

Ministry and Coaching

By Rev. Dana W. Sutton

If you've been in ministry for at least six months, I'm guessing you've either bumped gently up against or, perhaps, run full speed and smacked into an obstacle you never noticed. You know - like suggesting getting rid of that old piano in the basement, only to find out that it was donated by a saint of the church and is considered a holy relic. Or showing frustration in a committee or session meeting - a completely understandable human response... just not for "the pastor!"

If you're lucky, it's a kind of an "oops" moment and you're able - after a brief awkward time - to move on, to laugh at/with yourself. If, on the other hand, it was more of a high speed collision, you may need some "sorting out" time, a kind of concussion-recovery period. In a worst-case scenario, you need/want a reset button!

To make matters worse, pastoral ministry tends to be one of the most isolating professions; who can we talk to about our ministry challenges? Church members - the folks with whom we spend most of our time - are off limits for such things. Colleagues can be helpful, but often tend to offer "advice," which may/may not even have worked for them. Counselors can be helpful in sorting out how our own past and personal issues play into our ministry leadership, but most aren't familiar with our profession, and maybe a diagnosis and treatment plan isn't what we most need.

Following its widespread adoption by corporate leaders, ministry professionals have found coaching to be a great source of support. Like a sports coach, a ministry coach offers support and encouragement; unlike sports coaching, ministry coaching doesn't "teach" ministry - it seeks to draw out the client's own best practices and wisest solutions. Like a counselor, a ministry coach asks questions that help assess situations and relationships; unlike counseling, coaching doesn't ask "why" we hit the obstacle, but invites strategies to avoid it in the future. (If we keep hitting the same obstacle, counseling may become the more helpful tool!).

Ministry coaching can help with:

- Recovery from burnout/compassion fatigue.
- Discovery of new ways to be our best selves in ministry
- A tool for maximizing:
 - Joy
 - Potential
 - Opportunities

In our Presbytery, both Bruce Stevens and I are trained, certified coaches who also have ministry experience. We also both offer coaching services on a sliding scale and are especially interested in working with pastors from West Virginia. If your curiosity has been piqued, feel free to contact Bruce (brucestevens@frontier.com or [717-364-8879](tel:717-364-8879)) or me (dana@suttoncoaching.com or [304-730-0640](tel:304-730-0640)) to explore how coaching might be just what you need to make the most of your ministry and your life!