

Transformational Leadership & Church Turnaround

By

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What is Transformational Leadership?

The concept of transformational leadership was introduced in the book *Leadership* by James McGregor Burns (1978). Burns (1978) theorized that three types of leadership exist: *Laissez-Faire*, *Transactional*, and *Transforming*. These three leadership styles form a “full range model” of leadership dimensions (Bass & Avolio, 1994). *Laissez-Faire* leaders are the least competent leaders because they take a hands-off approach leaving followers without clear direction. *Transactional* leaders are at the mid-point of the scale and are more effective leaders than *laissez-faire*. They lead by offering various rewards to followers who meet prescribed expectations but are primarily concerned with their own goals and interests. *Transformational* leaders are at the top of the range and are considered the most effective leaders. They focus primarily on achieving mutually shared goals above their self-interests. These leaders cast vision with clarity and influence followers to share in that vision by promoting follower creativity and innovation.

Transactional leaders focus on accomplishing tasks and rewarding followers who assist in completing those tasks. Leader and follower transactions take three forms: contingent reward, passive management-by-exception, and active management-by-exception. Contingent reward finds the leader clearly articulating to the follower the task required and the reward that can be expected (Bass, 1999). Once agreement on the task and reward occurs, the transactional leader passively or actively manages the follower. “Active leaders monitor follower behavior, anticipate

problems, and take corrective action. Passive leaders wait until the behavior has created problems before taking action” (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 756). Ultimately, transactional leadership emphasizes the self-interests of the leader, not the follower.

The primary difference between transformational and transactional leadership lies in “what leaders and followers offer one another” (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). Hughes (2014) offers a succinct and accurate definition that describes what the transformational leader offers followers:

Primarily focused on the vision and followers, transformational leadership emphasizes follower development and their intrinsic motivation. Transformational leaders are focused on raising the followers to a higher level of performance and consciousness in order to reach the mutual goals of the team, rather than solely for self-interest (p. 6).

Transformational leaders “possess the ability to inspire followers to go beyond expected levels of commitment and contribution” (Rowold, 2008, p. 404). Implicit in followers going beyond the expected is the element of personal and organizational change. Podsakof, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) suggest that transformational leadership in any form is meant to change (transform) the “basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers” (p. 108). The hopeful result is followers who go above and beyond the expected norms. Bass and Riggio (2006) offer four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence (sometimes referred to as charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized concern.

Idealized Influence and *Inspirational Motivation* is about vision, motivation, and modeling (Bass, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The leader clearly articulates a vision of an optimistic and preferred future. Transformational leaders motivate followers by showing

followers how they contribute to, enhance, and share in the vision. Then, the transformational leader models the vision he or she has presented to followers “by behaving in admiral ways that cause followers to identify with the leader” (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). *Intellectual Stimulation* occurs when “the leader helps followers to become more innovative and creative” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). *Individualized Consideration* occurs as the leader give personal time to followers as a coach and mentor to assist them in their growth and development. Ultimately, transformational leaders emphasize the values of followers above their self-interests (Jandaghi, Matin, Zarei & Farjami, 2009).

The literature paints a vivid description of the characteristics of a transformational leader. Transformational leaders influence followers through vision (Bradford & Cohen, 1984; House, 1977; Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Murphy, 2005; Penn, 2011; Scarborough, 2010; Scuderi, 2010; Tichy & DiVanna, 1986). Transformational leaders demonstrate influence in a variety of ways. Through his or her influence, transformational leaders raise followers to a “higher levels” of “motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978), “performance” (Hughes, 2014; Lievens, Van Geit, & Coetsier, 1997), “participation and satisfaction” (McMahan, 1998), “performance and satisfaction” (Hughes, 2014; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; McKinley, 2015; Scuderi, 2010; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Bass (1985) and Choi (2006) describe a leader who empowers followers. Transformational leaders inspire followers to commit to organizational goals (Penn, 2011). Bass (1985) describes transformational leaders as innovators. Liethwood (1992) summarizes the transformational leader as one who “facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment” (p. 9). All the qualities mentioned point to a leader who possesses a dual focus. The transformational leader is

guided by a compelling personal or organizational vision. The leader understands, however, that vision cannot be accomplished alone. Consequently, the transformational leader not only inspires people to help him or her fulfill their vision but empowers and equips followers to become autonomous leaders. The result is leadership multiplication where the primary leader gives away power and authority so that others are brought up and not kept down.

Transformational Leadership Qualities of Turnaround Pastors.

Revitalizing a plateauing or declining church requires pastors to be transformative leaders. Moving a church from plateau and decline to life and health is a task best suited to pastors who practice transformational leadership. Carter (2009) contends that a transformational leadership style is a central variable found among effective pastors (abstract). Bass (1990) asserts, “[...] among Methodist ministers, transformational – not transactional – leadership was positively related to high church attendance among congregants and growth in church membership” (p. 22). The literature provides excellent insight into the qualities of pastors who successfully lead their congregations to turnaround. Turnaround pastors’ model certain attitudinal and behavioral qualities as they lead followers to revitalize their church.

Ross (2013) and Penfold (2011) identify numerous attitudes common in turnaround pastors. A turnaround pastor is focused, determined, outgoing, energetic, and an innovative team builder with excellent communication skills (Penfold, 2011, p. 163). Turnaround pastors successfully leverage these attitudes to direct transformational change initiatives in entrenched religious cultures. Ross (2013) offers twelve attitudes of a turnaround pastor. Three attitudes of note include a leader’s ability to manage emotional pain, a willingness to endure inevitable personal clashes arising from cultural change, and commitment to stay between five and twelve years (Ross, 2013).

Revitalizing a dying church requires immense and sometimes painful change. “Turnaround is fairly rare, and that’s probably because it is often costly” (McEachin, 2011; Stroh, 2014). Nevertheless, those pastors committed to turnaround help members see the necessity of change (Martin, 2015). Plateauing and declining churches often turn inward thinking that by doing so they will survive. Lamb (2016) challenges turnaround pastors to help their congregations see the reality of their current situation then move the church toward “patience, positivity, and passion” (p. 157). The inwardly focused church must be challenged to turn their eyes and hearts out to the community they are called to serve (Lamb, 2016; Stroh, 2014). Doing so requires change. The turnaround pastor is willing to “pay the price to lead change” (Penfold, 2011, p. 175). A transformational leadership style is vital to leading an organization through change (Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2008). In this case, the organization is the local church desiring to move from stagnation to vitality.

Turnaround pastors lead by effectively and communicating a God-given vision to followers (Lamb, 2016; Martin, 2015; Penfold, 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2017) describe vision as “[...] projections of one’s fundamental beliefs and assumptions about human nature, technology, economics, science, politics, art, ethics, and the like” (p. 98). Turnaround pastors genuinely believe that a dying church can live. They act on those beliefs by tenaciously painting the picture of a better future for a church that is, for the moment, struggling to stay open for one more Sunday. Vision is key to motivating followers toward greater creativity, collaboration, and higher levels of performance (Bass, 1985; Hughes, 2014; Scuderi, 2010). Turnaround pastors consistently cast a vision that compels people to act and challenges followers to deeper levels of organizational commitment (Penn, 2011).

A behavior overwhelmingly portrayed in the literature is the image of a pastor who genuinely loves people (Crandall, 1995; Rainer & Lawless, 2003). Crandall (1995) asked members of small congregations this question, “What are your pastor’s three greatest assets and strengths in ministry” (p. 31)? The following five results occurred: 1) loving people, 2) people skills, 3) preaching, 4) visionary motivator, and 5) personal faith and love for God (Crandall, 1995, p. 31). Love, for the turnaround pastor, is not viewed as some abstract or vague concept. For turnaround pastors, love is demonstrated in concrete action meant to build up their followers (see Ephesians 4:11-12). The literature lists a multitude of practical ways turnaround pastors build people up: discovery and development of gifts that leads to empowering followers to passionately use their gifts in shared ministry (Nixon, 2004; Penfold, 2011; Rainer & Lawless, 2003; Stroh, 2014), being authentic and leading by example (Crandall, 1995; Nixon, 2004; Rainer, 2001), keeping an elevated level of faith and optimism (Frazee, 1995; Mays, 2011; Rainer, 2001), and modeling a life of deep spiritual discipline (Crandall, 1995; Rainer, 2001). The literature also describes the turnaround pastor as one who is willing to confront others in love (Lamb 2016; Penfold, 2011; Wood, 2001). Jesus was asked, “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law” (Matthew 22:36). His answer was twofold: love God, and love people (Matthew 22:37-40). Turnaround pastors, through the enablement of the Holy Spirit, typify a life committed to these two commands so that followers are inspired to do the same.

Pastors recognize the invaluable role of lay-leaders in successfully turning around a dying church. Revitalizing a rural church requires a cooperative and interactive relationship between pastors and lay-leaders. The literature portrays turnaround pastors as having similar qualities of transformational leaders. Pastors who adopt a transformational leadership style produce a wide-range of positive follower effects.

Bass and Avolio (1994) assert transformational leaders consistently produce four follower effects: trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect. Conger, Rabindra, Kanungo, and Menon (2000) state that charismatic or transformational leadership has likely follower effects. They hypothesized that when followers perceived managers as transformational leader's, changes would occur in follower "attitudes, values, and behaviors" (Conger, et. al., 2000). Consequently, followers work to meet the expectations the leader has established usually accomplishing more than initially expected; and followers view their contribution toward accomplishing a task more positively (Conger, et al., 2000). Podsakof (1990) explains that the follower effects of trust in, and satisfaction with, a transformational leader are the mediating factors for organizational citizenship behaviors and help to leadership fatigue (Bass, 1998).

Other research has linked transformational leadership behavior to increased organizational innovation because of an increased commitment to change by followers (Bjorn, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2010). An assumption by the researcher is that turnaround pastors have a transformational style and produce positive follower effects of reverence, trust, and satisfaction with the leader in rural turnaround congregations. These follower effects result in lay-leaders forming a unique group identity resulting in higher performance than initially expected.

Much of the literature speaks of the necessity of good relations between pastor and lay-leaders. "With growth and changes in society, the pastor is unable to continue the mission set by Jesus without help from trained laity" (McEachin, 2011). Penfold (2011) insists that even the most capable pastor cannot produce church growth alone. He or she must have the help of a capable and willing laity (Penfold, 2011). Martin (2015) writes,

Synergy between pastoral leadership and laity who want church turnaround is essential.

Although a formal church revitalization program is not necessary, the turnaround pastor

must cast mission and vision in easily understandable forms and must rally laity behind them. Laity must recognize the necessity of change (abstract).

If pastors mean to mobilize the church for God's mission effectively, they must elevate the role of lay-leaders in the church (Newton, 2013; Mays, 2011; Scuderi, 2010; Shanlian, 2013; Sloan, 2001). Hunt (2016) declares the most significant challenge facing churches is a lack of trained lay-leaders. Daniels (2012) insists that laity must be equipped and inspired to co-labor with pastors in significant ministry aspects of the local church.

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