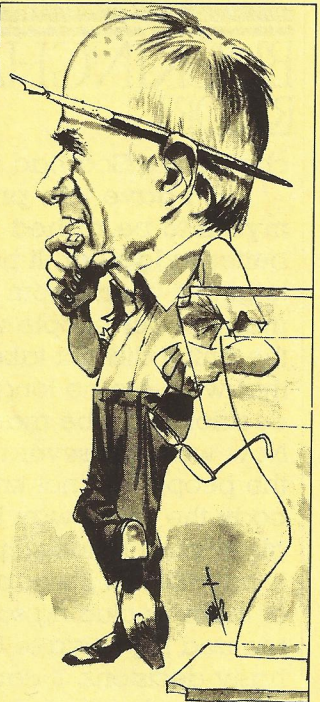


BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE & EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS



TEN DEADLY SINS OF PASTORAL MANAGEMENT

For me 1987 was a year of growth by trial and error. For almost four years I had taken a back seat in visible leadership with the church body, limiting myself to general oversight through the elders, giving direction to our senior pastor and preaching every fifth Sunday morning. In May of last year, following the resignation of our senior pastor and music director, I stepped back into active management. Because of prior commitments (speaking and writing) I was unable to give full time to the local ministry until the end of the year. During those seven months I broke nearly all the cardinal rules of management in my effort to get our church back on course.

Friends who have reviewed these "management sins" have cautioned me about writing down only those things I did wrong during the crisis, without mentioning the things I did right. Things like holding to loyal friends and proven values; fasting on several occasions—once for 26 days and again for 48 days; spending large amounts of time in the Word. And despite a 30 percent drop in income, we never cut our mission budget.

God blessed the right things and forgave the wrong, and we've recovered—in spite of my management goofs. We have called two new staff members. Team spirit has been re-established; miracles have reappeared; deep ministry is taking place; attendance and offerings are increasing; worship is once again paramount; and we are considering plans to help establish a new church. But before that happened I almost lost it. I hope I never have to repeat what we've been through, but the management lessons I learned during that time of crisis are priceless.

Here are the 10 more significant mistakes I made during our trauma time.

1. I abdicated my God-called position as spiritual leader. Despite prior commitments, I should have treated my church the same way I would have treated my wife had she become terribly ill. The moment I re-assumed full leader-

ship I should have immediately cancelled everything that would have taken me away from home for a year—including my contractual writing assignments and a massive tour to Israel for television taping—and given full time to resuming the pastoral functions. Instead I listened to bad advice which said, "Go ahead. Fulfill your commitments. We can take care of things here at home." care of things here at home."

2. Even when I stepped back into pastoral leadership, I didn't take full authority. I did not, as Don Finto says, "lean into leadership." Instead, I remained a reluctant leader, unwilling to stand in the authority I knew God had given me. In January of this year I finally took seriously what God had said when He told me, "This is your last chance. If you try to give this church away one more time, I'll take my anointing from you." The moment I took authority and said, "I'm in charge," even though we lost some people, things began to turn around.

3. I did not listen to the early advice of some of my trusted friends who warned me of inevitable conflicts down the road. In fact, when I look back I can safely say that every major problem I've encountered could have been averted had I listened to those closest to me who had my welfare at heart. At the same time, I foolishly ignored the rumblings and complaints I kept hearing from the saints in the body, many of whom I did not know well, but all of whom I loved and respected.

4. I allowed our elders—all personal friends and deeply dedicated to the cause of Christ—to become issue-oriented rather than God-oriented. Ministry and prayer, which had previously consumed most of our time, became secondary priorities as we became problem solvers—rather than looking for the greater

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challenges God had for our church.

5. I gave into pressure and allowed myself to be rushed into decisions against my better judgment. It had taken us several years to get off course from my original vision and many of our people wanted instant reversal of the drift. I did not take into account, however, that we were no longer a small church where decisions can be made by common consent. Now we were several thousand, and many of the people did not know me well. I treated the body the same way I had treated it prior to abdicating leadership some years before. It was a mistake, for I was a virtual stranger to many of them—including some of the staff. When I realized my mistake and reversed some of my hasty decisions, it caused additional misunderstanding among my leaders and in the church body.

For instance, in January I dissolved the old eldership—men who had stood with me and served the church sacrificially during a year of intense crisis. Even though we were all in agreement this was the right thing to do so I could take over full management of the church, I handled it badly. I should have made sure every elder was solid in the decision. I should have shown far more public respect for their service in the past. Even though four other elderships in the past had gone through similar experiences, I was now dealing with a generation who had little knowledge of the past. I have since established a new eldership and the sheep are settled, but that move severely damaged my credibility as a man who was submitted to and respected his fellow leaders.

6. I wanted to be liked more than I wanted to be respected. That caused me to go against my conscience in several management decisions. Rather than digging in my heels early on when I knew we were heading in the wrong direction, I waffled on several major decisions which caused even my friends to wonder if I could be trusted. In short, I allowed grace to outweigh truth. I have since spent considerable time allowing God to readjust my personality to bring truth into balance with grace.

7. I did not involve the church in the major decisions that needed to be made. By keeping them uninformed and not respecting the fact they heard from God as much as the leaders did, I severely strained a long-standing trust factor.

8. Across the years I became too busy to disciple young men and women in the

church. Nor had I encouraged my fellow leaders to be involved in personal discipleship. The result was our church was filled with outstanding young men and women who were deeply committed to Jesus and the local church but did not have my spirit. We are gradually changing that—but I should have started 12 years ago.

9. I allowed some of my subordinates to emphasize rules rather than insisting they implement my vision of developing the gifted areas of our staff and volunteer leaders. This thwarted personal talent and brought a judgmental and suspicious spirit into the church office and then into the body. In short, they overbalanced grace with truth.

10. I did not insist that criticism be positive and preceded by prayer support, and that all accusations and rumors be handled by the principles of Matthew 18.

SOLVING PROBLEMS VS. PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES

In 1960 Bill Alley, an engineering student at the University of Kansas and a member of the U.S. Olympic team, set the world record by throwing a javelin 283 feet, 8 inches. After several operations to remove bone chips in his elbow, Alley stopped throwing spears and went into business manufacturing them. His aluminum javelins were light and with better aerodynamics than the old wooden shafts. Alley soon realized, however, that despite his expertise, he had a problem. The market for spears in today's world is limited.

According to author George Gilder, that was when Alley developed his formula for success: "Don't solve problems—pursue opportunities." He noticed that a spear handle resembled the shaft of a golf club. Since far more people bought golf clubs than javelins, he went to work making golf putters.

A contract was signed and 4,000 aluminum-shafted golf putters had been manufactured when Alley pulled one from the assembly line to make sure the club flexed exactly two inches when a weight was hung from the end. To his horror, the club bent 17 inches—folding nearly in half.

"I started to panic," Alley said. "They were all the same. I'd designed the formula wrong."

In frustration and anger he grabbed the putter and bent it over his knee. Then he thought, "That's what every golfer does when he misses a putt." Once again, instead of searching for the solution to his problem, he pursued the opportunity.

He took out a magazine ad and marketed his bendable golf putter as a novelty for the

temperamental golfer. He called it the "Silly Putter." Instead of selling 4,000, he received orders for 6,000—at \$19.95 each. The income was enough to get him started making other things, this time from carbon fiber—a material that offered the designer control over flexibility.

Last year he grossed \$2 million with his "Diamondback" brand of carbon-fiber fishing rods which dominate the high-end fly-rod market.

Alley didn't stop there. In talking with other engineers he learned that a lot of machines break down because the parts expand as they heat up. For instance, one reason kidney-dialysis machines are so complex and expensive is engineers are constantly trying to solve the problems generated by parts that heat up, expand and ruin the mechanism.

Alley saw this as a challenge. One of the qualities of carbon fiber is that it doesn't change shape when exposed to heat and humidity. Using the materials developed in his fly rod, Alley's company, REC Corporation of Stowe, Vermont, developed a better blood pump for dialysis machines. This same material now goes into making cross-country ski poles, violin bows, phonograph arms, artificial limbs, automotive drive shafts and a standard for measuring torpedo tubes.

Billy Alley's story was written up recently in *Success* magazine, where I got this information. But more important than being featured in a national magazine, Bill has proved something management expert Peter Drucker once pointed out: a focus on problems devours time and resources without producing anything.

Today's Christian leader can learn from Bill Alley. Problems, like the poor, are with us always. It is foolish to spend our time trying to solve them. Instead, it is better to pursue opportunities than waste time spinning our wheels trying to solve problems.

HANDLING COMPLAINERS

What do Moses, Macy's and the modern church all have in common? Complainers. Like death and taxes, they are always with us—the gripers, the complainers, those who don't like the way it is. Many churches report the longest lines are usually at the complaint department.

Pastors and leaders should have an open mind, a listening ear. They also know that complaints are often a valid source of information. The problem is that complaints don't feel like information. Complaints feel like attacks—like obstacles thrown in our path. According to Kenneth Fisher, complaining stems from a postponed emotion or incompleting experience. Finding a listener allows the complainer to

unload anger and complete the experience.

But just hearing these complaints can arouse guilt in the listener. Pastors and other spiritual leaders are often powerfully motivated with high goals and ambitions for themselves and their church. Few, however, are able to live up to the goals and ideals they have set for themselves. When a complainer comes along, someone with a highly critical approach to our program—or us—we automatically blame ourselves when accused. In short, listening to complaints makes us feel wrong, even if we aren't. This puts us in a helpless position—and being made to feel helpless is essentially to feel attacked and overcome.

Forcing Yourself to Listen

When a staff member or a volunteer worker complains to you about something that is your responsibility, it may take an effort to hear the information over the din of his anger and your defensive reactions and guilt. The first step—and the hardest step—is to listen. Our natural reaction to any complaint is to explain, argue or judge the complainer. You need to push that back, force yourself to listen and be attuned to what is being said between the lines.

If you disagree with the complainer, and 90 percent of the time you will, you need to try to imagine how he or she could be right. See if you can reconstruct the logic the griper is using; try to see the situation as it must appear to him or her. This does not mean you need to change your mind; it simply means you are trying to understand the situation. Just knowing you genuinely care may solve the complainer's problem. On the other hand, he may have a valid point and you may need to do something about his gripe.

There is usually pressure to give an immediate answer. The complainer wants a solution. You may need to show the people around you that you are in control—a man of action. But fast action is not always for the best. Few people can change their minds right away. No one can see every angle instantly. That's why judges don't hand down decisions the day the trial ends. If possible, allow time for ideas and facts to settle in your mind, scout around for more information, pray, then make a decision.

The Real Problem

Occasionally the complainer is coming to you for advice, not action. The good leader is able to distinguish between these two, even if the complainer is not able to make the distinction.

Recently a senior pastor of a large church appointed one of his associate pastors as "chief of staff." When this happened, another staff pastor, who felt he had been bypassed, com-

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plained. The senior pastor wisely followed the course outlined by Harry Levinson of the Levinson Institute.

1. He listened for the young man's emotion, which was not the same as his complaint. He realized it was not just a matter of wanting the position. That was secondary to the fact he felt unjustly insulted, to some degree humiliated in front of the other staff members and his close friends in the church, and most of all, that the selection of another man painfully confirmed his low self-esteem.

2. Next he had to find out what action had been taken before the complaining pastor talked to him. To whom else had he talked? What damage had he done in accusing the promoted pastor—or the senior pastor?

3. His next step was to ask him what precipitated the pain. Being bypassed was not the main problem; it merely confirmed a much greater problem that he needed to recognize—his low self-worth.

4. They then talked about how the younger pastor handled his aggression, affection and dependency needs. They talked of his ego ideal, his dreams, his ambitions and whether they were realistic or not in view of his tremendous needs to be constantly affirmed.

5. If the problem had been beyond him, he would have referred him to someone who was able to handle it. In this case, the younger pastor solved the problem for himself (or, as I suspect, created an even bigger problem for himself) by resigning from the church staff. At that point, although he was no longer the pastor's managerial responsibility, he became his pastoral responsibility and is at this time still attempting to work things out—only on a different level.

The Need to Vent

Pastors also hear complaints about situations to which they have no authority. People complain about their family situations, their jobs, their health, their finances. The complainer needs to vent the anger that circumstances don't allow him to vent at the real target. By putting anger into words, he may be able to formulate the problem more clearly in his own mind, place it in perspective and dissipate some of the anger at the same time. The pastor's job is to listen. The complainer is probably not ready for advice, no matter how much you feel you can help. Here are some tips:

1. Ask open-ended questions or make sum-

mary statements such as, "It sounds as if you're really angry at God." This allows the complainer to bring out as much of the story as possible. Sometimes the complainer will turn on you. "You're just like my husband," or, "If you had done your job they wouldn't have...." In those situations it is best to summarize or occasionally even agree. To get defensive, however, confirms in the complainer's mind that you really are to blame.

2. If he wants to know what you think, recount similar experiences involving yourself or others and describe what worked and what didn't work. Be sure to point out that the circumstances are different, however, and that even in the same circumstances the dynamic is different because people are different.

3. If the person wants you to list various solutions, you can point out those which are less likely to work and may be too costly or too dangerous.

4. Avoid pointing out mistakes that are after the fact. The complainer already knows and doesn't want to hear about them now.

5. Unless you are dealing with a chronic complainer, leave the door open for further discussion.

Avoiding Pitfalls

Resist the temptation to pour out your own problems. Complainers have a way of repeating what you might tell them, but not until it is filtered through their own twisted concepts. In addition, you run the risk of having the complainer grow angry at you as well, because you didn't offer the sympathy he wanted. He will interpret it, saying you took advantage of him and hit him when he was down.

Sadly, many pastors do not understand how to handle complainers. They want to establish their own superiority by insisting on offering advice and arguing that the person must take it or be labeled a fool. The pastor who does this, even though he may genuinely believe he is sympathizing and trying to help, is more often trying to establish domination over the complainer, who is in a vulnerable position.

Don't try to be an Ann Landers. These advice-givers don't have to live with the complainers. You do. Those who enjoy genuinely helping people will find satisfaction in being able to handle at least some of the complaints that are almost daily fare in most churches. They are also glad to have an opportunity to learn what their people really think and how they feel.

MASTERING YOUR MAIL

Very few things frustrate and intimidate me more than my mail. For years I have worked

out of my home, finding that much more conducive to my style than working out of a church office. Despite the obvious advantages, there are several distinct disadvantages. One of these is that I open my own mail.

My mail arrives each morning in a large rural mailbox at the end of our driveway. Next stop is our kitchen table where for years I have opened it with one of my wife's paring knives before sorting it into different piles. Jackie gets all the bills, bank statements, advertisements, birthday cards, wedding announcements and the like. I pick up the first-class letters, magazines and packages. The magazines go upstairs beside my bed where I read them at night. I open and read the first-class stuff at the breakfast table before taking it back to my desk in my studio. The packages—which contain everything from unsolicited cassette tapes to precious manuscripts—usually stay on the breakfast table for days at a time since I hate to clutter my office with stuff I know I'll probably not get to for a long time.

In the past my part-time secretary would eventually realize I was drowning in unanswered mail. She would come to my rescue and take my entire "in-basket" home with her. She'd answer some of the letters, throw others away and mark the ones she felt I needed to answer. That system proved to be terribly inefficient and caused me constant anguish. The problem, I finally determined, was not the system. It was I. I was, and am, intimidated and frustrated by the mail.

Don't Answer Every Letter

Part of my problem came when I read about C.S. Lewis who, legend says, answered every letter he ever received—by hand. Lewis felt his personal touch in correspondence might be the one thing that would help some troubled individual. Couple that with my personality, which wants to please—even those who write hate letters, and you have ready-made frustration.

Even those who have an efficient system of handling mail are often frustrated by it.

Catherine Marshall, before she died, often told me that answering her mail was the most difficult part of her life. She would receive, as I often do, lengthy letters from people who had read one of her books. These people would pour out their hearts, then ask for additional advice. Sensitive and conscientious, she was never able to get a handle on how to answer such letters. She spent huge amounts of time, which could have gone into creative writing, trying to help people through correspondence.

I have long admired people who never open their own mail. When I visit in large

churches I envy those pastors who have personal secretaries who receive, open and read all their mail—giving them only the pieces they need to see. I began to think I was doomed to a life of frustration when it came to the mail.

Then I read about Charles Percy, the former Illinois senator and one-time president of Bell & Howell. Percy refused to have an in-box on his desk. He said the tendency to peek at his mail all day long was just too strong.

Percy was right. Most mail is a low-priority task. Not only that, it's distracting and time-consuming.

Percy had a secretary to open all his mail and prioritize it. She made a red mark on letters that required immediate attention, green on those he needed to respond to and yellow for informational reading. A secretary, even a part-time one, can also speed up your job by highlighting important passages in letters and attaching any previous correspondence that is pertinent.

I'm indebted to our church administrator, Jim Bauman, who taught me to set aside special times to answer mail—and not to look at it or answer it until those times arrived. For instance, I now try to read and answer mail twice a week—and only in the afternoons after my creative juices are beginning to wane. Mornings are reserved for prayer, study and writing. Travel and interruptions often interfere, but I'm doing a lot better.

I've learned some other things.

* I don't need to answer every letter—especially those making unreasonable or impossible demands, hate mail, and folks who write just to say they like me.

* Since I don't dictate, I've found it easy to scribble in the margin or on the back of the original correspondence and let my secretary write the letter.

* My secretary can sign my name as easily as I can.

* Handwritten replies, either on my stationary or on the back of the original correspondence, are often the best and quickest way to answer.

* "I don't know" is still a good answer. So is "I don't want to."

* Handle high-priority items first. Answer your letters as you read them. Once they are put aside they'll bug you to death. As Percy says, "Eat your way through your mail, don't browse."

LINE UPON LINE, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT

The elders and church staff eagerly awaited the arrival of the new pastor. They knew he would have a different approach from their

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former, much-loved shepherd who had recently retired and moved south. They had thoroughly investigated and looked forward to change. But the change came faster and was far more dramatic than they had visualized. The former pastor had been easy-going, building through time, allowing the staff freedom and privileges as long as they got their job done. He had been known for his long-term relationships with people in the church.

Then the new pastor arrived and suddenly the lay leaders in the church found themselves racing to keep up with the changes and wondering why they felt such painful stress. The staff and elders hadn't warned them what changes were in store and what the impact would be.

It became critical when the new pastor—after less than two years in office—implemented a building program. The leadership was for it but the church members and the middle-grade leaders in particular, balked. Their complaints and accusations were classic: They felt the pastor was moving too fast; this was "his" program, not theirs; he was pushing it on them; they hadn't been consulted; they needed more information; the old pastor would have done it differently. After a year of peaceful growth the church was suddenly in turmoil.

"But I did tell them," the pastor argued defensively when called before the elders. "I made announcements. I sent out memos. I invited anyone with questions to come see me. I even called a meeting of all the leaders. It's not my fault only half showed up and the rest stayed away and criticized."

When a major change is taking place, people feel loss of the familiar, fear of the unknown, and resentment that their world is being disrupted. When people are feeling all these emotions, announcements and explanations may not penetrate at first. That's why there's no substitute for pastors patiently going over the changes, the reasons for them and their effects, as many times as people need to hear them. Then people have a chance to confront the stark realities before they hit, mourn the loss of their historic functions and find new meaning in their new functions.

I have discovered in my church, for instance, that it takes at least five Sundays to reach most of our people with an announcement—not just because some are absent from the services, but because they either don't hear or don't understand.

This repetition can be hard on go-getter pastors. For one thing, it gets tedious. The message may be as uncomfortable to the pastor as it is to his people. The pastor may have to do things he feels guilty about, such as slowing down, changing plans, even backing off and apologizing for being too pushy. He will probably feel silly, having to say the same things week after week in the Sunday services. But he needs to remember that one of the main tasks of leadership is taking the trouble to bring people the truth in whatever form helps them to hear it, understand it and act on it.

THE ACTUAL AND THE IDEAL

Here's something worth clipping and pasting.

There are two things, the actual and the ideal.

To be mature is to see the ideal and live with the actual.

To fail to accept the actual and reject the ideal, and to accept only that which is ideal and refuse the actual, is to be immature.

Do not criticize the actual because you have seen the ideal.

Do not reject the ideal because you have seen the actual.

Maturity is to live with the actual but hold on to the ideal.

—Derek Prince

OUTDOORS IN ISRAEL

A number of pastors have asked me if I intend to return to Israel to do additional videotaping as I did in late 1987 when we videotaped the three tapes: "Ten Miracles of Jesus," "Ten Parables of Jesus" and "Ten Bible People Like Me." Yes, I'm going back April 9-20, 1989, to make two videotapes for church curriculum on the subject of "Bible Basics." I'll take a tour group with me, but you'll need to be in good physical shape. This will be a rugged hiking, mountain-climbing trip. We'll spend four nights in a kibbutz on the Sea of Galilee, two days in the Dead Sea and Negev Desert region, and four days in the Jerusalem and Judean Wilderness area. This will not be a regular tourist trip. We will climb at least one mountain or take a major hike each day—some 10 miles in length. If you're interested, drop me a line, and I'll send you additional material.

