating: “The Third Century: Christian Platonism of Alexandria and Its Opponents, 190-275”).

each other, hold each other accountable, care for each other, pray together, worship and seek God together, work and serve together, struggle together, resolve conflicts, and learn and grow together.

It is significant that nowhere in the gospels do we find Jesus alone with one of His disciples. Even the interactions that appear to have taken place between Jesus and one person were always conducted with others close by. Certainly there are clear biblical examples of “one-on-one” mentoring such as Moses and Joshua or Elijah and Elisha, but it appears that Jesus always engaged in character building when the “family” was together.

In addition, some of the unhealthy dependencies and transferences of dysfunctionalities that we often see in mentoring relationships would be avoided by a community approach to building disciples and leaders.⁸

Second, as already stated, the community of emerging leaders must itself be part of a larger spiritual community. The learning community may be distinct but it must not be separate from the overall community.

The two communities should not compete but should have one unified and integrated corporate strategy of leader development. This larger community might be a local church or cluster of churches.

The learning community must not be separate from the overall community.

Both the learning community and the larger community must take initiative in building the relationship between them. It will help in this regard if there is some overlap of direct leadership between the two

⁸ In one-on-one mentoring, the various personal issues, prejudices and personality quirks of the mentor are sometimes reproduced in the mentee; there is a “transference of dysfunctionality,” with *both* the good and bad things being passed on. However, if there are others involved in building the new leader (other leaders, spiritual mothers and fathers, mentors, coaches, intercessors, etc.), then the emerging leader is less likely to pick up the wrong things from one leader. This is a big advantage of the community approach as contrasted with a traditional mentoring, one-on-one approach where only one leader interacts with each emerging leader.

communities. It will be particularly effective if the top leader of both is the same person; this will help greatly to create a strong level of ownership of the learning community by the larger, spiritual community.

The larger community can take responsibility for providing:

- Overall leadership of the learning community.
- Providing and sharing the vision.
- Practical provision – shelter, food, clothing.
Significantly, this means the learning community does not need to be dependent upon outsiders for funding.⁹ This, in turn, means that church-integrated learning communities can be multiplied almost limitlessly!
- Spiritual care and nurture – pastoring and shepherding.
This spiritual care can occur in both formal and informal ways. Some possible formal roles might be:
 - Pastoral Coaches, who provide accountability, nurture and encouragement as the participant responds to the work of God in his or her heart (Christ, Community, Character).
 - Intercessors, who pray regularly for the participant (all 5Cs of Christ, Community, Character, Calling and Competencies).
 - Ministry Mentors, who provide ministry examples, practical and experiential guidance, advice, correction and encouragement as the student grows in understanding of his or her calling and in the competencies necessary to fulfill that calling (Calling, Competencies).
 - Learning Coaches: former participants in their own training who provide encouragement as well as practical help regarding the process.
 - Spiritual Friends: peers who can give encouragement, accountability and prayer support.

⁹ Some outside financial support might be beneficial for initial start-up expenses in certain situations. Please see Chapter 6 of *Church Planting* by Malcolm Webber for more on the need for indigenous ministries to be self-supporting and how that relates to their own abilities to also be self-governing and self-propagating.

- Host Families, who provide homes, clothing, food and relationship.
- The spiritual community – spiritual mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, friends, role models, mentors, ministry opportunities.
- Teaching and mentoring (both character and ministry).
- Modeling the various gifts and ministries.
- Sharing life stories.
- Life examples.
- Returning missionaries and traveling ministries sharing their stories.
- Encouragement.
- Oversight.
- Accountability.
- Prayer support.
- Learning materials and resources.
- Ministry opportunities and responsibilities.
- Housing for participants and their families.
- Ministry assignments after the formal learning period is over.
- Ongoing mentoring after the formal learning period is over.

The learning community can take responsibility for:

- Praying for the church.
- Being accountable to the church.
- Being committed to the church and sharing its burdens.
- Submitting to the church's vision.
- Providing various forms of ministry and service in the church community.
- Being examples and mentors to younger members of the church.
- Visiting the people to build relationships with them and looking for ways to serve – both spiritually and practically.
- Leading special combined meetings on a regular basis.

- Sharing the participants’ visions with the church so there is mutual understanding.
- Providing reports on the participants’ growth.
- Inviting counsel and advice.

By making the learning community an integral part of a larger spiritual community, the participants will experience a more holistic learning and growing experience.

We will also avoid the frequent problems associated with “re-entry” into normal life after the learning experience. For example, after going through an intense learning experience that has lasted for several months or years, participants will frequently experience difficulties in reconnecting with their local spiritual communities. It is not uncommon for them to go into depression, discouragement, confusion, isolation or other forms of emotional and intellectual disequilibrium after the artificial “high” of the learning time is over. This can partly be avoided when they *maintain* their relationships and responsibilities within their normal community throughout the learning experience.

In addition, the gap between knowledge and practical ministry that usually occurs in traditional schools will also be avoided. When the emerging leader is placed in a far-away school for training and nurtured in an artificial environment for a long time, he will be too far removed for too long a time from the rugged life and challenges that he is to meet in the ministry.

When young people are educated away from their churches for long periods of time, that very education sometimes puts them out of touch with their communities. They return to their people with strange ideas and habits. They are not even the best teachers of the people from whose intellectual and spiritual lives they have been absent for so long. They no longer know how to answer their difficulties or respond to their needs. They are disconnected and out of touch with the people. The community has not grown with them, nor they with the community. They are now “outsiders,” and only a few exceptional people can overcome that profound difficulty. This

will be avoided if the emerging leaders maintain their life, relationships and ministry in the local church while they participate in an intense time of learning, experience and growth.

From the Factory to the Family

By moving from a centralized “factory” mentality to a pervasive “family” approach to leader development in the church, the following can be achieved:

- **Flexibility.** When it comes to leader development, “one size” does not fit all. Around the world, leaders from a vast diversity of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, education levels, etc., need to be built. Our approaches must be flexible and customizable. In addition, in many countries, the environment is rapidly changing around the church, again requiring flexibility in our approaches to leader development.
- **Multiplication.** The inherent limitations of the centralized factory will be lifted, the family approach providing a model that can be multiplied virtually endlessly, with every local church or cluster of churches providing a learning environment for their emerging leaders.
- **Self-support.** The local church provides the financial support for the learning process, thus maintaining both responsibility for and control of the building of its own emerging leaders. To be truly self-governing, the community must be self-supporting.
- **Holistic development.** The learning process becomes considerably more effective because the local church provides the spiritual, relational and practical context for the development of the whole person.
- **Security in restricted countries.** In restricted countries, large educational institutions are often not viable due to their size, visibility and the ease with which they can be closed down. Church-integrated learning communities,

on the other hand, can be small, easily-hidden and pervasive.

- The right people receive training. The emerging and existing leaders who need training the most are those who are already engaged in ministry and cannot leave their work for years at a time to go and study in a distant Bible school. In the traditional approach, we consistently train the wrong people.
- Ongoing, lifelong leader development. The training is not limited to a certain period of time, but continues throughout the emerging leaders' lives. Leaders are built over lifetimes!
- Effective evaluation. Members of the local community who know the emerging leader and who work with him on a daily basis are the best ones to help him both establish goals for his development and evaluate his growth toward those goals.

New Roles for the Old Factories

It is conceivable that if a church denomination or network were to adopt a church-integrated learning community approach to leader development, this would not necessarily mean the end of their seminaries and Bible schools; these entities could adopt new roles. In their new roles they would no longer do all the training *for* the churches; instead they would serve the churches as *they* build their own leaders. This support would involve the following areas:

- Envisioning and equipping local leaders to build leaders.
- Designing appropriate holistic processes and learning experiences to be used in the local learning communities.
- Developing appropriate materials and resources to be used in the local learning communities.
- Maintaining standards of training quality.
- Providing certain kinds of specialized learning.

This decentralized leader development with some measure of centralized support has a New Testament precedent. Clearly, the Jerusalem (Acts 8:14, 25; 15:4, 30-33), Ephesian (Acts 19:9-10) and Antioch churches (Acts 13:1-3; 15:36) served the churches around them in a variety of ways. In fact, this gave rise to the writing of most of the New Testament!

A Strategy to Impact a Nation

To illustrate the above strategy, the following discussion concerns a hypothetical nation.

This nation has about 5000 churches. The current training is being done by 10 Bible schools with about 50 students each. The cost per student is about US\$500 per year. This means that a total of 500 emerging leaders are being trained at a cost of US\$250,000 per year.

While we rejoice that 500 emerging leaders are receiving training, this strategy has clear limitations:

- The training is largely academic, being disconnected from the local church environment. The whole person is not being built – a *quality* issue.
- There are not enough new leaders being trained – a *quantity* issue.
- Since the local churches are not directly involved in the training, they do not have a deep sense of ownership or responsibility. Consequently, it is hard for the Bible schools to fund their ongoing operations. Much of their funding comes from outside the country, and attached to that funding there are often “strings” (outside control and agendas).

However, if the local churches become the primary units of leader development, with the ongoing support of centralized envisioning-equipping-resourcing centers, the following can take place:

- If each local church will focus on building just *one* emerging leader, the numbers will increase dramatically. Now, *5000* emerging leaders are receiving training. Some churches can build two or three leaders; some can build ten or more! The crisis of quantity has been addressed.
- In the spiritual, relational and experiential context of the local churches, the leader development process can be considerably more holistic – character, spiritual life, marriage issues, practical ministry competencies, etc., can all be dealt with. The crisis of quality has been addressed.
- Since the training is based organically in the local churches, the cost is minimal. In addition, the local churches are now involved directly in the leader development so they have a much stronger sense of ownership and responsibility. Consequently, whatever costs are involved can be covered by the local churches. No outsiders are involved and the indigenous leaders remain in control of the training. The costs of the regional centers are also minimal and can be covered by the local churches who receive their help.

The following table summarizes the contrasts:

Contrasts between the Two Strategies	
TRADITIONAL STRATEGY	CONNEXIONS STRATEGY
The local churches funnel their emerging leaders into the centralized Bible schools who do the training for them	A web of local churches around the nation that are the primary units of leader development, with equipping and resourcing from regional centers
500 students	5000+ emerging leaders
Largely academic training	Holistic leader development
Cost of US\$250,000 per year	Minimal cost
Dependence on foreign funding (with possible “strings”)	Owned and led by indigenous leaders

Contrasts between the Two Strategies	
TRADITIONAL STRATEGY	CONNEXIONS STRATEGY
Local churches lose their best young people	Emerging leaders invigorate the life and ministry of the local churches
Some impact on the nation	Major impact on the nation

This is not to suggest that such a paradigm shift will be easy to accomplish. It is clear, however, that this strategy will meet the need. In addition, it has its roots in the New Testament.

Conclusion

In healthy leader development, the builder must work to create and sustain two kinds of community relationships for the emerging leaders in his care:

- Their relationships within the transformational, learning community itself.
- Their relationships within a larger spiritual community in which they live and serve.

If we can effectively do this – if we can move from the “factory” to the “family” in our leader development – we will dramatically increase both the numbers and the quality of the leaders we build.