Beginning Well: A guide to a successful start as a new pastor of a church
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1. Make a list of everything that you could possible want to change
    a. As you begin, your <u>objectivity</u> of your new church will be better than at any point in the future and you will never again regain your fresh perspective on the church because you are now part of the system. Thus, it is important to keep and maintain a list of <u>everything</u> you think you want to change and why you want to change it. For example:

I want to change . . .	Why?
The church sign	it's ugly and not readable
Church relationships	unfriendly, unhealthy,
Organizational structure	too many committee's
Atmosphere of the morning	uninspiring, insider focused
Lobby décor	ugly, not guest friendly
Programs	outdated, lack of serving community
"Staff" thinking	they think too small-church

    b. **Note: it is important to start this list on day 1, but as we will see, it is equally important to NOT rush out and change things immediately.**

2. In your first 4-6 months, you have three must-do priorities: listen often (and ask questions), change very little, preach values.
    a. <u>Listen often and ask questions</u>

        The old cliché is often true: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." You most likely became a pastor because you wanted to see God's kingdom grow. The reality is that the only way you'll do that is if you have people going <u>with </u>you. If you want to mobilize your church to effective kingdom advancement, which will most likely mean significant change, then you must have a baseline of trust and relationship. Thus, **make it a strategic priority to meet with many people.** The size of the church will dictate how this is done, but it is imperative to meet, greet, and listen.

        As you listen, <u>ask these kinds of questions</u>: (and just listen, don't argue)
        - Tell me about your faith story
        - What were some of the most exciting times you remember in this church?
        - In your estimation, what were some of the pivotal moments of this church (both positive and negative)?
        - What were significant milestones in the history of the church?

- Think back 5, 10, 20 years: What were some of your dreams for the church that succeeded and what were some dreams that failed? (Follow up question is: what do you think was the difference?)
- I'm new to the area, what do you think our church's reputation is in the community?
- What do you love about this church?
- What is one thing that we are good at as a church?
- We are going to be writing another chapter in this church's history <u>together</u>. What hopes do you have for that chapter?
  - o **Ask people to pray about that next chapter and identify a few prayer partners to especially pray with you.**

As you ask these questions, you are accomplishing many things at once:

- Building rapport and trust
- Learning key historical moments to both celebrate and leverage as impetus for more change in the future
- Finding early adopters and late adopters in the change process
- Discovering the unwritten "core values" of the church and the "sacred cows"
- Discovering who is the key influencer(s) of the church

b. Change very little

One fatal mistake that leaders make is thinking that they need to make changes immediately. Jim Collins, in his book *How the Mighty Fall*, says that the most successful companies are built by deliberate, thoughtful change and that charismatic leaders who come in and change everything instantly <u>always</u> fall. Similarly, the classic John Cotter book, *Leading Change*, illustrates that <u>lasting</u> change requires a strategic, thoughtful process.

A second fatal mistake that pastors make is failing to think systemically about their church. Our default way of thinking is cosmetic change. <u>However, any long-lasting change to an organization happens at the DNA level of the organization.</u> For instance, if your new church is unfriendly to guests, then <u>just</u> changing your guest "connection" card or welcome packet isn't going to work. The reality is that your people needs to begin to <u>care</u> about loving and welcoming people – they need a fundamental shift in attitude (see preach values below).

The reason you change little early is so that you can establish your relationships, get to know your church's strengths, begin to exegete your community, and discover the DNA "lynch pins" that need to be changed.

Caveat: There are always exceptions to this principle (such as an already-brewing decision that can't be punted farther down the road, OR a power-hungry staff or Board member with whom you MAY need to set a boundary). But in general, remember that you can't accomplish as much in a year as you think, and you can accomplish more in 5 years than you think.

c. Preach and celebrate values

What we value as people determines our actions. So preach and cast vision for the values that matter. *Let God begin to work in people's hearts so that when you begin to lead the change process, there is more openness to change*.

The key in this step is to preach the heart-level value changes. Unless you are entering a church that is struggling with significant doctrinal issues and the church is hanging in the balance on which way it will go, stay away from doctrinal issues. The reason? Doctrinal sermons are "safe" for people (at least as typically taught). So for instance, a sermon on "we value the Bible" will meet vast approval, but will NOT spark DNA change. Instead, preach on these types of subjects:

- Who is my neighbor? (setting up DNA to greet and welcome new people, serve the community, etc.)
- Forgiveness (most churches have many holding grudges)
- A series on the Kingdom of God (God's intent)
- A series on Mark 12:29-31 where Jesus redefines the most important thing from "doing right" to Love. And then ask, "what does it mean to Love God? To love our neighbors as a church?" etc.
- If you do preach "doctrine" make sure you do the surprise relevant application. For instance, "we value the bible" could morph into a point that the bible says we should forgive and we don't always do that.
- Etc.

Once you've built your foundation well in the first 4-6 months (while keeping that list of things to change), you are now ready to begin phase 2.

3. Begin a Preferred Future process
   a. Convene a meeting with key leaders (paid and volunteer staff, church Board, and find a way to get the unofficial influencers there too without being blatant about it). This can

be a series of meetings over time, an intense weekend retreat and/or a combination of both of these.

b. Celebrate the Past

    i. This serves several purposes: it provides newer folks with a sense of what the "oldies" have accomplished and also helps some of the "oldies" to feel validated and ready to move on. For older staff, celebrating the past is a great way to help them be ready for change. When celebrating a key change, ask them how that change was (hard, easy, glad now that they made it, etc).

c. Assess the Present

    i. Be ruthlessly honest about the current state of affairs:

        1. What's working in ministry? (what are their outcomes?)
        2. What's the atmosphere of the church?
        3. Are the organizational structures working?
        4. What does our community think about us? (if we would cease to exist, would the community care or notice?)
        5. What's not working?
        6. What do we most dislike about ourselves?
        7. What do we most like?
        8. Are their unresolved tensions in the organization?

d. What are values and assumptions?

    i. What are our sacred cows?
    ii. What do we really value?
    iii. What do we say we value but really don't?
    iv. What do we currently value that we would like to stop valuing?
    v. What would we like to value in the future?

e. Identifying trends and developments

    i. What are the trends in our own demographics?
    ii. What's changing in our community?
    iii. How are younger people identifying with God?

f. Expand Horizons

If people have a difficult time thinking beyond their current way of doing church, you must find a way to inspire them to a potentially preferable future. Help people be stretched in their thinking about the church through use of the following:

    i. Bring in a visionary to talk
    ii. Engage your group to think "out of the box" to generate ideas

      iii. Introduce people to exemplary churches.

g. Vision of a preferred future

This is the key step in the process. Begin by articulating that we know the probable future of the church and state what that future might be. For example:

- We've been 125 people for the last 10 years. We've had our Bible Studies, youth events, worship services, etc. And so it's somewhat reasonable to think that we could keep going for the next 10 years doing the same things – but we might decline actually as our children go off to college, get married, and move away.

Then pose the question: "But is that what we want as a church?" (Remember you've been preaching about the Kingdom of God and what God intends the church to be for the past 6 months at least! So remind them of that if you need to.)

    i. Ask them to list on a paper what they would prefer to be true about the church in the future. (list can be both specific or descriptive)
    ii. Share and dream about that preferred future

"A preferred futuring activity isn't intended to point to the "proper" path to follow. The objective is to help staff to identify a course of action on which the group agrees to pursue." - Richard M. Dougherty

h. Connect images to actions
    i. **A Preferred future activity must be tied to a series of concrete actions** that are designed to move the organization toward its stated preferred future.
        1. Learn to ask, "does this take us closer to our preferred future?" before adding or changing something organizationally.
        2. Break down the over-arching preferred future into step-by-step processes.
        3. Choose an easy change to tackle first and then celebrate when it is accomplished.
        4. Continue to implement change and re-assess the preferred future on a regular basis.

    ii. **This is where your patience with your "change" list in step one pays off**: rather than fighting a lonely, unnecessary battle to change things you will find three thing to be true:
        1. Changes will be suggested by others, instead of you. That's a win.
        2. Changes that ARE controversial will be done with ample support rather than you vs. the church.

3. Some things on your list will go away because you've changed your mind or it is no longer necessary.

     i. Celebrate Progress
          i. It's very important to pick easy changes for quick implementation to both create momentum and provide quick ways to celebrate progress.
          ii. Encourage, support, and celebrate the changes as a leader.

Concluding Thoughts on Preferred Future Exercise (from Richard Doughtery with emphasis by me)

Preferred Futuring as a process is really straightforward and easy to follow. You can use the process to identify your own preferred future or the preferred future of your department, but I also need to insert a caveat. **What can be tricky is to recognize when to emphasize or leave out a specific step in an actual situation** (Or re-order the steps).

When I engage in Assessing the Present, I often use an exercise called "glads" and "sads." When using this exercise I ask participants is to cite happenings that have occurred in their library in the recent past that they are glad of or sad about. But there occasions this exercise needs to be modified so that staff have an opportunity to cite matters that make them "glad, sad or down-right mad." It might also be necessary to conduct such an exercise in a way to ensure the anonymity of individual staff members.

Just keep in mind that all <u>of the steps I've described can be structured in a variety of ways.</u> The challenge is to decide which approach is appropriate for each situation. <u>There is no pat formula because no two no two organizations are alike.</u>

I've never seen either Preferred Futuring fail as a process. That doesn't mean that all applications are successful, but what it does mean is that <u>if failure occurs, it happens in the implementation stage.</u> About a decade ago I was asked to work with the staff of a travel agency. It was a tough assignment because of the conflict that existed between the agency's manager and its staff. They had different visions of the future. As a result of the interpersonal conflict the staff and owner hadn't been able to accomplish any long range planning. I worked with the group for a couple of days. The conflicts were quickly identified, and in this case anonymity wasn't possible, but the group rose above their bickering, and as a result they were able to see how the agency could get a head start on its competitors by becoming visible on the web. They came up a bunch of exciting possibilities. The process worked superbly. I left feeling very good about the sessions.

The group got off to a good start, but I soon learned that the staff had begun to slide back into form behavior patterns. Gradually the interpersonal strife reignited, and soon they lost sight of the vision. Eventually the firm was sold because the participants never really learned to work with each other. What a shame, had they been able to pull together as a team, they would have been rewarded handsomely with their preferred future. What was lacking was leadership with a commitment to follow through.
- End of quote from Richard Doughtery

The Role of Conflict in Organizational Change

Conflict in organizations will happen. If there is no conflict, it <u>may</u> mean that people simply don't care. So, learn to engage conflict for redemptive, better futures in your church rather than "resolve" conflict too quickly.

The challenge is knowing when to avoid a fight, when to instigate a fight, and how to respond if you find yourself suddenly in a fight. Several principles are constant guides in responding to conflict:

1. Keep conflict issue-oriented rather than personal.
2. Leading Change will almost always mean significant conflict – even if you make every correct step in the process. Most people don't like change and even those that do like change struggle when they aren't the ones leading the change. Expect that conflict, remember it's not you, it's the changes you are bringing to the organization.
3. Set healthy boundaries for how conflict is handled.
4. Set healthy boundaries for your own well-being AND for re-charging yourself emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally.
5. Pray.
6. Remember that leadership = responsibility. You do have the responsibility to lead your church toward its God-ordained preferred future. So be wise in how you lead, but once you've carefully thought through the issues, lead even if it means conflict happens.