

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Leader Development: Are We Hearers or Doers of the Words?

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

James 1:22 has been a blessed thorn in my side. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (ESV) As a church leader I'm not so much bothered by the contrast between hearers and doers – I get that. What bugs me is the "deceiving yourselves" part. I don't like to be deceived, and I particularly don't like the thought of deceiving myself. Living in a fantasy world of one's own making is not a particularly useful characteristic for a leader.

Church leaders are inundated with information and advice regarding leadership. As I wrote this article, I went to amazon.com and typed the word "church leaders" under the category of books. There were 15,016 returns. Reading one of these books every day, it would take over 41 years to read them all, not to mention the new books and blogs still coming out every day. Between books, conferences, blogs, and unsolicited advice from others, there is an amazing amount of leadership noise out there that we hear and file away in our brains. But hearing and doing are entirely different things. And that's something to talk about.

Note that this month's article is not about leadership development – it's about *leader* development. I want to suggest that these are two different concepts. Leadership development most often focuses upon developing specific leadership behaviors such as planning, managing, innovating, inspiring, strategizing, teamwork, executing, etc. Leader development, on the other hand, is about developing the leader as a whole person, not just specific leadership skills. It's about growing in their faith, family, soul, discipleship, emotional health, and spirituality in addition to the other leadership skills. It's treating the leader as a whole person rather than as a set of leadership skills and behaviors to be used as tools to further our goals. It's about never again having a church leader crash and burn. I see leadership development as training and leader development as overall personal growth.

Church leaders know that it is important to develop leaders in the church – we've heard it over and over. Yet, very few of us actually do it. Some of us focus upon developing emerging leaders and forget that the leaders we already have and work with need to be continually developed, too. Our reasons and excuses are many, but the reality is the same: We are hearers but not doers of leader development; and

we are deceiving ourselves by thinking that it's okay to let this vital need not be addressed in our church leadership teams. Let me suggest some questions to help jump start your conversation.

- In the past year, what has our leadership team done to help us grow individually and collectively as Christ-followers and church leaders?
- When was the last time we met together to grow rather than to conduct business? If recently, when was the time before that?
- Do we ever talk among ourselves about our personal growth (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual)? For the truly strong and courageous, am I and are we currently mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy?
- What have I done individually this past year to grow as a whole person (more than as a leader)? What has been its impact?
- What are some of the behaviors/disciplines we have not been doing individually that we should be doing? What are some of the actions we have not been doing in our role as church leaders that we should be doing? Why are we not doing these things, and how might we start and encourage one another to continue?
- Brainstorm as a group some areas where you might like to work together, holding one another accountable, to develop as leaders (personally and in your leadership role)?
- Select two of these areas to work on together this year. Work on each one for about six months.
- I seldom use this space to recommend books, but John Ortberg's book *Soul Keeping – Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (2014) is one of my new favorites on this topic, and I try to read it at least once each year.

The hearer/doer problem posed in James 1:22 fits well the discussions over the past few years on the topic of execution. Intentions are never enough – they must be followed by execution to mean anything. As a leader, I wish I had devoted more of my time and energy into developing the leaders around me. While I cannot change the past, I can change the future. But, I won't. That is, I won't unless I make my intentions known and ask others to hold me accountable to accomplish them. Leader development doesn't just happen. It's intentional. And it's something we should talk about. Often.

Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.

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