

A Roadmap for American Churches and People of Faith: W.W.J.D. (What Would Jesus Do?)



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Stewardship Calling

CHAPTER 4. Elements Of Exemplary Leadership.

Leaders Create Culture.

In addition to casting a Vision for the future, a crucial duty of parish council leaders is to help create and maintain the values, culture, and ethics of the parish you lead. This is easier with a new parish where culture can be created from whole cloth. However, most parish leaders inherit a parish organizational structure, history, procedures, and parishioners with specific values and ethics that define its culture. To provide transformation and improvement, new leaders must cause the current team to empty (zero) themselves of their previous biases and behaviors and pursue a transformational change of heart (μετάνοια) as they embrace new righteous Core Values that will define the desired cultural outcome.

Culture

Schein & Schein (2017) have a comprehensive definition of culture that focuses primarily on a parish's "accumulated shared learning," producing sufficient results for it to become a part of the parish's DNA that is shared with new members (p. 6). Cambridge University Press (n.d.) defines culture as "the way of life" that includes one's customs. The Greek origin of the word culture is Πολιτισμός which focuses on a "way of life."

Ethics

Cambridge University Press defines ethics as "the study of what is morally right and wrong." However, the origin of ethics is from the Greek word ἠθικός, which focuses on one's "character." It ultimately derives from the Greek root word ἦθος, which focuses on how one practices morality.

Values

Cambridge University Press defines Values as how one decides "what is right and wrong" and, thus, what is appropriate behavior. The Greek origin of values is Αξίεις which focuses on one's worth or actions.

How Did Biblical Leaders Present Values To The World?

Holy Scripture provides countless examples of people living their values. A notable example is Job, who we learn was "*true, blameless, righteous, and God-fearing*" (Job 1:1). Regardless of Satan's testing of Job, this man of God upheld the values firmly embedded in his ethos. Ultimately, Job loses everything, including his family, health, and wealth, yet he continually shows complete respect toward God and His values. Through his difficult journey, Job becomes an example of one living their values to define right vs. wrong.

Another cultural lesson comes in Matthew 5:17, where the Lord makes clear He did not come among us to abolish and eliminate the "Law" or the "Prophets" but to "fulfill"

them (Matthew 5:17). The “Law” to which Our Lord refers is the “Torah” or the old Hebrew Bible. Similarly, the people of the day were intimately familiar with the teachings of the “Prophets,” called the “Nevi'im.” The “Law” and “Prophets” our Lord references are what we often refer to today as the Old Testament and which define Jewish values and culture. Therefore, our Lord affirms in Matthew 5:17 that the Core Values demanded by the Ten Commandments, the Torah, and the teachings of the “Prophets” remain applicable. Our Lord does this even as He adds a new “commandment” that we “*love one another*” (John 13:34). The cultural clarity of righteous Core Values Christ establishes continues to this day for those who aspire to be His disciples.

Our Lord attacks some established cultural norms by “zeroing out” and replacing incorrect understandings and values of the day. Perhaps no better example exists than the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37). In the culture of the time, Samaritans and Jews could not interact in any way. Indeed, the Jews believed Samaritans were complete aliens to be hated in every way and always avoided. (Bindley, 1931). Against this backdrop, Jesus tells the Jews that the Samaritans should be treated as their “neighbor” (Luke 10:36-37). He goes further to instruct His Jewish audience to “go and do likewise” by caring for any Samaritan (or other person) who needs help, just as the “Good Samaritan” cared for the injured Jew left for dead (Luke 10:37).

The Orthodox Study Bible’s explanation (exegesis) of Titus 2:11-15 focuses on Christ’s imperative to embrace an ethical and righteous culture not merely because of the existing Jewish laws. Instead, the Lord calls His disciples to focus on ethical behaviors that lead to eternal life with Christ (OSB, 2008, p. 1648).

The “zeroing” process by which all Marine candidates are first evaluated regarding their capabilities and character is explored by Yaroslaski & Tripodi (2006). Like the well-established process of “zeroing” a gun sight to ensure it shoots straight, Marine Corps leaders create a culture where individuals are re-oriented to embrace a different culture and set of values. They learn to abandon personal well-being and begin to feel responsible for all their actions and all Marines, both past and present (Yaroslaski & Tripodi, 2006, p.72). This reorientation creates a sense of responsibility, a corresponding set of ethics and values, and a new culture of what it means to be a member of this elite group.

[The Divine Path To Ethics And Culture.](#)

The Old Testament has many examples of such a zeroing of humans and helping them commit to a new higher calling and corresponding values, including Noah and Moses. However, this process is precisely what Christ did and what He taught His Apostles to do. Christ made himself “*of no reputation taking the form of a bondservant*” (Philippians 2:7). This passage teaches that Christ “emptied himself” (or zeroed himself) and merely embraced a human self (OSB, 2008, page 1613). In this way, the Leader of all humbled Himself to become one with His subjects so that He could more effectively teach the culture, values, and ethics He desired. He did all this, not as a superior deity making demands on subordinate humans but by using human nature.

In John 21:15-18, Christ asks the Apostle Peter three times if Peter loves Him. Christ was asking for more than a rote affirmative response. As the explanation of this passage states, Christ was asking for a type of “self-emptying” and unconditional love, which lays aside one’s prior selfish being in favor of an all-encompassing loving culture (OSB, 2008, p. 1467). This was common with the Lord from the beginning of His public ministry when He asked all Apostles to leave their prior lives, values, and families and instead embrace His new culture and ethics. His simple words were “*follow me*” (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 19:21; John 1:43; Luke 9:59; I Corinthians 11:1). However, implicit in these two simple words was a request to empty oneself of who they were and what they had previously believed. Essentially, they were called to join Christ and “*die to the past*” (Colossians 2:20).

The Human Path To Ethics And Culture.

We have seen how military and divine leaders can create compelling cultures, ethics, and values. But is such a powerful objective achievable in today’s parishes that are not as structured and controllable? Cameron & Quinn (2011) suggest changing a culture is possible only if the very foundation and roots change through a personal “μετάνοια.” Ellwanger & Gehrke (2020) define the Greek word μετάνοια as a person changing their mind about something or changing what they believed in their heart. The Merriam-Webster dictionary simply defines μετάνοια as a “transformative change of heart” (Metanoia, n.d.).

Christ constantly called for all to experience a μετάνοια transformational change of heart. For example, this transformation is the theme of the “Parable of the Tax Collector” (Luke 18:10-14) and the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10-25:37). The Old Testament similarly describes the μετάνοια transformative change of heart many times, as far back as when the three Wise Men saw the baby Jesus. Everything changed for them at that moment, and they “*fell down and worshiped Him*” (Matthew 2:11).

However, perhaps nowhere can we see a more remarkable Scriptural μετάνοια change of heart than when Christ appears to His Apostles (and others) after His death. Our Lord called everyone to a meaningful transformation of the heart. He leaves them with the culture-crashing notion that they will live the rest of their lives traveling the world to “*make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19).

It is hard to imagine a greater requested μετάνοια and transformative change of heart than to give up one’s entire life and focus on the calling of traveling to the “*ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8) to make disciples of Jesus Christ. This is certainly not what you ask of yourself or other parish leaders. In the end, as in the beginning, Christ called for all followers to embrace a new culture, ethic, and righteous Core Values through a personal transformative change of heart so that you may live the life to which you are called (Ephesians 4:10; Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

So, what is the culture in your parish today? Again, Cameron & Quinn (2011) provide a clear and precise definition of an “enduring, slow-to-change, core characteristic of organizations” (p.20). However, Cameron & Quinn (2011) also advanced a persuasive

conclusion that Core Values are a vital element of culture. In other words, establishing Core Values is critical to defining culture. Thus, when a parish leader works to clarify and enculturate a parish's Core Values, you make considerable progress toward creating the culture you seek. Since most successful parishes will create a dominant culture, the embedded Core Values are something you, as a leader, must help influence and constantly reinforce (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

Scholars have identified 15 characteristics of stewardship theory, each of which drives the leader-follower relationship (Caldwell et al., 2008). Among them are the traits of being an "integrator of shared interests" and "virtue ethics based upon a commitment to society-based virtues and rights." These values help parish leaders personally live stewardship values that inspire parishioners with a focus on more enhanced group-centered outcomes.

So-called "Level 5 Leaders" are among the most effective leaders. They inspire the best followership focused on optimal organizational success and stewardship principles (Collins, 2011). They do not seek individual accolades as a leader. Instead, they focus on parishioners and more holistic perspectives, needs, and benefits, not merely maximizing a particular metric at your parish. Trustworthiness due to ethical leadership behaviors and global stewardship now extends to caring for the dual environments of parishioners and your environment and planet (Caldwell et al., 2008; Collins, 2001; Collins & Collins, 2005). This conclusion has been repeatedly echoed by Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the "so-called "Green Patriarch."

Regardless of the dimension of a parish or its culture that one examines, it is indisputable that the leader helps create, maintain, and positively metastasize a parish's culture. Thus, every priest and parish council member must consciously determine the culture they wish to establish and foster.

Five Best Practices Leadership Habits.

After establishing the desired parish culture, the critical question is: what are the best practices of the most effective leaders? Whether you are clergy, parish council, or ministry leaders, Drs. Kouzes and Posner posit five best practices each leader must embrace that we will explore briefly. The five habits include:

- 1. Model The Way**
- 2. Inspire A Shared Vision**
- 3. Challenge The Process**
- 4. Enable Others To Act**
- 5. Encourage The Heart**

1. Model The Way.

At the beginning of my leadership career, I decided that no one would work harder than I would. In that way, the team would see their leader willing to do whatever was necessary and exhibit whatever effort was required for the team to succeed. I am not suggesting this is right for everyone, as it imposes several personal sacrifices. However, if your parishioners see you living your parish's WHY consistent with its (and your) Core Values and working tirelessly alongside others, you can inspire them to be as dedicated as possible. I always say, "Your actions speak so loudly I can't hear what you are saying."

All of us have worked for "leaders" who did not work very hard. I put the word leader in quotes because their violation of the rule of modeling the way through hard work makes them hypocritical when they ask you to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:14). However, when you see your leader willing to do any task necessary to help the team succeed, their exemplary behavior can be inspirational. This is why so many military leaders lead the charge rather than watch in safety from a command center or mountaintop. This is why Mother Teresa asked no one to do anything she was not prepared to do herself. Modeling the way includes clarifying what you and the parish stand for, which is why I keep stressing the importance of a WHY and Core Values discovery process.

Outstanding research has determined that the most significant indicator of success and personal development is not IQ (measured intelligence), EQ (emotional intelligence), or talent. The key to success is "GRIT," which is defined as personal passion and perseverance for long-term goals and sticking with them for years (Duckworth, 2013, 2016). Dr. Angela Duckworth's research shows that the ability to change can grow with grit (Duckworth, 2013, 2016).

After a lifetime of excellence, Princeton women's ice hockey head coach Cara Morey famously said, "It's not the failure that matters, it's how you respond to failure that matters" and "trying is more important than failing" if only a coach can motivate their coachees to embrace grit (Morey, 2022). Thus, the impact of a parish leader can be transformational and a force multiplier of results because leaders/coaches can help followers/coachees realize that failure is not a permanent condition but rather a gateway to a growth mindset that leads to a new and brighter future with grit (Duckworth, 2013, 2016). Plain and simple, if a parish leader does not model the way, they cannot lead any parishioners anywhere. You are called to model the way by living your and your parish's Core Values and WHY and thus serve as a role model.

2. Inspire A Shared Vision.

Secondly, parish leaders must share an inspired vision and be able to articulately describe the exciting possibilities of a future destination of where the parish is going. This is one reason why it is so critically important that parish leaders stop acting and thinking like micro managers and committee workers (e.g., deciding what will be served at the banquet). A leader (clergy and parish council) must focus on the future and operational changes that must be made for the parish to go where it needs to go over the next several years. Thus, leaders must excite people to make the change for the future.

And notice it must be a shared Vision, not merely the Vision that the parish council or priest sees. It is impossible to force volunteers to do anything. Thus, commanding people to commit to specific actions is unproductive and ineffective. However, if a parish leader can gather parishioners together to envision and share a picture of the parish's future, then inspiring them to achieve it becomes much easier. This is why I strongly advise against small groups of just parish leaders developing a parish Vision or strategic plan. It must represent whatever diversity exists in the parish, and the new Vision must be shared, seen, and "caught" to become a reality.

Thus, this single Kouzes and Posner principle incorporates three physical responses and reactions. The Vision must be seen and shared, and it must inspire. Seeing, sharing, and inspiring are three different responses that must be joined together in pursuit of an agreed-upon and noble WHY and consistent with shared Core Values to become worthwhile.

3. Challenge The Process.

Challenging the process is the third critical practice of exemplary leadership within any parish. I confess this is a favorite for change agents (like me) and the greatest fear of those who abhor change. Now, this principle sounds a little threatening because everybody likes to work together collegially. However, the reality is that it is only when we ask questions, challenge ourselves and each other, and imagine other or better ways of doing something that the creative juices and different Godly-inspired visions can help us see a different future.

Now, please let me be clear. I am not suggesting experimenting with the core theology of a parish. There should be a denominationally approved process for doing such critical acts. However, I suggest that everything else, and certainly all operational elements of a parish, should be continually put under the microscope, examined, and experimented on. How will you ever get better results if you do not ask questions and push forward, seeking better alternatives? One of my favorite exercises is to take a decision a group I have been a part of has made and spend some time at the end with everyone shooting at the decision or idea. We try and creatively think of all the ways it might be wrong, too limited, or may have missed something.

The Holy Gospel discusses iron sharpening iron to mean people can push each other to more significant improvement (Proverbs 27:17). Laying out each automobile part gets you nowhere. However, after assembly, the possibilities of where a vehicle can take you are endless. Nontraditional and aspirational thinking encourages examining things one at a time beyond the normal frame of reference, whereas true "devil's advocacy" is contrarian thinking (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Please refer to the previous Chapter 3 discussion of using devil's advocates to intentionally challenge ideas/assumptions that help to sharpen them and discover and fix flaws.

The government uses exhaustive FBI background checks to identify weaknesses in certain federal employees. (I participated in two FBI background checks of friends seeking Federal judgeships and can attest to the thoroughness). However, the overwhelming desire for consensus, collegiality, and Groupthink often works against

challenging the process of any decision in a parish council. This can lead to the avoidance of addressing critical weaknesses and shortcomings.

Thus, parish council members and ministry leaders should always ask what we can do better or how to do what we are doing more effectively. Church consultant Thom Rainer looked at some of the churches that he worked with that failed, and it often was the result of the fact that the leaders weren't leading by focusing on the future. They were merely trying to maintain the status quo. Leaders must lead and must challenge all operational assumptions.

And for those in hierarchical churches who decry change (especially converts to those faiths), please remember that the early church had no air conditioning, emailed bulletins, online giving, pews to sit in, carpeting to walk on, sound systems to hear, internet streaming of services, and so many other things that modern parishes take for granted. I can assure you that the first time each of these "innovations" were proposed, there were those who argued against them because it was a change and not what had been done before. And yet now we cannot imagine church without these innovations that make worshiping easier and more interactive. So, the next time you think nothing should change, think again or destine your parish to the decline of those that never improve. By challenging the process, results, and everything you do, you can always find a way to improve.

4. Enable Others To Act.

Empowering and enabling others is critical if you want your parish to do more than only what you personally are capable of doing. Every parish I work with always tells me that Alfredo Pareto was right. For those who do not remember the Pareto Principle, you certainly have heard it applied. It is often referred to as the "80/20 Rule." This truism states that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people, and 80% of the money is contributed by 20% of the donors. This principle has been validated repeatedly in many different contexts. Yet leaders do not realize their failure is causing them to be overworked and burned out. Remember when I said every problem in a parish is a leadership problem? This is one example.

The root cause of the 80/20 crisis is that parish leaders are not empowering, authorizing, encouraging, training, supporting, and mentoring others to act. It is most often due to ego. How frequently have you heard (or said), "No one can do this as well as I can." "No one knows as much about this as I do." "No one cares about this as much as me." If you have said any of those, you are admitting your failure as a leader. It means you have not done what St. John Chrysostom advised about finding successors (which I will discuss shortly).

The next generation of leaders is waiting. They are in your pews and want to get in the game. But as long as you (or anyone else) hoard the power, position, or authority because of the false ego of your own exceptionalism, the longer you will suffer. Hear that? This is a self-inflicted wound that you can heal. How about that for tough love?

You, your parish council, and other leaders should ask, "Who am I training to take my place? Who am I mentoring to lead next time?" Or, in a more unfortunate situation, "If I get hit by a bus tomorrow, who will take up the baton and run this lap of the race?"

As soon as you obtain any leadership position, you should immediately start thinking about who you will train and mentor to replace you one day. Only the insecure fails to do that. If you believe a successor might be better, you are admitting your weaknesses.

When I became managing partner of my global law firm's Atlanta office, among the first things I did was identify my successor. When I told people who it was, I frequently heard, "Hey, you just got into this 4-year position, so why are you talking about your departure?" Others told me the person I picked was unprepared to be a leader. My answer to these doubters was, "We'll see because I have four years to ensure they are ready." I did that from day one, engaging him in as many leadership opportunities and decisions as possible.

For this reason, I strongly suggest that every ministry has co-leaders. Two heads are better than one (because you have two brains, four arms, and four legs working). Plus, there is always a backup when someone needs a break or help. Holy Scripture teaches in Ecclesiastes 4:9 the value of two workers because "*they have a better return for their labor.*" This passage describes how "*one can pick the other up if they fall.*" If there is redundancy in ministry, there is far less likelihood of failure or the ball being dropped. This is another reason this fourth leadership rule requires developing future leaders.

Moreover, since God has given different gifts to people, how empowering is it when you encourage your fellow parishioners to use those gifts? And believe it or not, at times, they can do it better or more efficiently than you can. Yes, there will sometimes be a learning curve. However, you had a learning curve when you did something for the first time. The more you train and mentor, the better the results will be.

In the Greek Orthodox tradition, when someone dies, we say to their family, "May their memory be eternal." Of course, as we contemplate their eternal lives and souls, there is a theological foundation to that expression. At the same time, those who create mentees and future leaders ensure their dreams and efforts succeed and live longer, if not eternally. Give, and you shall receive. Train, and you shall benefit. Develop others, and you will become a force multiplier of good.

5. Encourage The Heart.

The final Kouzes and Posner leadership rule often sounds touchy-feely to some. Yet the best leaders understand the role the heart plays in everything (not just medically). A leader's heart includes compassion for those who follow and those you serve. It includes showing appreciation for everything everyone does to further the Mission. I have never met anyone who hates praise. They may hate false praise. And some (like me) get uncomfortable with public praise.) However, a genuine acknowledgment of sacrifice or effort and results can be highly reinforcing. Do not forget that your Creator "**DOSE's**" you with hits of **D**opamine, **O**xytocin, **S**erotonin, and **E**ndorphins when you help or serve others or do something righteous. (See the discussion of the DOSE effect in Chapter 10 of my Roadmap.)

This is just one more way God reinforces the best behaviors in you. So, lead with your heart and humanity, and you will find more loyal followers. This also means acting with trustworthiness and sincerity to show what you value when you see it in others. Any

important work is hard. And when the heart is engaged, the work becomes easier and more fulfilling. Great leaders know this truth. This is why you hear from the followers of great leaders how much they love working with them. When used correctly, that powerful emotional centrifugal force of love extends the orbit of a follower or volunteer. Use this force of good wisely, and your work will be rewarded.

At the end of the day, I continue to advocate that as a parish leader, you are not only bringing people closer to Christ but also helping people become closer to each other and better fulfill their WHY and calling. You want to focus on those celebrations as an exemplary leader. The researchers all agree that the leader's focus on the future and changes necessary to make things better secure their position as true leaders and not merely people with titles.

I remind you that Pastor Rick Warren challenged church leaders to be risk-takers, or else they will be caretakers who become undertakers of their parish. And again, I am not speaking about taking risks in your theology. But to bring people closer to Christ and each other means you must transport them from where they are to where they need to be. This is change, and that is what leadership is all about. In Thom Rainer's excellent book, [Autopsy of a Deceased Church](#), he outlines his twelve ways to keep your parish alive (Rainer, 2014). And none of the required actions conflict with anything preached in my Roadmap or the great wisdom of Drs. Kouzes & Posner or many others. In an ever-changing world, we must change to avoid atrophying or dying.

[St. John Chrysostom's Leadership Lesson.](#)

The one leadership principle I teach every chance I get is the wisdom of a 4th century Saint who effectively taught church leaders about establishing culture and values. I always like to humorously point out that St. John Chrysostom was the greatest lawyer that ever lived. I say that because he studied law. Now, as far as we know, he never practiced law. However, I call him the greatest lawyer to show that one of us made it to Sainthood. I have no such expectations for myself or any other lawyers I know, but St. John Chrysostom gave you the perfect roadmap for being a leader within your parish. This wise Saint, in his homily *On Living Simply* said:

The most basic task of the Church leader is to discern the spiritual gifts of all those under his authority, and to encourage those gifts to be used to the full for the benefit of all. Only a person who can discern the gifts of others and can humbly rejoice at the flowering of those gifts is fit to lead the Church (Chrysostom, 1964, p. 44; Kostakis, 2018).

Let's unpack this quickly. St. John Chrysostom tells you that as a parish council member, ministry leader, or clergyman, the first thing you should ask yourself when you look at anyone in your parish is: What gifts does this person have? What might God have called them to do? How can I encourage them to use those gifts? And how can I encourage them to use those gifts fully to benefit everybody? This is the essence of outstanding leadership. You are a talent developer. God has called all your parishioners.

Thus, you don't have a volunteer problem. You have a leadership problem because you have not engaged in the process of developing your followers to do what God has already called them to do.

St. John Chrysostom also proved his legal training by getting in our faces at the end when he says only a person who can discern the gifts of others and cause them to be used "is fit to lead the church." Those are fighting words, as we would say. So, think of parish leadership fitness as directly correlated to how you develop talent.

A fun and productive exercise I ask all parish leaders to try is the next time you see or meet any parishioners, first think of what gift or talent God has given them. After you complete the talent identification phase, your next question is if there is a way they might use it for the parish. If they say yes, thank them and immediately get them with whoever can help them use their God-given talents. If they say that they cannot, then thank them anyway and let them know as soon as they are able Christ's church could use their gifts. In this way, you will become a talent magnet and prove, according to St. John, your fitness to be a parish leader.

Perhaps current parish leaders can embrace this 4th-century wisdom to help each parishioner identify a unique stewardship calling. A WHY discovery or similar process might help many of the faithful. There are also Christian Skills Builder aptitude surveys and tools that can assist you in the talent development process. Genuinely inspirational leaders can change the world by helping followers zeroing out everything else inconsistent as they embrace a transformative *μετάνοια* change of heart to live according to righteous Core Values.

The offer of the faith in Christ is consistent. However, how we act on and deliver it and practice it, as well as the ministries and services we offer, can be ever-changing. This is why the job of leaders today in the Christian Church of modernity is so much more challenging than it was 20, 30, or 40 years ago. But St. John Chrysostom, thank God, gave us the solution for best leading within our parish.

Trust And Talent: Two Sides Of The Same Coin.

Coach Bill Belichick, one of the greatest professional football coaches ever, once famously said: "Talent will determine the floor. Character will determine the ceiling." Similarly, the greatest college basketball coach, John Wooden, repeated that trust is a key element of leadership and begets trust. No great team is formed, and thus, no great accomplishment is realized unless and until the foundation of trust is established. Perhaps there is no better place to test this than in the elite fighting force of our time, Navy Seal Team 6. The best of the best of the best.

Simon Sinek, a leadership motivator, explains that trust is the foundational bedrock of the best leaders and highest-performing teams. The unimaginable becomes achievable once trust is established between and among any group, regardless of size. Simon explains briefly how the Seals pick which of them to join this most elite group. Please watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zP9jpxitfb4&t=3s>

No one will follow a leader they do not trust. So, the question is, what are you doing to create a safe and trusting environment in your parish teams? Simon Sinek goes on to discuss empirical research on Navy SEAL Team 6, where they explored the variables to determine who is invited to join, finally focusing on the two variables of talent and trust. Clearly, everyone wants the upper right quadrant, the highest performer who engenders the most trust. It is also never a surprise that the people you do not want on your team are on the opposite spectrum: lower left-hand quadrant, low performance, and low trust. However, the surprising data showed that trust was so critical that the better choice was to take someone with a little less talent who scored high on trust.



This does not mean you want people who cannot perform or execute well. However, if you must choose between people who can perform excellently vs. people who can be trusted, trust is the more critical factor. You can always train someone to perform better or more competently. But trust is foundational to your Core Values and ethos. So, ask yourself, what are you doing as a parish leader to earn the trust of your followers and teams and to re-establish and re-support any missing trust? As it turns out, building and keeping trust is essential to being a great leader. Period. Full stop. End of discussion.

Four Promises Of Leaders.

In their phenomenal book Mastering Leadership, Robert Anderson and William Adams conclude that leadership is a conversation. Thus, how you show up to and engage in your conversations determines the level of effectiveness and trust you will experience as a leader. In other words, as a leader, you are not there to tell people what to do. You are there to engage in dialogue with people to help them, and you discover what they can best perform and how.

Thus, according to Anderson and Adams, leaders succeed or fail depending on whether they clarify their roles and keep their promises. One measure of success is your alignment with the parish's WHY, Core Values, and Vision and how you execute against the strategic and tactical goals to achieve the Vision as a team. As a result, what the Anderson and Adams research shows is that four universal promises of leadership require you as a parish leader to:

1. Set the right direction and create meaningful work.
2. Engage all stakeholders and hold them accountable for performance.
3. Ensure the process and systems facilitate focus and execution.
4. Lead effectively by maintaining trust to achieve and sustain the desired results.

The rest of my Roadmap's leadership chapters will explore how to fulfill the above four leadership promises.

Essential Ethics.

Trust is impossible without ethical behavior. Thus, to build trust, one must ensure their greatest commitment to ethics, professionalism, and what we call righteousness in church-world. One way to do this is to discuss what is acceptable or not. This leads to a Code of Ethics that can be taught and enforced.

Research shows that 95% of major companies within the United States and abroad had some form of a written code of ethics or conduct by whatever name they used (Sharbatoghlie et al., 2013). Indeed, while most global organizations have codes of conduct, ethical codes, or business codes, my research and work with over 1,000 American Orthosphere parishes suggest that most parishes do not have such critical and foundational documents.

Kyle Fedler advocates that to be a “moral human,” one must act appropriately (Fedler, 2006). In this way, ethics is much more than a particular action. It extends to individuals’ thoughts and emotional responses, which must exist in effective 21st-century ethical models. Accordingly, parishes must enculturate codes of ethics formally and informally. Parish councils must lead the modeling and enforcing of the desired ethical behavior. External compliance audits identify and discourage misconduct, enhance trust, and integrate ethics into corporate operations. Many ethicists and scholars talk extensively and authoritatively about the need to enculturate corporate codes of ethics formally and informally as they ensure senior management takes the lead in modeling and enforcing the desired behavior (Grigoropoulos, 2019).

So, my questions to you include:

1. Does your parish have a Code of Conduct or Code of Ethics?
2. Is it written, published, and widely shared with everyone (not merely the parish council and other leaders)?
3. Is it constantly updated to be most current?
4. Do all leaders affirm it both verbally and in writing?
5. Is it enforced and in such a way that those watching it can see it is accurate and part of parish culture?

In addition to signing and affirming the parish Code of Conduct, parish leaders should also sign a Conflicts of Interest disclosure. This document identifies any actual or potential conflicts they might have that can affect their independence or work on the parish council. For example, they must disclose if they or any family member has a contract with or receives any form of compensation or benefit, directly or indirectly, from the parish.

While parishes should avoid electing parish council members with family members who are either employed by the parish or also on the parish council, this is

sometimes unavoidable in smaller parishes. In such cases, these conflicts must be disclosed in advance, and the impacted parish council must recuse themselves and abstain from voting or participating in the discussion on any matter in which they might have an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Notice this abstention requirement applies even if they only have an “appearance” of a conflict where someone might question a parish council member’s independence. I will briefly cover the three legal duties all parish council members must uphold in Chapter 6 of my Roadmap, all of which establish and reinforce trust.

M² - The Quickest Route To Losing Talent.

OK, this section is simple and quick. Do you want to know the fastest way to run off a volunteer (or any worker)? The answer is **M²**. You have all experienced M² and understand its effect on you. **MicroManaging** (a/k/a M²) is a recipe for disaster. M² is where a leader or manager so closely observes, controls, intervenes, instructs, corrects, changes, or excessively supervises a team member’s work that their autonomy is negatively impacted, and they become frustrated, unmotivated, and less productive. Legendary Apple founder Steve Jobs once famously said: “We don’t hire smart people and tell them what to do. We hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” No one wants to work for someone constantly M²ing them. No one wants to be around or marry someone constantly M²ing them. (Although this is not a marriage or relationship book).

Yes, you must encourage everybody to be engaged. And yes, you should hold them accountable for the performance and results they agree to obtain. Of course, as a leader, you also need to ensure they have the right processes, systems, resources, and talent. However, you need to lead effectively by demonstrating that you trust them to do what they say and deliver the results they agreed to provide. Nothing conveys the lack of trust more than M².

I was blessed to close many billions of dollars of outsourcing transactions. In such deals, the customer party outsourcing a function or operation would tell the vendor what results they wanted. They would then leave it up to the vendor to determine how to achieve those results. I represented both entities outsourcing major functions and vendors delivering the outsourcing solutions. I told my vendor clients to ask their customers to “manage the results, not the processes.” In other words, Mr. Customer, hold me, the vendor, accountable for producing the results, benefits, or output I promised, and then let me figure out how best to do it.

This same approach is an invaluable tool in parish work. Sharing your experiences and what you have seen that has worked or not worked is fine. But do not assume you know everything or even the best way to do the things you want done. Indeed, perhaps the reason something you tried did not work was because you or your parish executed it poorly. If someone wants to try again with better execution, learn not to say, “We already tried that once” or “It will never work that way.”

Moreover, do not presume your expertise makes you all-knowing and that someone with different experiences might not come up with an improvement. I remember vividly that at the huge and successful Atlanta Greek Festival, most of our parishioners who were restaurateurs would laugh at the gyro sandwich booth where I volunteered for over 30 years. Virtually the entire team in our Gyro booth were professionals (engineers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, etc.). We had NO restaurateurs. The very successful restaurant owners would constantly come to try and “help” us by sharing what we were doing wrong and how they did it in their successful businesses. We listened and learned but constantly adapted and created our own methods, much to their chagrin. And yet, each year, the gyro booth sold more product than any other food items run by restaurant professionals.

Indeed, after three years, I figured out a way to combine two steps in the gyro sandwich-making process that the restaurant owners laughed at. That is, until we proved that by combining two steps into one, we produced more products consistently and rapidly. So yes, even a megafirm corporate lawyer (trained in process management) could improve something as “simple” as making a gyro sandwich.

It was clear that none of our professionals would give up their day jobs. And it was also clear that the restaurateurs had forgotten more about running best-in-class restaurants than we would ever know. But we could use our God-given intellects, observational skills, and willingness to experiment, try, fail, and learn to make something better. By letting us go and not M² everything we did, the parish Greek Festival became more profitable and successful. (I’ll spare you the story about the apoplectic fits from the restaurateurs when the “professionals” told them we needed to replace the cash registers with online and iPad ordering.)

Within your parish are people with vastly different gifts from those God has provided you. Please empower your people to take responsibility and do what is necessary to be successful. Learn to focus on managing the results, not the processes and how they do their work. The best and brightest are willing to learn but unwilling to be M²ed. If you do, the good ones will leave, and you will have to do everything.

One of the most common complaints I hear from parish volunteers regarding why they quit volunteering is because parish leaders are not engaging and empowering them. So, please work with your ministries to ensure alignment with the goals they should accomplish and then cut them loose to deliver those results. The only thing you need to say thereafter is, “How can I help you achieve that,” not “Let me tell you exactly what you need to do and how you need to do it.”

[Team Breakdowns And Dysfunctions.](#)

I am always amazed by the 4x100 and 4x400 relay teams in the Summer Olympics. In this event, you have some of the fastest people in the world running either a 100- or 400-meter leg of a four-person relay. The blinding speed at which they traverse

the oval track is beautiful as they waste no motion. Everything is intentional and the most efficient it can be.

However, what distinguishes the Olympic champions from the non-medalists is more than the overall speed of their runners. Indeed, the most critical aspect of the race is the three times the baton is handed from one runner to the next. It must be accomplished while the handing-off runner still runs at a blinding speed. The recipient runner starts from a dead stop and must reach record speed in record time. The baton must be perfectly delivered within a narrow zone of the track, or the team will be DQd (disqualified).

In some Olympics, the team with the fastest individual runners does not win. In every such case, it was because of a slight delay in the smooth passing of the baton. Sometimes, the baton is handed off too late (outside the legal transfer zone), and in some cases, the baton is dropped. Your heart breaks for all four runners in the relay in such cases.

So, what does this sports metaphor have to do with parishes? Great leaders ensure extraordinary processes that include efficient and proper succession and handoffs. In virtually every instance, I have seen a breakdown in the performance or effectiveness of a parish, it is a leadership challenge. This is why I repeatedly say every parish problem is a leadership problem. More often than not, the leadership challenge results in a breakdown in a team's performance. They not only failed to operate at maximum efficiency and excellence, but there is also often a failed or ineffective handoff.

Studying the characteristics of high-performing teams is a passion of mine, and I often see little to no effort placed on team dynamics and performance in parishes. Frequently, parish ministry work reminds me of a little kid's soccer game where all the small children from both teams are clumped together, surrounding the ball and trying to find and kick it while most often missing the ball and kicking each other.

Indeed, the issue of team development is so critical that in designing the Effective Parish Assessment (discussed in Chapter 7 of my Roadmap), it was clear that a vital Pillar to be examined at each parish needed to focus on both Leadership and Teams. Whenever I work with a dysfunctional parish, I find a dysfunctional team (or two or three). Yes, I also always find some aspects of less-than-optimal leadership. However, even the best leader has trouble leading a dysfunctional team to success. While much has been written about team excellence and failures, among my favorite books are Patrick Lencioni's The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and The Advantage. While every team leader should read these books, allow me to offer my high-level summary of Patrick's five key messages on the top five team dysfunctions (Lencioni, 2002, 2012).

1. Lack Of Trust. I cannot repeat too many times the critical importance of trust in any team or parish. If the parish council and other leaders or team members do not trust each other, they will not succeed or progress. Trust requires vulnerability and welcoming the opportunity to be open and productively discuss failures, errors, weaknesses, and even fears. The previously discussed Groupthink kills team effectiveness and productivity. To be blunt, research and personal experience have repeatedly shown that ego is the number one team killer.

People do not appreciate those who are arrogant, self-centered, show no compassion or grace for others, and lack empathy or willingness to look at others as equally made in the image and likeness of the same God who created them. Throughout history (and the Bible), we see the horrendous consequences of those egotistical and failed leaders. This is a reason for the effective team rule of “check your ego at the door.” For example, one of my 15 Rules of Engagement in strategic planning retreats that I will address in Chapter 8 of my Roadmap is that everyone is equal and should feel free to speak. Otherwise, the highest position or alpha personality in the room will dominate the team. The consequence is significantly reduced effectiveness, productivity, and the joy of working together.

2. Fear Of Conflict. The highest performing teams have a productive, ideological conflict with respectfully passionate and unfiltered debate around important issues. A little discomfort can be helpful to ensure the best decisions are made and the team members are all committed to the final course of conduct. The simple model below underscores this point:



Notice that on the far left is the state where everyone is either silent or tacitly agrees with little to no dialogue or disagreement just to “get along.” In such situations, it is unlikely the decision will be optimal because there was no vetting, analysis, or discussion of ways to improve it or alternatives. This will shock some, but I believe those who constantly remain silent are more divisive than those who always object (although neither extreme is productive). I say this because if God has given you the power of observation, thought, and a voice, and you do not use it, I find it more sinful than someone who tries to use it too much. My favorite expression (and it is another of my 15 Rules of Engagement in strategic planning) is “get in the game or go home.” Parishes do not need complacent compliance.

Of course, the group that gets rightfully pilloried the most constantly offers mean-spirited attacks, as represented on the far-right side of the above diagram. I need not go into any more details about their toxicity to a team, as you have assuredly seen it. The trick is to pull the bully aside with a loving intervention to help them see the error of their ways and get better at offering constructive criticism. While the notion of an ideal conflict point in the above diagram is perhaps illusory, there is a range where the dialogue and debate must be not only permitted but solicited to identify the best possible solution.

I am stressing Patrick Lencioni’s dysfunction number two heavily because I often see this as the breakdown in the parish teams I assess. Either they are complacent and going through the motions, or they are near verbal fistfights. Coach John Wooden of

UCLA offered the best answer to this challenge, “Whatever you do in life, surround yourself with smart people who will argue with you.” Throughout my life, I have been blessed to have some partners in my law firm and my ministry who are wickedly smart and willing to challenge me so we can reach the best possible solution.

This was also the secret to the leaders’ success in my favorite genre of “mafia/mob movies.” The “Consigliere” had a distinguished and coveted role in the mafia. He was the most trusted advisor to the DON (head of the mob family) and perhaps the only one who could always say what he felt and was free to disagree with the boss without getting “whacked” (killed for those faithful souls who do not appreciate this genre). In that role, the disagreement was always respectful but sincere and unapologetic (and often in private). It was the proverbial “iron sharpening iron” (Proverbs 27:17). I have been blessed to play that role for some major church leaders in my ministry. It was not always easy, but it always led to better results and a more effective team.

One such example is often spoken about in my Metropolis. I was blessed to be the consigliere to our Hierarch (who is also a beloved friend). We were in a Metropolis Council meeting with the elected leaders. While we usually carefully planned all significant decisions to be sure we had done our homework and were aligned, he surprised everyone with a spontaneous decision on the fly. I knew that the decision he announced was wrong. It was an action that should not have been taken so that we could remain consistent with our WHY, Core Values, and governing documents. I immediately saw most leaders leaning back in their chairs. They recognized the mistake but were too afraid to say anything. We were clearly a dysfunctional team at that moment. Of course, many of them looked at me, and I imagined I could see the thought bubbles over their heads saying, “You’re his consigliere, so do something.”

When I caught the eye of the leader, I very subtly nodded my head left and right, saying “no,” giving him the private signal to retreat. Instead, he doubled down and called me out publicly, asking why I was nodding no. I politely suggested that the decision might benefit from further research and analysis, which was lawyer doublespeak for “what a stupid idea.” I think my beloved “boss” (Bishop) sensed my less-than-candid response, and “triple dog dared me” (for all my Christmas Story movie fans) to tell him and everyone else why I thought his decision was wrong. It was time to put up or shut up.

As calmly as this passionate advocate could, I explained the inconsistency with our WHY, Core Values, and applicable rules. But the Bishop wanted to argue or call my bluff to see if I would stand down. Since I call all bluffs and was honestly convinced there was a better way to proceed, I continued to explain my position. There was about a 10-minute back and forth between us (with everyone sitting back in their chairs, glad someone else was willing to prosecute the case). The Holy Spirit intervened, and we both realized we were getting nowhere. We agreed to pause the decision and consider it further later.

While that might seem like a mission accomplished, understanding team dysfunction, I knew that was not enough. So, I stood up and went to the “boss” to ask for his forgiveness and hug it out. Interestingly, because we knew each other and worked so well together, and because he had great servant leader instincts, he had stood up at the same time to do the same thing. We met halfway around the large and packed

conference room oval table and smiled, publicly asked for each other's forgiveness, hugged, and even laughed.

For the first time in 10 minutes, everyone else in the room took a breath. This became a moment of personal growth for the Bishop and me. More importantly, it was a teachable moment of growth for the entire leadership team. It was clear that polite dissent was not only permitted but also valued and would lead to better team dynamics and decision-making. I have known some leaders with dysfunctional teams who intentionally stage one of these moments of productive disagreement to make the point that everyone should speak up.

As an aside, after we examined the decision, the boss realized what I was saying, and we course-corrected to a much better and more consistent solution that everyone enthusiastically supported. Respectful disagreement is essential, just as we must always ask for the Holy Spirit's intervention and guidance.

I can also attest to similar interactions that did not end as well. There is also at least one exception to this rule. For example, when your wife tells you that what you want to do is definitely NOT permissible, I have learned that is not the time to make Custer's last stand. Just retreat, survive, and live to "fight" for your opinion another day. But as I said before, my Roadmap is not about marital harmony.

There will be a few leaders who do not appreciate you are trying to help them. You cannot worry about their displeasure, but you should practice love and respect in your disagreement. In other words, disagree agreeably. In the fullness of time, they will either come around or not. And perhaps you will realize either they were right or there is another better alternative. Regardless, you must always act to the best of your ability. And when you are the leader, you must always welcome respectful dissent and new ideas. If you do, you will have a higher performing parish than if you demand everyone conform to your wishes.

3. Lack Of Commitment. Team members who do not commit to the decision or goal can become metastatic cancer cells. I do not mean they are bad people. Merely, they will kill team progress and effectiveness. It is a strong team that can embrace disagreement and temporary indecision while the discussion and debate seek the best ideas, alternatives, and perspectives to achieve clarity and buy-in. This is a strength of a consensus process, which allows for respectful debate until everyone has been heard and the compromise decision is one everyone can live with.

However, as Patrick Lencioni discusses, it is highly detrimental when the team makes a decision, and members who disagree with the answer go to work to defeat it or ignore the decision. Everyone has seen examples of this passive/aggressive behavior in parishes and other organizations. Once part of the leadership team ignores the supposed team decision or complains about it to others, extraordinary damage can be done to the parish. Thus, it is better to "table" or "park" a decision for later discussion and complete commitment than to force a decision. (Yes, "parking" discussions for later resolution, when consensus cannot be reached, is another of my 15 Rules of Engagement discussed in Chapter 8 of my Roadmap.)

When teaching this principle, I share the story of a parish council that split on a decision, with seven in favor and five against. They did not practice consensus, and the “majority” forced the decision on the minority. So did those in the minority go home and tell their spouses and friends, “Oh, I was so wrong. Fortunately, the ever-wise seven showed me the error of my ways.” Of course, they didn’t. Instead, they often tell everyone who will listen how stupid the majority’s decision was. (Sometimes character assassinations follow, which I horrifically find inappropriate but all too common in church-world).

However, after a productive discussion and exploring alternatives, a high-performing team can usually reach a consensus and then all commit to moving forward with that process. This is the Intel Corporation process of “disagree then commit” (Lencioni, 2002). In the meeting, respectful disagreement was welcomed until the consensus decision was made. At this point, all had to commit. The Intel team evidenced this commitment by “cascading communications” by every team member to all their subordinates and then the sub-subordinates, with everyone hearing about the appropriateness of the decision.

4. Avoiding Accountability. Patrick Lencioni appropriately identifies how often teams refuse to be accountable for their decisions or processes. If the team members are unwilling to respectfully remind one another when they fail to achieve the agreed-upon team performance standard, then accountability is masked, and group performance is impeded. This is why I always advocate that every parish strategic plan Strategic Goal, and Action Plan have a very visible scoreboard to all parishioners showing the progress made, or lack thereof.

The old expression “everyone plays differently when they keep score” is well understood by anyone who grew up on a playground. If the group were just shooting baskets, the level of competitiveness would typically be nonexistent. But the first time someone says, “OK, let’s pick teams and keep score,” almost everyone elevates their game and gets serious.

If the work of your parish is salvific and life-changing, you must be accountable for it, too. If you accept my default simplistic WHY Statement, your parish brings people closer to Christ and each other, then who wouldn’t want to excel at this critical work? If you’re going to succeed, it requires understanding the objective, why you have established it, and how you will measure its achievement. Without that level of diligence, you are just shooting around on the playground of life and not seriously bringing people closer to Christ and each other. Please remember that you WILL have your II Corinthians 5:10 Moment when you stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ to account. So why not start being accountable and keeping score now so that when your earthly clock runs out, you will be more confident of a “winning score” on the eternal scoreboard?

5. Inattention To Results. While effort is critical, results make the difference at the end of the day. Much unproductive work does not get you to the desired endpoint. If you are on a journey and walking endlessly in circles, you will have exerted a lot of effort but gotten nowhere. This is why it is so critical to put first things first and last things last. Left to their own devices, the last things will often push their way up to the top of your list

either because they are easy (and you want to do something) or because a squeaky wheel advocates for them.

The most effective leaders always know their goals and metrics and work diligently to achieve them. However, in church-world, we often see the opposite. I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard Bishops, clergy, or parish leaders say something like, "I'm just so glad someone showed up to do this work," with the implicit statement that they will accept anything that person does. While we must be thankful if someone gives their time and talents, that does not mean we should tolerate insufficient effort or ineffective results on a team.

If I were added to the U.S. Olympic Team 4x100 relay team, I would undoubtedly enthusiastically give my best but would inevitably cause my team to lose. The current world record time is still Jamaica's (with Usain Bolt) at 36.83 seconds. Suffice it to say, if I were to run a leg in that race, my time would likely be measured in minutes (many minutes after the inevitable stoppage to catch my breath). We would lose so badly that I would still be laboring around the track while the medal ceremony was celebrated.

In that circumstance, my inattentiveness towards the result would let the entire team down (not to mention our country). So, by all means, celebrate anytime someone gives you their best. However, do not penalize a team by poorly pairing the members with massively different skills and abilities. Find something else for the underperformers to do at which they can excel.

In my Stewardship Calling strategic planning process, I always have the teams develop scoreboards to unambiguously identify how the team is doing in achieving the Strategic Goal and how much time is left. I will confess that the teams often abandon that accountability, partly explaining why they fail to meet their timetable or endpoint completely. But if you are not keeping your score somehow as you proceed down a task or road, you will not know how far behind (or ahead) you are on the stated end goal. In writing my Roadmap, I established obsessive time goals for each Chapter and segment (in keeping with my OCD personality). However, it always informed me how I was doing, when I could take an unscheduled break, or when I needed to pick up the pace.

If bringing people closer to Christ and each other or your parish's alternative WHY Statement is essential, you show it by holding yourself accountable. And accountability extends not just to the short term but to the long term. As much as we avoid setting short-term accountability goals, we abhor longer-term ones. Indeed, sometimes we can more easily achieve short-term goals but fail over the long term if we do not have those hard-to-achieve goals in mind when we plan what we will do.

Among my many failings were the 15 years I coached church basketball for my parish's youth. Everyone thought I was wildly successful because we had more points on the scoreboard at the end of almost every game than our rivals. Yes, we went six years in a row as undefeated Gold Division Champions. And yes, because my rules included that if the child (and their parents) were not in church on Sunday, the child could not play on Saturday; they all showed up in church.

But it wasn't until decades later, when I measured my success (or lack thereof) using a different scoreboard, that I realized my longitudinal failure as a church league basketball coach. Most of the kids I coached are not actively engaged in their parish today (as far as I have been able to assess). I may not know entirely how each one is progressing on their journey to theosis; however, I have seen enough of them to know that I failed to use this lowercase "m" ministry of church basketball as a tool to instill a love of their faith. Yes, I taught them Christian principles in conducting ourselves on and off the court. However, something was lacking in what I might have been able to do to keep more of them closer to their faith.

So, what are your ministries' and parish's long-term and short-term goals? How are you measuring their attainment? And what are you doing to periodically assess progress and make course corrections along the way rather than waiting until the end to discover your failure? The element of inattentiveness to results is undoubtedly one of the primary dysfunctions of underperforming teams. The lack of accountability to the highest standards and metrics of performance excellence is an epidemic in parishes. It is no wonder your parish is experiencing the challenges it faces. Anything less than the best for God's house and people should never be acceptable. Our parishes, dioceses, and national churches must shed the imprisoning cloak of no or low expectations and mediocrity.

High Performing Parish Teams: wego = wedo = wedid = wegood.

Dear brother or sister, please do not underestimate the importance of building high performing teams in your parish. I would encourage you to spend your first parish council meeting or ministry gathering, preferably even offsite, learning about each other and creating all the elements of what it means to be a successful team. Secondly, create clarity around what you are trying to accomplish and pursue a lockstep focus on a few specific critical strategic goals.

Of course, your parish has got to do many different things in its ministries. However, as a leader of your parish, if you do not periodically and systematically judge yourselves on what you accomplished and where you failed, you will not be leading effectively. Do you know WHY your parish exists and why anyone should join you (your WHY Statement)? Do you know the Core Values that drive the decisions of your parish? Do you know what you do (your Mission Statement)? Do you know how you will succeed and where you will be in three to five years (your Vision Statement)? How about knowing what is essential right now and who must do each task?

You must communicate all the above elements over and repeatedly. The researchers say it takes repetition at least seven times before something moves from short-term to longer-term memory. You will see me deploying this principle throughout my Roadmap when I repeat themes, conclusions, or quotes. So, please communicate effectively, constantly, and clearly to your parishioners so they understand how effectively your teams are performing.

In a phenomenal book called Leaders Eat Last, leadership guru Simon Sinek once said, “Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of the people in your charge” (Sinek, 2014). And that’s really what I want you to start to focus on as leaders of a parish or team. You must have trusting teams that use creative conflict, commitment, accountability, and attention to results to excel. This includes being vulnerable and openly discussing and admitting your failures, errors, weaknesses, and even fears.

We need to learn to subvert our “personal egos” to “team **“wegos.”** (Yes, I made that term up to signify putting the team first.) However, wegos will build team trust and reduce productive conflict avoidance to achieve more robust team decisions and results. **To conclude, “wego” leads to “wedo” which results in “wedid” and makes you feel “wegood.”**

Top 4 Qualities People Want In Leaders.

Everyone likes simple numbered lists when trying to understand complex ideas. Thus, I will briefly share the results of excellent leadership research studies performed over decades by Drs. Kouzes and Posner. They gave thousands of people the following list of qualities of leaders and asked them to vote for the top seven characteristics they would like to see in their leaders. Take a few moments to look at the list and identify the top seven qualities you believe leaders should possess:

Ambitious	Honest
Broad minded	Imaginative
Caring	Independent
Competent	Inspiring
Cooperative	Intelligent
Courageous	Loyal
Dependable	Mature
Determined	Self-Controlled
Fair Minded	Straight forward
Forward-looking	Supportive

Interestingly, after many thousands of responses, four characteristics came to the top (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Please pay attention and assess yourself with respect to these four most critical aspects of leadership.

Honest (85%)

Forward-looking (70%)

Inspiring (69%)

Competent (64%)

The number one quality leaders are looking for in leaders is honesty. If you're not honest or trustworthy, you can never lead effectively. Unless you are trusted, people will not follow you when they have a choice.

Second on the list is being forward-looking. People want to follow leaders with a vision of where they are going. This is why I constantly remind leaders that if they are not looking forward to the future, they are not viewed as fulfilling their leadership role. The primary job of leaders has changed as the pace of life has increased. People are less willing to follow someone who wants to stay in the same place and not respond to changing circumstances, needs, technologies, and opportunities. A manager can effectively keep people in the same place doing the same thing for so long. However, a leader must lead people on a journey with a roadmap to a new and better future destination.

Close behind, forward-looking is inspirational. Followers want to be genuinely inspired by their leaders. That does not mean every leader must be a charismatic extrovert and out there beating their chest and shouting from the top of soap boxes. Mother Teresa, in her quiet humility, inspired people to be better, just as the more vocal and visible Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Greek Orthodox Archbishop Iakovos, etc. have done. Some people are inspired by their dedication to practice and their craft. Each person has unique gifts and ways to communicate most effectively. Being the most genuine version of yourself is essential. However, if you wish to lead, you must inspire others to follow you.

Finally, and in a close fourth place, we want our leaders to be competent. We want people who do something well and are confident in what they do. However, that does not mean that the leader must be qualified in every activity and function of the parish. If they lack a specific ability, then competency is manifested by recruiting someone with greater talent in the areas in which they are weak so that all tasks are performed with equal excellence.

I summarize these top four characteristics of leaders by stating simply that followers want their leaders to be **Trustworthy** (Honest, Inspiring, and Competent) and **Forward-looking**. You must understand and act on this list of two (or four) most desirable leadership characteristics to grow as a leader. If you are weak in one of these attributes, then take classes or study under mentors, but do something to improve your competency in each of these four elements each month and year, and your leadership influence and effectiveness will rapidly accelerate.

For those OCD folks who want to know how the rest of the leadership attributes scored in Kouzes's and Posner's research, here are the remaining characteristics in order of the voting with the percentage of respondents who identified it as a top seven attribute:

Intelligent = 42%
Broad minded = 40%
Dependable = 37%
Supportive = 36%
Fair Minded = 35%
Straight forward = 31%
Determined = 28%
Cooperative = 26%
Ambitious = 26%
Courageous = 21%
Caring = 20%
Loyal = 18%
Imaginative = 18%
Mature = 16%
Self-Controlled = 11%
Independent = 6%
(Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Succession Planning And Succession Management.

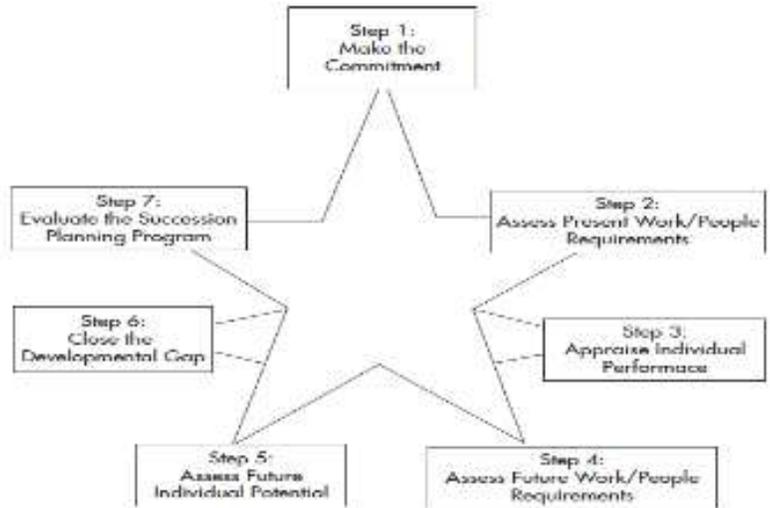
Succession planning focuses on identifying, recruiting, and training successors to current key individuals and leaders (Rothwell, 2016). In addition, best practices also include the element of "succession management," which focuses on ensuring the full development of the right talent when needed (Rothwell, 2016, p. 6). For purposes of my Roadmap, I will use the broader term **Succession Management** ("SM") because it entails ensuring the right person is appropriately trained and ready when needed. While leaders and executives of organizations underscore the critical importance of SM, surveys have identified that less than 50% of organizations have succession plans, thus leaving them vulnerable (Meinert, 2018). And parishes are almost always devoid of SM processes.

At its core, SM focuses on a parish managing its talent pipeline and key team members (Barnett & Davis, 2008, p. 721). This includes identifying:

1. the roles and responsibilities of each key team member,
2. the skills and training needed,
3. the metrics and processes to evaluate performance and remediate challenges,
4. additional training or support needed,

5. their availability timelines,
6. the readiness of their possible replacements, and
7. all training and support needed to ensure the highest level of talent performance using Succession Management (“SM”) best practices (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Rothwell, 2016).

Indeed, William Rothwell, in his excellent book Effective Succession Planning: Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent From Within, identified numerous unique steps needed in an effective SM process. A logical sequence and progression of individually focused initiatives are identified in a “seven-star model” pictured to the right (Rothwell, 2008, p. 74).



One way to review performance is by assessing all talent using a typical nine-box model comparing an employee’s potential ability against their current performance. The two matrices below identify the different categories focusing on a similar nine-point assessment with slightly different labels.

Potential	LOW PERFORMER HIGH POTENTIAL	MODERATE PERFORMER HIGH POTENTIAL	HIGH PERFORMER HIGH POTENTIAL
	LOW PERFORMER MODERATE POTENTIAL	MODERATE PERFORMER MODERATE POTENTIAL	HIGH PERFORMER MODERATE POTENTIAL
	LOW PERFORMER LOW POTENTIAL	MODERATE PERFORMER LOW POTENTIAL	HIGH PERFORMER LOW POTENTIAL
Performance			

(Gupta, 2022)

Potential Assessment	High	"Rough Diamond" Low Performer/ High Potential	"Future Star" Moderate Performer/ High Potential	"Consistent Star" High Performer/ High Potential
	Moderate	"Inconsistent Player" Low Performer/ Moderate Potential	"Key Player" Moderate Performer/ Moderate Potential	"Current Star" High Performer/ Moderate Potential
	Low	"Talent Risk" Low Performer/ Low Potential	"Solid Professional" Moderate Performer/ Low Potential	"High Professional" High Performer/ Low Potential
		Low	Moderate	High
		Performance Assessment		

(Caruso, 2012)

Next Steps For Parish Team Succession Assessment And Needs

Here is one step-by-step process for a parish to implement SM:

1. Create a detailed duties description for every significant role in the parish that includes any required skills, education, experience, etc.
2. Outline the performance standards and evaluation criteria for that role.
3. Identify the profile of characteristics and Core Values the ideal candidate would possess to align with WHY and Core Values of the parish or applicable ministry.
4. List any future skill sets necessary to deal with anticipated changes the parish or ministry will likely experience.
5. Research the desired education and training candidates should receive to enhance deficient skills and develop best-in-class talents.
6. Establish a disciplined and rigorous self-evaluation process for each leader.
7. Implement a companion 360-degree evaluation process for all leaders, which includes evaluations of the leader by their supervisor(s), critical reports, peers, and any other identified stakeholders.
8. Constantly reassess the position by examining evaluation criteria used by the other parishes or Christian churches both inside and outside your specific Denomination.
9. Create a final outline assessment of position readiness for each leader candidate.

While the above is not an exhaustive list, it might initially seem overwhelming for parishes with no SM processes. In keeping with the title and theme of my Roadmap, I urge parishes not to let the details of task excellence keep you from starting down the path. At a minimum, look at every leadership position and undertake the first five steps from the above list. Later, you can move to the evaluation and assessment steps six and seven. Eventually, you can assign someone to do the best practices assurance assessments in steps eight and nine.

However, the key is to begin. Every leader of any activity or ministry of your parish should be charged with helping to achieve your parish's WHY and work toward the Vision. At a minimum, given my simple model WHY of bringing people closer to Christ and each other, every leader plays a pivotal role in the parish's future and the journey to theosis your parishioners are pursuing. Given the sacredness of the role and responsibilities, we should ensure they are as well prepared as possible for their tasks.

The Holy Scripture demonstrates the righteous conduct of Moses both as a judge and as one who follows the advice of his father-in-law, Jethro (Sherley, 2019). Moses builds a leadership succession plan by sharing control with others. Preparing successor judges/leaders who are well-trained and adequately guided in critical ethical and righteous Core Values is essential to creating the desired culture (Exodus 18:13-24).

Parishes can use many different tools to ensure the best SM and readiness of all their talent and leaders. While I do not sell anything, I have discovered that Lifeway Christian Resources is a leading provider of resources parishes can use. Two such robust parish tools are:

1. Spiritual Gifts Survey, a self-assessment survey to identify God-given gifts and talents, available here: (<https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/Spiritual%5FGifts%5FAssessmentpdf.pdf>), and
2. Spiritual Gifts List identifies corresponding Holy Scripture references for specific skills and abilities (<https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/Spiritual-Gifts-List-pdf.pdf>).

Regardless of what tools a parish uses, intentionally focusing on SM and developing new leaders is critical for the long-term success of any parish.

Coaching.

Coaching is as old as the sixth day of the creation story. From the moment God created man and woman, He began coaching humanity to bring out the best in them. Just as humans have evolved, so too has the discipline of coaching. And yet, the lack of coaching is one of the most significant weaknesses in parish life. The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

Another way to view coaching is “unlocking people’s potential to maximize their performance” (Whitmore, 1992, p. 10). Again, the emphasis is on the coachee’s desire for self-development and self-learning vs. being taught. It focuses on the internal desire for betterment for various complex external reasons. Thus, a coach helps you bring out the best in yourself.

Others define coaching as a process (a) for coaches to provide guidance and support rather than instructions to help people learn to adapt or (b) to unlock a person’s potential and thus enhance their performance. A significant difference between coaching and training/mentoring/disciplining is the exercise of God’s great gift of free will that allows the coachee an unfettered right to set their personal plan/agenda of what they want to achieve/discover with the assistance of a coach. Since I believe understanding your God-given Why is most critical, a Christian coach can lovingly help bring out the best in someone based on how they choose to excel on their journey to live their calling.

However, the key differentiator is the coachee is in control and sets the direction, agenda, and parameters of the relationship rather than the coach. In addition, the coachee must be ready and willing to engage in this potentially transformational process. This definition stands in stark contrast to the original dictionary definition that focused on the more educationally proactive tutoring, instructing, or training, which has now evolved to include those providing career advice (Oxford University Press, 2024).

A specific subset of “Executive Coaching” evolved as a process of collaboration between a coach and an executive coachee to achieve coachee-established self-development goals instead of merely performance evaluation (Bartlett et al., 2014). To be successful, the coachee must want to change and be willing to engage in self-examination and correction after trust is established with the coach (Bartlett et al., 2014).

Put another way, Stoltzfus (2005) explains coaching as a disciplined process by which the coach “believes in people (coachee) to empower them to change” (p. 7).

Tomei and Mele (2023) simply defined coaching as a way to help people manage and enhance their internal capabilities and resources, and they traced its popularity to those who sought wisdom at Cambridge University or Oxford University. Linguistically, distinctions are drawn between coaches and (a) tutors/educators who impart their knowledge, (b) clergy who can help change behavior, or (c) mentors who share their experience with neophytes (Tomei & Mele, 2023).

Finally, in differentiating coaching from other forms of personal improvement, Evers et al. (2006) suggested: (a) training is a more rigid process by which the trainee must adapt themselves to the trainer’s processes and information, and (b) mentoring is more about imparting expertise from one with greater experience to a novice (p. 174). In contrast, the coach may not be an expert in the coachee’s environment or domain but has the trust, respect, patience, and ability to avoid dominating the relationship to be an effective supporter of personal development and evolution (Evers et al., 2006, p. 174).

To summarize, Wiater (2023) advanced a three-legged stool for leadership balanced on a “golden trifecta” of legs consisting of training, mentoring, and coaching, which each provide separate strengths and benefits (p. 107). While articulated using different definitions, examples, and language, the above discussion demonstrates the common Core Values and foundational precepts of controlled, personalized self-improvement that allow coaching to be the powerful tool it has become. However, exploring a concept’s origins helps to understand it.

At times, our parents coached us as they taught, mentored, and supported us. Along our leadership journey, we hopefully added coaches to help us achieve our goals in our faith expedition, school, professions, and other areas. Coaches come in and out of our lives to help us achieve our agenda of becoming better at life.

Only one person in history needed no coaching, and we crucified Him. The rest of humanity can benefit from coaches, as did the 12 Apostles, who required intense coaching and training for years to be able to coach the early Christians. Now, almost 2,000 years later, the Christian church they coached into existence remains a global force for good. Just as Moses was coached by his father-in-law on achieving his goal of being a more effective judge (Exodus 18), Christ coached the Apostles to answer their question of who He was (Mark 8:27-29).

[Clergy And Lay Leaders Coaching Needs And Benefits.](#)

The Lord’s coaching of the earliest clergy remains equally critical today. All clergy and most parish leaders could benefit from coaching, and yet I never find that as a priority in parishes. Regardless of your leadership position, work, status, location, education, or experiences, if you want to achieve your goals, including the II Corinthians 5:10 Moment “Big Ask,” then coaching can be invaluable.

As of this writing, one estimate identified approximately 34,200 coaches in North

America (up 47% from 2019) who produce a staggering 99% satisfaction score among those they help, with an estimated ROI (Return On Investment) of 14.46% (Zhou, 2025). In an experiment to determine coaching's impact, Olivero et al. (1997) provided 31 managers with specific training followed by one-on-one coaching, which resulted in a 22.4% productivity increase when they received training but an 88% increase after they received coaching. Alternatively, Fillery-Travis and Lane (2020) cited other studies finding a 5.7 times ROI from coaching in the form of tangible outputs capable of quantification (p. 29).

As potentially relevant as such items are in the business world, assessing ROI in the Christian church environment is not as easily quantifiable and may require more qualitative data, which is not as abundant. Of course, one can measure the benefit of church coaching in specific areas and tasks. If the coaching of evangelization ministry workers leads them to develop more seekers or the coaching of stewardship ministry workers helps them to produce more volunteers and donations, correlative metrics can be calculated. Indeed, the author's Stewardship Calling coaching ministry has produced countless quantifiable examples of the success of Servant Leadership and Stewardship & Generosity coaching.

Special Needs For Clergy Coaching.

Christians seeking to fulfill their II Corinthians 5:10 "Big Ask" often seek spiritual and life coaching from the clergy God called. So, are those who lead people closer to Christ properly cared for? Duke Divinity School's Clergy Health Initiative identified that U.S. clergy are among the most overworked and stressed-out professionals, which creates many mental health and financial challenges. Indeed, in a survey by The Hartford Institute, almost half of 1,700 clergy confirmed they were considering leaving that calling. According to Columbia Theological Seminary data, approximately 25% of U.S. clergy work 60 hours or more while feeling they are not doing enough for their flock.

In the Lilly Endowment-funded Greek Orthodox Clergy Initiative research, over 50% of clergy reported working over 60 hours per week, and because of no financial coaching, 47% of clergy reported they could not cover a \$5,000 emergency expenditure, 37% have significant medical debt, 28% reported no personal savings, and 23% have seminary education debt of \$20,000 or more they found challenging to repay. Another study found clergy to be more obese and in poorer health than their general population counterparts. The bottom line is that our clergy leaders need coaches and help in many areas.

To travel anyplace new requires the bravery to explore the previously unimagined, along with the coaching and courage to fail until mastery is achieved repeatedly. Only someone free of whatever fear limits them will undertake this heroic journey into the unknown destiny of their calling. Yet many do not appreciate the freedom available to pursue what they are called to do. So, how do we break through the impasse of fear, shortsightedness, or lack of confidence?

Everyone knows people who encourage them to achieve their goals. Clergy provide critical salvific coaching and leadership when needed most, whether in times of loss, ill health, lack of faith, or other challenges. D.R. Silva, the author of Hyper-Grace, concluded, **“My job as a Christian is not to get people to heaven when they die, it’s to get heaven to people while they’re alive”** (Silva, 2014). Thus, Christian lay leaders must ensure clergy are properly coached to help them coach others on the journey to theosis and salvation as we look forward to our “good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.”

Church leaders have come to understand how transformational coaching can become a preeminent vehicle to re-invigorate the leaders of missional programs and ministries by listening, asking questions, and encouraging Christ-centered fulfillment of what the coachee determined was God’s calling (Ogne & Roehl, 2008).

Seven Habits Of Coaching.

Seven habits of great coaching summarized by Ogne and Roehl (2008) included:

1. listening first,
2. caring for people,
3. celebrating progress and the journey,
4. strategizing how to achieve a worthy vision,
5. helping guide people to achieve and succeed in the way they wished to do so,
6. creating additional coaches (coaching disciples), and
7. always challenging how we can better fulfill God’s calling for us, our people, and our churches (Kraft, n.d.).

As to this last point, Ogne and Roehl (2008) made clear the importance of a coach creating and leading willing and high-performing teams by aggressively challenging them to a significant and shared vision. As a powerful example of how coaching can be transformational in other than operational settings, Ray (2020) created a coaching and support program for women of faith who had suffered domestic violence. Invoking all the elements of best-in-class coaching infused with the Christian principles and invocation of the Holy Spirit, women of faith supported by coaches with the right tools positively addressed the domestic violence challenges they faced (Ray, 2020, p. 4).

Uniqueness Of Christian Coaching.

Specifically focusing on the target audience of coaching church and ministry leaders, Bell (2022) identified four major characteristics to improve the coach/coachee relationship and effectiveness, namely:

1. the coach is the coachee’s servant in keeping with Greenleaf’s (1970,

- 1977) servant leadership scholarship,
2. the foundational necessity of earned trust between coach and coachee,
 3. complete clarity and effectiveness of communications between coach and coachee, including honoring the ICF Code of Ethics (International Coaching Federation, 2021),
 4. always asking the right open-ended questions (and follow-up questions) just as the Lord taught and modeled (pp. 94-99).

A critical nuance in Christian coaching is that it is not merely focused on a coachee's desires for personal growth but a prayerful development of what God has called the coachee to become (Adeleye-Olusae, 2011, p. 100). Indeed, a Christian coach must perform all the functions of coaches previously discussed with the often-added responsibility of grounding their supportive journey of coachee development in pursuit of a revelation of the endless potential for growth and service God has invested in each of His creations (Adeleye-Olusae, 2011).

In a specific application, Boakes (2020) defined coaching as "...unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance" (p. 321) and then explained how coaching represented a particular methodology and style to enhance the ministry of an Archdeacon. Having established a critical part of the value proposition for Christian coaching, acknowledging the true roots of coaching requires exploration in the following section of its historical Biblical foundation.

[The Altar Call To Action For Christian Church Leaders.](#)

Humans most fear the unknown, change, death, and public speaking. However, if you value the salvation of your and your family's souls and want to know Jesus and His teachings better, we must invest in the clergy who will coach us through our journey to theosis/oneness with Christ and God. To ensure their readiness at the highest levels, clergy need a spiritual father to whom they confess their sins and coaches who help them improve themselves and their ministries.

If we invest in coaching to help our clergy (and critical lay leaders) achieve their goals of leading us closer to Christ and each other, we can receive a great (eternal) ROI, help answer our Why and avoid "if only" regrets as we pass faithfully to the Kingdom Eternal. What a way to go!

A coaching audit helps leaders determine a parish's readiness to implement coaching. While every coaching element does not need to be present in your parish, the presence of one or more elements that can show coaching efficacy is sufficient to establish coaching readiness (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007, p. 49). The parish must have established a trusting culture since the success of coaching is likely as dependent on trust as any other variable (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007, p. 57). From a cultural perspective, coaching is also more successful when the team members are valued rather than merely seen as a cog in the wheel. Thus, coaching for clergy and key parish leaders can be an effective improvement force multiplier to bring people closer to Christ and each other.