

Learn to Lead Change *8 stages of Congregational Change*

One resource that has proven to be especially useful to church and ministry leaders in a variety of settings is the eight step process outlined by John P. Kotter in *Leading Change* (HBS Press 1996). It has been adapted for church use by Robert Logan and Tom Clegg in *Releasing Your Church's Potential* (ChurchSmart 1998) and in *Leading Congregational Change* (Jossey-Bass 2000) by Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr who describes each of Kotter's steps but also shows how they can be specifically applied to the fit the local church:

The Eight Stages of Congregational Change

Stage 1: Prepare Yourself Personally

Key challenge: Carving out the time and space to discern God's voice and direction for the leader's own ministry and for the church, and living with the tension that this creates.

Action steps:

- Practice spiritual disciplines
- Revisit God's mission for the church
- Conduct an honest self-assessment
- Proactively address problems
- Find the right pace

Stage 2: Create Urgency

Key challenge: Creating energy for change: being clear and explicit about current reality in contrast to God's ideal.

Action steps:

- Accurately assess and describe current reality
- Make information widely available
- Get outside help
- Make honesty and constructive criticism the accepted and expected behavior

Stage 3: Establish a Vision Community

Key challenge: Creating an environment in which challenge and diversity leads to genuine collaboration and commitment

Action steps:

- Put together a group with enough power to lead the change
- Get the group to work together like a team

Stage 4: Develop a Vision and Strategy

Key challenge: Producing a written description of God's preferred future that is broad and exciting in its direction but clear and explicit in its details.

Action steps:

- Create a vision to help direct the change effort
- Develop strategies for achieving that dream

Stage 5: Communicate the Vision

Key challenge: Finding creative ways that enable the entire congregation to thoroughly understand God's vision for their future and its implications.

Action steps:

- Use every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
- Leaders model the behavior expected of the congregation

Stage 6: Empower Change Leaders

Key challenge: Cultivating a broader base of committed leaders and removing the barriers that would prevent them from serving effectively.

Action steps:

- Get rid of obstacles
- Changes systems or structures that undermine the vision
- Encourage risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities and actions

Stage 7: Implement the Vision

Key challenge: Coordinating multiple, concurrent actions plans and achieving the right pace for the process-in consideration of resource limitations, congregational attitudes, and urgency.

Recommended actions:

- Be clear about priorities
- Treat new initiatives as experiments
- Measure results

Stage 8: Reinforce Momentum through Alignment

Key challenge: Creating an environment in which widespread commitment to follow God's vision routinely overshadows fears of continuous change.

Recommended actions:

- Align existing ministries with the Vision
- Address specific pockets of resistance

Never stop

In addition to these steps, the authors of *Leading Congregational Change* include a warning that "the transformation of an existing congregation is never a quick or easy process . . . [Indeed] a realistic figure for comprehensive transformation might be five to seven years, sometimes longer" (pp. 12-13).