

## Missional Leadership Culture

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### Intro

This summarizes a series on some of the key aspects of the leadership culture we are seeking to create at [The Well](http://www.thewellpa.com). These are the concepts that we have found help guide us and lead us towards being an adaptive and creative community that is able to push the bounds of what it means to be the church while still having a sense of organization and structure. This is a list that we've discovered along the way and is still a work in progress.

Over the years we have learned that it is important to set expectations up front on how we will walk forward together in leadership. It is also important that we intentionally define the type of leadership culture that we are shooting for. I have found that all of us carry a certain set of assumptions to team environments and this document is an effort to layout some of those expectations in the open and, if needed, deconstruct some expectations that aren't helpful or fair.

The idea running under all of these thoughts is the need for an atmosphere of trust. This atmosphere of trust is difficult to come by and it doesn't happen overnight. Nor does it happen by simply agreeing to fact that we have to have trust. Trust comes over time and a commitment to honestly work things out in community.

Therefore, also underlying the entire leadership enterprise is a commitment to seeking community within the leadership team. When someone is on a leadership team in a church environment, it is important that this person be able to make significant relational commitments to the other members of the leadership team. This is where trust is built. Perhaps it would be possible to have a different view on this if one were part of a leadership team in a non-church environment. But, we believe that when we are leading a church are calling the church to community and family, we must be doing the same.

## Part I - Working as Team

### **#1 - Leadership/Decision-Making power isn't defined by position, but rather by gifting, experience and expertise.**

We demonstrate trust by giving leaders the freedom to lead in their area of giftedness. When we are faced with a decision, the decision itself decides who should be given the power to act and decide. When we say that the “decision itself decides” we mean that we look at the decision to be made and we let it guide us in “telling” us who should take the lead. Leadership positions in and of themselves do not possess power. Rather the power is passed around to the person most gifted, qualified and equipped to lead the decision.

One thing this means is that it is quite possible that the person who should lead the decision is not a formal member of the leadership team and we would then invite that person into the team short-term to guide that decision.

-> See the chapter on Power and Leadership in [Organic Community](#) by Joe Myers. In this chapter, he uses the term “the project holds the power” to describe what I described above. (Basically what I am saying is, I've completely stolen this first point from him). In fact, I am deeply indebted to two personal mentors with all that follows. Joe has done a lot of work with our team over the years. Also, Ken Callahan (author of [this excellent book](#)) has also been a very important mentor to me as well.

### **#2 - We must work hard to recognize our strengths and invite people to serve mainly out of those. In contrast, we work hard to recognize our own weaknesses and give up our need to be good at everything.**

Ephesians 4 talks about how some were called to be prophets, apostles, teachers, evangelists and pastors and that these leadership gifts are meant to build up the body of Christ and equip others for the work of ministry. We therefore seek to understand our

primary gifting and calling and serve in those areas where we are most gifted to lead. We don't call people or ourselves to some general leadership role rather we invite them to lead out of who they are.

Here are some assessments that we've found as helpful as we've navigated this:

- **PRO-Development** from TAI Incorporated ([www.taiinc.com](http://www.taiinc.com)) - This assessment isn't very well known but it is excellent and this organization works with church leadership teams. I know the guys so let me know if you are interested in getting in touch with them.
- **APEST** from Alan Hirsch ([www.apest.org](http://www.apest.org))
- **Belbin** ([www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com))

If we are serving out of our giftedness, we learn to recognize our weaknesses and be willing to let others take the lead in those area. No leader is good at everything and we need to have the humility to admit when we are not the best person qualified to lead some aspect of the mission.

Some of the best leadership advice I ever received from my father is around this issue. I remember recently watching as three pastors, who were each 20+ years into service at their churches went through horrible endings with the churches they had served for so long. I asked my dad, "Is it inevitable that I'll end up that way in 20 years?" What he said back has affected me in profound ways. He said that if I was unable to admit where my weaknesses were, and get people around me who could lead well in those areas, then yes, that would be me. Each of these pastors were very gifted people. But they were, like most of us, great at one or two things. But their ego did not allow them to admit that they weren't as gifted in other ways and find someone else to help.

For example, a pastor may be a great teacher and communicator but not very good at being a visionary leader. The expectation in our culture says that a pastor should be good at everything. Because of this, this pastor will work as hard as he can to prove that he

really is a good visionary leader. But, its quite possible that what this pastor should really do is concentrate on being the best possible communicator that he can be and give up trying to be the main visionary. Instead, find another person or group of people who can think about the big picture and give them freedom to flourish. Of course, this is hard to do because it means we have to admit we're not good at something.

Now we don't ignore our weaknesses, but we shouldn't spend our lives trying to be something that we are not. This serves no one (except for maybe our own egos - and in the end, it doesn't even serve those because where we end up is not good).

## **Part II - Decision Making and Expecting Change**

### **#3 - We are a leadership team and a community in process. The church today is not the finished product.**

One of the biggest struggles with how church leadership and the church itself is expressed is the unrealistic (and often unsaid) expectation that what we have today is a finished project. Far too often, when people visit a church, they look at the current expression as if that's how the church will be for all time, and they they critique accordingly.

We learn to be "okay" with the fact that we have shortcomings. It's not that we are ambivalent to these short-comings but rather, that we realize we will always have short-comings of some kind and we must constantly be seeking to improve. We must therefore exercise patience as we move toward the future God has for us. With this in mind therefore, we are free to be ourselves as we interact with the congregation. We do not need to put on a "professional" or "polished" face, rather we can be who God has us at the current time and continue to grow in the ways that God has before us.

I can't tell you how many times someone has visited our community and decided we were "not a healthy church" (whatever that means) because of something we did or didn't do. The assumption was that we intended it to be this way. Often, when they mention

whatever they were talking about my response is, "yeah, I know. I agree." It seems as if they expect us to solve all our shortcomings and that someday we will never have any. Sometimes, I am aware of shortcomings and prioritize advancing strengths or other shortcomings over and above those. The fact is, we're not perfect. We never will be. When we fix the problem in front of us today another will arise. It's just the nature of an imperfect community struggling to live out the gospel. I think this is where we say something about grace. :)

#### **#4 - We lead with a highly adaptive approach by allowing for quick decision making and adaptation in culture that is defined by discontinuous change.**

These days, the world changes faster than we can even imagine. Notoriously the Church has always had a hard time keeping up because we have created heavy and slow moving organizations that make it impossible to make decisions quickly. "Discontinuous change" can be defined as "change that breaks for the normal progression of things or change that take place that is completely unexpected." (I think I stole that definition from [Alan Roxburgh](#) but I can't remember where from). We live in a world that is almost defined by unexpected change. The financial markets and 9/11 are good examples of this. In this kind of world, we must be willing and able to turn on a dime and move a different direction if we need to. For far too long, the church has been unable to adapt to a changing culture.

#### **#5 - We must be willing to hold each other accountable.**

While we allow grace, failure and freedom we must counterbalance this with the willingness to ask each other hard questions surrounding the commitments we have made. This does not mean we can never go back on a commitment or change direction, we'd just better have good reason to do so. And, we must be willing to graciously walk through why things did or didn't get done.

I'll tell you from experience, this is one of the hardest things to live out in a church community because we are mostly working with volunteers and we think that in the church culture we're supposed to be nice all the time. Holding someone accountable means that we have to have hard conversations about reality. This isn't something we're necessarily good at in the local church and we need to get better.

**#6 - Accountability will only happen if it is intentionally sought after. When we made a decision there needs to be an intentional process to make the decision:**

At The Well we have a four questions that lead us through the decision making process"

*1. What kind of decision is this?*

- A level decisions - Big, key objectives in the next 3-5 years. (Very few decisions) / Many people involved (Long range planning team + congregation) / 1-3 months to decide
- B Level Decisions - Supporting key objectives this coming year / Some people involved (Board) / 1-3 weeks to decide
- C Level Decisions - Midrange decisions on a month-to-month basis / Few people involved (Task forces, temporary groups, working groups) / 1-3 days to decide
- D Level Decisions - Week to week decisions that help us move forward in incremental ways. (many decisions) / One - Two people involved (individual persons) / 1 minute to 1 hour to decide

*2. Who is best equipped to lead us through this decision or challenge?* This goes back to the idea that we lead out of our giftedness, not from some arbitrary hierarchical organizational chart.

*3. What are the set specific goals for the project or task* (the person/people goals are set by the one leading the project or task). Here we let the person who is responsible set the goals themselves. After all, they are the ones who have the most knowledge or expertise

on the issue in the first place. I think this is really important. Far too often goals are set by "some one in charge" just because they are in charge.

*4. Who will commit to following up to hold this person/people accountable to the goals that they themselves set?* This is a key part of the process and something we've added recently. Far too often in our history we have gotten to #3 and then the ball dropped because we didn't have a plan for follow-up. This piece provides a way for us to make sure what has committed to being done gets done.

Note on this one: We're still working out how this four question process works out in reality. I realize that it's a tad wooden and it looks a lot more fluid when worked out in reality. Despite this, I think this serves as a good guide for the decision making process even if we don't walk through this exactly as it appears above.

**#7 - We must rarely make once-and-for-all decisions, rather we re-make them on a continual basis.**

It's not that we are afraid of commitment, but we realize that we live in a rapidly changing culture that requires us to constantly reevaluate our commitments. Looking at this positively, what we do is we continually reaffirm our decisions as the future unfolds. This applies to organizational structure as well as some aspects of our non-central theological commitments.

There seems to be the thought in some teams that if someone worked really hard on something we should do it, even if its not the best way forward anymore. Those on the outside of a situation will often be able to see the ridiculousness of this approach, but those on the inside will be too closely attached emotionally to their friend.

For example, for the last four years we have had a bi-vocational staff model. Before that, when our last pastor was around, we had a full-time staff model. Four years ago we made the decision that it would be better to move forward with two-part time pastors on staff.

This is a decision we had the freedom to redefine four years ago. Therefore this is a decision we constantly "re-make" as we look at our current situation and the direction we are moving as a church. In fact, since we just sent my co-pastor off to plant a church, we just made the change to move my role to 3/4 time and we currently only have one pastor on staff.

There are many other decisions we constantly "re-make" every year and we have to understand that this is okay. When we do this, it is not that we aren't "being true to our word." One of the words I hate most in church situations is: "precedent." We are afraid of "setting a precedent." I don't think we ever set precedents in adaptive communities. Precedent's usually mean we are making a decision for all time. We don't do that so setting a precedent should never be a concern. We always make contextual decisions in a specific time and place.

## **Part III - Risk and Failure**

### **#8 - We embrace creativity, innovation and risk for the sake of the gospel.**

One of the values we have held onto since our inception has been creating a culture of innovation, experimentation and risk taking. We believe God has gifted us to be creative and that he invites us to be that way with how we expresses our witness as a congregation. You don't have to look very far to see how this has been expressed (Art Shows, Fashion Shows, We meet in a warehouse, etc). [Seth Godin](#) once said, "If your organization requires success before commitment, it will have neither." What he is saying here is that there is an element of risk that is required for an organization (and I would argue, the gospel) to move forward. Of course, we don't just risk for risk's sake. We take risks when they seem missionally helpful and don't go against our core commitments (theologically and practically).

It's amazing how quickly people want to seek safety when faced with uncertainty. If you don't set this up as a value early on and intentionally, you will always lean back into safety. Keeping this value a value is harder and harder the older you get and more established are.

### **#9 - We must learn to embrace “failed” projects and ideas as opportunities for growth.**

In a culture of creativity and innovation, failure is not only inevitable, it is required. In an innovative environment there must be room to fail or innovation will be squashed and creativity will be stifled. For every iPod or iPhone there is a Apple Newton (Apple's attempt at a PDA in 1993), Apple Pippin (apple's foray into the video game console market - not to be confused with Scottie Pippen) and the Apple G4 Cube (a boxy computer that never sold). Never heard of those? That's the point. Apple, a company that is a cultural icon of innovation and creativity, has had some major failures in its time. Some of the greatest lessons and learnings come from failed experiments. Often, failed projects, experiments, etc are good tutors for redefining our mission and vision by reminding us what is important.

Putting both of these thoughts together: One of the things that is often asked is, "how do you keep from going 'too far' when it comes to mission?" I understand this question but I think this question comes from a place that desperately wants to never make mistakes. It comes from a stance of fear rather than risk and faith. Quite honestly, we have done plenty of things that I wouldn't do again, but I'm glad we took the risks because we learned so much from our well-intentioned efforts.

## **Part IV - Leading in and With the Congregation for the Sake of Others**

**#10 - We lead with the belief that “the spirit of God is among the people of God” and not just the leadership team.**

Far too often leaders and leadership teams believe that the congregation is dumb and naive. While very few people actually say that, there are those who actually do. Just spend some time at a pastor's conference where the majority of the pastors are frustrated with the state of their churches. Most of the conversation is about how the "people" don't "get it" and how they are stuck in the mud and the leader can't do anything because the congregation is always holding them back. I would suggest that, while this is partially true because of the fallen nature of all of humanity (even the leader!), what is really happening here is that the pastor / leadership team have their own agenda for what God is calling the people to and they are not doing the work of hearing how the Spirit is moving and active among the people.

We find ways to constantly have an ear to the ground and listen to the voice of the community as a whole to see how the winds of the Spirit are blowing among the people. This is a complex task in our setting because of the disconnected nature of our community so we must go out of our way to listen to the stories and hearts of our people. In doing this, we cannot only listen to the loudest voices, we must work hard to hear the voices of the introverts and those on the fringes of the church.

**#11 - We cannot not forget that the community (and leadership) is made of fallen people.**

As we listen to the spirit of God among the people of God (in the context of the community as well as the leadership) we must constantly be questioning our assumptions about what is right and wrong and reasonable. It would be far too easy to capitulate to the culture if we just assumed that we were all successfully hearing from the Holy Spirit at all times.

**#12 - We remember that our leadership is not primarily about taking care of the needs of our congregation but more calling the congregation to care for the needs of those outside our group.**

We talk all the time about being a church for the sake of others. We must live that out in how we lead and care for the community. We are not here to cater to their consumer needs, rather we are here to help them care for their neighbor.

**#13 - We remember that the most effective apologetic to an unbelieving world is a healthy, kingdom living congregation and that pastoral care and healthy relationships is essential to our witness.**

While its true that we don't cater to our people's consumer needs, we cannot ignore their needs all together. We have to work hard to cultivate a community that is full of healing relationships. Often this will mean that we focus our energy towards the congregation as we focus outwards also.