



DIRECTIONALLY IMPAIRED LEADERSHIP: CHURCH LEADERS CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS

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It was 2:45 p.m., and my son, Cameron, and I were lost and already 15 minutes late for a birthday party for his 7-year-old friend. True to the male stereotype, I was bent on finding my way without directional assistance. Convinced that he was missing crucial elements of the party, Cameron piped up and pleaded, "Dad, stop and get directions! If you had asked somebody for help as soon as we got lost we could have been there by now."

My 7-year-old had just taught me an important lesson in leadership. The I'll-find-my-way-on-my-own attitude can impair your ability to navigate effectively, and the situation gets worse the longer you dig your heels in. Whether in a car or a leadership role, openness to input can get you where you want to go faster than figuring it out on your own.

The phrase "I don't know" should be a staple of every leader's vocabulary. To think that you have the answers for every leadership situation you're faced with is unrealistic. Take advantage of the varying knowledge base and experience of those around you. There's nothing wrong with asking for help now and then. Being closed to input destines us to the limited outcome of what we can think up, problem solve, or achieve on our own.

I see this a lot in my role at Leadership Transformations. We have a church health assessment that allows leaders to do their own "church health check up" over the internet and get feedback from the entire congregation and leadership team. In one month, leaders can gather feedback as to how their ministry is going, all with minimal effort from the church staff.

Whenever I mention this concept to a pastor, I can tell within a couple sentences of his response if he's the type of leader who is open to feedback or not.

Some are better at hiding it than others, but the underlying message is, "I've got a good handle on what's going on. I don't need

anyone's input." This sentiment is particularly pervasive in large church contexts. It's such a shame. The reality is that we often lead with little more than anecdotal feedback and a limited (or heavily biased) view of the whole picture. The people around us can assemble a more full view of the reality we live in if we're willing to solicit their input.

Imagine passing by the cockpit of a plane you are boarding and noticing that the pilot has only two instruments on the dash and a 6-inch by 6-inch windshield. Wouldn't you be concerned that the person charged with getting you and your fellow passengers to your destination has very limited information with which to navigate? This silly analogy becomes very real when I see church leaders who charge ahead in ministry without the discipline to periodically solicit feedback from their team and congregation.

The irony is that all those team members and people in the congregation have ideas, concerns, and affirmations, and they will continue to have their ideas, whether anyone asks for them or not. Why not take advantage of knowing what they are thinking? Just because someone gives input doesn't mean you have to take what they say as gospel, but, as the leader, you ought to at least absorb someone's feedback and then decide whether it merits action or not.

Don't be a directionally impaired leader. Stop and ask for directions periodically, as counter-intuitive as it may be for you. Take it in stride when someone tells you that you've got a headlight out or that your back tire is low. Realize that they are doing you a favor. You'll be better informed as to the condition of your vehicle, and odds are their input will get you where you're going a lot faster than going it alone.