

## MARKS OF THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER IN A DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

An ending comes before every new beginning. In between the old and the new lies a “neutral zone,” a place where transformation takes hold and takes charge. So says William Bridges in *Transition: Making Sense of Life’s Changes*. The neutral zone unnerves the inexperienced leader. Grief and imbalance characterize this stage in the transformational leader’s work. The neutral zone is the place that you are too far to turn around and yet not far enough to see what the new thing will bring.

How a leader handles the stresses of the neutral zone demonstrates that leader’s essential qualities. Four marks provide clues to a person’s readiness for transformational leadership.

- 1. The ability to discern and cast vision.** Change becomes transformation only with a vision. The transformational leader must play a key role in discerning a clear and compelling vision. He or she then uses this vision to navigate through the unfamiliar territory of unknown and unforeseen circumstances. The transformational leader establishes, articulates and executes a change process.
- 2. The willingness to let go.** Change threatens most of us. The transformational leader helps to provide safe passage through the turbulent waters of change. He or she guides others to a place that they have been either unwilling or unable to reach on their own. The transformational leader will need to let go of personal attachment to “the way we’ve always done it” while facilitating change for others. He or she should expect a time of letting go and provide for that if followers are to take personal ownership of the change.
- 3. The ability to develop trust.** Someone once said that a leader without followers is someone out for a walk. Effectiveness as a transformational leader depends upon the trust and support that person can garner from potential followers. Without trust, no one will follow. *Time, integrity and ability* characterize the relationships between a leader and followers:
  - People learn to trust others through their presence and interactions over time.
  - Integrity demonstrates alignment, or congruence, between words and actions.
  - Ability means more than “does he know what he’s doing?” It includes the willingness to ask for help or admit a lack of knowledge.

Neither holding the position as leader nor possessing the right qualifications grants automatic permission to lead a transformation process. Would-be transformational leaders have crashed and burned because they moved far too quickly in leading a transformation process. Only after trust is developed can transformation occur.

- 4. The personal experience of transformation.** No one can lead change who has not experienced it personally. Therefore, transformational leaders must be serious about their own transformational work. In their book, *Leading Congregational Change*, Jim Harrington, Mike Bonem and James Furr call this work spiritual and relational vitality. Among the indicators of maturity are the practice of spiritual disciplines, accountability to others, regular self-assessments, and openly, honestly and swiftly facing problems in a non-anxious or non-blaming manner.

Leaders who have the four marks of readiness for transformational leadership will reap the benefits of living a transformational life. They will live the reality of 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness.”

Transformational leaders are changed into the likeness of Christ and thereby help others live into that likeness also.

### Questions to Ponder for Personal Growth

- Why do you think it is important to be a transformational leader in a disciple-making church?
- What would you need to do in order to embrace and incorporate the marks of being a transformational leader?
- How will the marks of being a transformational leader positively effect change in the congregation you are serving to be more of a disciple-making church?
- What are the potential roadblocks to fully incorporating the marks of being a transformational leader?

– Harry Riggs

