

# 3-4 D LEADERSHIP

HOW EVERY PASTOR  
CAN LEAD MORE  
EFFECTIVELY

by ALAN NELSON

One of the biggest frustrations  
of those attending church  
conferences

is that, while they appreciate the leadership gifting of many speakers, there is often a significant aptitude difference among attendees. These experts lead intuitively, but convey the idea that “you too can be effective like me.” The all-too-common result is that participants find enormous resistance to their conference-inspired ideas at their churches. This is similar to when gifted intercessors teach on praying, gifted

evangelists train on faith sharing, and gifted administrators explain planning and organization.

If we believe that God vests gifts in varying capacities (Matthew 25, 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4), and that our wiring is a combination of genetics, heritage, and personality, there’s little hope that most pastors *can* become gifted leaders like those teaching on the topic. As The Barna Group and others have reported, very few pastors name leadership as one of their top gifts. Yet leadership is required for change to occur in our churches.

So what’s the typical pastor to do?



The answer has nothing to do with reading leadership books or “psyching up” to a level of leading we’re not apt to obtain. **Gifted leaders can see through a poser almost immediately. A non-leader simply cannot “fake it ‘til you make it.”**



The key for pastors, most of whom are not leaders, is what I call 3-D Leading, perhaps the most overlooked practice in the local church today.

Think of 3-D Leading as back-seat driving. While all leadership is influence, not all influence is leadership. When our kids were young, we’d negotiate where the family would eat. My wife and I weren’t fans of McDonald’s, but even though the steering wheel was in our hands, we’d often find ourselves in the drive-through of the Golden Arches. The reason was our back-seat influencers. We had the power, but they were able to influence that power.

Business people use a parallel practice in finance called other people’s money (OPM). By strategically tapping the resources of others, they’re able to leverage them to make a profit. 3-D Leading is tapping into other people’s influence (OPI).

Nehemiah used OPI when he persuaded King Artaxerxes to give him time off and resources to supervise the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. Another example of OPI in the Bible is Esther. Queen Esther had very little power as a woman in the despot’s harem. As queen, she possessed positional power, but even that was precarious, as her predecessor discovered. Because of Esther’s connection with the King, she shrewdly led up, resulting in the preservation of her people, without possessing power of her own. We do a similar act every time we pray.

**The greatest untapped resource in the church today may be the influence of others**



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**who have power.** Good stewardship requires that we not bury this OPI. At Group, we’re working on a prototype of a unique process that moves churches from their holding patterns as they pursue their unique potential, reaching the next level of development. The key lies in tapping the latent leadership capacity within the church. We’ve discovered that when a church hits a plateau for more than three years, catalyzing leadership gifts have become marginalized. Sometimes this is unintentional and sometimes it’s not. Since catalytic leaders are apt to continually try to change things because they’re wired that way, they tend to be dismissed when things are going well and stability is valued. When the governance body of a church has too many managerial people, the status quo is usually protected. Leaders automatically dismiss themselves from such roles because they don’t relate to “managers” on the board. They become frustrated when they find themselves in a minority among the majority of status quo promoters.


The good news is that 3-D Leading is available to practically every pastor, regardless of gifting or aptitude. The three D’s represent Determine, Disciple, and Deploy. Don’t let the cutesy alliteration distract you from the power of this process.

**DETERMINE**  
The first thing a pastor should do is determine who the natural influencers are within the con-

**gregation. They’re apt to be only 5 to 10 percent, less in larger churches.** The benefit of being gifted in a certain area is that you tend to have the uncommon ability to recognize others with similar gifts. One thing we’ve discovered is that pastors, because most do not have strong leadership gifts, do not intuitively discern other leaders. At times, those who are perceived as “trouble makers” or “control freaks” may be, in reality, frustrated and untapped gifted leaders.

Consider this short checklist for identifying influencers in your congregation:

- Who holds an official position? While position does not make a leader, leaders sometimes get elected by peers to represent them, especially in healthy organizations.
- Who do people talk about? You’ll hear the names of certain individuals in informal conversations, staff meetings, and the church grapevine.
- Who do others listen to? When people are developing an opinion, they’ll often seek input from opinion leaders. In any room of people, you’ll notice a few who are looked to for input, not just talkers or socialites.
- Who has proven leadership? The best predictor of future influence is past leadership. Who has overseen an event that succeeded due to people ▶▶



working together, as opposed to an individual talent or sacrifice? If you're not sure, you can interview people and pick up information on the student body president, captain of the baseball team, regional manager, or president of the Rotary Club.

Next, extend a personal invitation. Once you've identified people with potential influence, invite these people to join you for coffee or a meal. Don't do a "ya'll come" from the pulpit or church bulletin. Leaders will not be herded. You need to invite them one-on-one. Build rapport. Listen intently. Most influencers say they'd be willing to spend time with the pastor if they were asked, but most pastors seem to be busy with other things, so that one-on-one time doesn't happen.

Finally, prioritize your time and establish mutual trust: Find out what is important to these leaders. What are their passions? their ministry hot buttons? Who are their gatekeepers (such as their spouse, children, friends, administrative assistants, colleagues)? Note their birthdays and anniversaries, and find any excuse to keep in touch. Trust is relational and very necessary before you're able to tap their influence.

## DISCIPLE

Spiritual formation is essential before unleashing a leader. I talked to a retired CEO of a large national corporation, who expressed frustration with his pastor and board. He said that the pastor only interacted with him in formal settings and there was little time for personal dialogue or spiritual development. The pastor seemed aloof to this power-wielding individual, who would have made time had the invitation been extended. Many pastors keep congregational influencers out of reach for fear that they'll take over or sabotage their ministries. The irony is that the best way

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to get knocked out is to keep a boxer at arm's length. It's best to embrace opponents, and to keep them close.

Scripture says that a new believer should not be put into a position of church leadership (1 Timothy 3). The issue is not so much about tenure as it is about maturity. Think of time qualitatively versus quantitatively. The problem is perceiving people with longevity as mature. Most pastors are surrounded by leaders who should not be given responsibility but are simply because they've adapted to church culture and are experienced in doing church work.

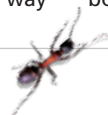
*Vetting* means to appraise, verify, or check for accuracy, authenticity, and validity. **Pastors need to spiritually vet their influencers before unleashing them with power and responsibility. The pastor should not let go of this on a personal basis, regardless of time and other ministry pressures.** Moses did this in Exodus 18, as he raised overseers to groups of 10, 50, 100, and 1,000. Jesus practiced this during his three-year journey with the Twelve. Whether it's a six- to 12-month covenant group, a two-year Bible study, or some other formal spiritual formation program, the pastor should provide personalized prep with influencers. The process is slow and arduous, but powerful for stabilizing influential church leaders.

In 3-D Leading, the primary role of the pastor is to serve as a chaplain and spiritual adviser to the governance board and informal influencers. This

flies in the face of the wisdom preached at pastors' conferences, most of which promote the idea that a pastor must lead and cast vision. However, vetting makes far more sense if you trust the concept of gifting. Congregants gifted in leading can smell a wannabe leader a mile away as he or she is trying to lead because he or she believes that's what they're supposed to do. **When you begin elevating people who are proficient leaders, they will attract others. The reason that most church boards have few strong leaders is that when leaders are asked to consider running for a governance position, they look at others in these roles and say to themselves, "Naw, I don't think so."** They'll come up with all kinds of excuses, but for most, it's that they don't respect those already on the team as leaders. Few influencers want to waste their time managing minutia and being corralled by polity, structural barriers, and personality issues, so they graciously decline.

## DEPLOY

Once an influencer is spiritually vetted, the pastor then deploys him or her into a role that combines gifts with passions and availability. This seems to be the most difficult part of 3-D Leading for a few reasons. Pastors feel that they are abdicating their role as leader when they empower laity to run with the ball. This sense of responsibility becomes dysfunctional when we hold on to ministry





instead of entrusting it to those more gifted. Think *stewardship*. When we've not done our job determining and discipling gifted leaders, we resist deploying them, and rightly so. Anyone with more than a decade in church leadership has had a personal experience of betrayal by a lay leader or staff member. We've heard the stories of church boards gone wild, so we tighten the noose on church leadership. As a result, the organization chugs along on three cylinders instead of eight.

Healthy deployment involves three elements: progressive release, empowerment, and staying in touch. Progressive release means that you begin to engage your disciplined leaders in projects that will not significantly harm the church if there's a train wreck. But don't think *trivial* because any capable leader will balk at a task that a teenager could manage. We need

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to use our churches as leader labs, testing the metal of our congregants, along with testing their loyalty, attitude, maturity, and capacity. After someone has succeeded at a somewhat significant church event like a retreat, a banquet, or a special project, then they'll be ready for a position on the board, the capital campaign, or a new church initiative. Jesus did this with his disciples, follow and then sending pairs, and finally turning

over the entire movement to their leadership.

True unleashing includes empowerment, providing opportunity with authority. Both of these have to do with responsibility, but if you put someone in charge of a task that has responsibility but little opportunity, it becomes managerial and you're not apt to engage the spirit and vision of a gifted leader. Opportunity means there's the potential for leaders to make a big difference, to change lives, and to transform an organization. Authority has to do with the resources that accompany the opportunity. Can the leader make decisions without running everything through you or the board? Is the budget available? **The more you hem in people with horsepower, the more frustrated you'll make them, and the less they'll trust you.**

Far too many pastors and boards micromanage ministry. The typical church in America is over-managed and under-led. If you've adequately vetted your leaders, which is the forte of most pastors, and provided mid-size tests for leaders to prove themselves, then it's time to empower them. Jesus did this in about three years, telling the Twelve that they'd do greater works than he'd done. They did...because he empowered them. Deploying leaders requires faith—the belief that all does not depend on us and that God has preceded our efforts.

But empowerment is not disconnection. The pastor must continue to keep in

### THE BIG BUT

In spite of the American myth that everyone can become a leader, I find no research that supports that belief, when you define leadership as inspiring and organizing people to work together toward a common goal. Yet when most people talk about leading, they imply leading "down," meaning gathering followers who work together as a team. I believe that this type of leading is indeed a God-given aptitude and that everyone only has a certain capacity, as the parable of the talents implies. BUT, and here's the big but, I'm also convinced that we can teach and learn how to lead "laterally" and "up." This involves working with people who have power and influencing them. Lateral leading may be with a peer or colleague, creating trust and persuading a person on our basic level organizationally, to make a decision that will benefit our vision and interest. Leading up involves creating alliances with people who have more power than us in a certain setting, and speaking into their lives in such a way that they change their decisions toward the direction we deem important. The vernacular for this is *brown nosing* or *kissing up*, but savvy influencers know how to tap the power of others. These skills can be learned. Pastors who lead laterally and up can tap the leadership capacity of others in their congregations.





touch, to have regular check-ins with the deployed leaders. The pastor can help shape the vision, make sure it's biblically grounded, and help the leader remain accountable through prayer and informal conversations. If you do not intentionally stay in touch, you increase the risk of a rogue leader losing focus. But staying in touch is different from micromanaging. The pastor-coach is able to ask strategic questions, assisting the leader in thinking through his or her decisions.

The error of many well-intended conference teachers is that they assume most pastors are visionary. Vision is the single most difficult thing to teach. I'm convinced that vision is far more about intuition, right-brain thinking, gut, and gifting than it is about careful planning and calculation. Reading a book on vision just doesn't cut it. You can talk

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vision until you're blue in the face to people without the gift of faith and leading, and you won't get them to come up with a vision that inspires the throng. Gifted leaders can't help but cast vision. It oozes from their pores. They're hard-wired to see in people and circumstances. That's why deployment is an exercise in aka *faith*. You mean

letting a few staff, lay leaders, and marginalized influencers run the ball and cast vision for ministries in "your" church? Jesus did, but only after he'd determined those with leadership gifts and then disciplined them. This is the power of moving from Me to We.

There's good news and bad news for the church in America. The bad news is that without a significant act of God, thousands of congregations will plunge into the abyss of dysfunction and irrelevance within the next quarter century. Thousands more will close their doors and disappear.

The good news is that God has already placed resources in most congregations for them to turn around. This seed is the leadership potential of individuals who've become marginalized; gifted leaders who already produce great results in the marketplace and social sector, who merely need to be disciplined and deployed.

Pastors don't have to steer the church from the front seat. They can drive from the back seat by tapping the potential of other people's influence. 🗣️

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## LEADING UP VS. LEADING Laterally

### LEADING UP:

- ▶ Senior pastor to key lay leaders
- ▶ Associate pastor to senior pastor
- ▶ Pastor to denomination judicatory (in some churches)
- ▶ Senior pastor to board (in some churches)

### CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADING UP

- ▶ Knowing the gatekeepers of people with power
- ▶ Doing homework on interests and pet peeves
- ▶ Initiating meetings for relationship building
- ▶ Respecting communication styles and time
- ▶ Offering assistance
- ▶ Finding how your interests can benefit the leader

### LEADING Laterally:

- ▶ Senior pastor to key lay leaders
- ▶ Senior pastor to board (in some churches)
- ▶ Staff member to staff member

### CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADING Laterally

- ▶ Understanding what resources colleagues possess
- ▶ Establishing friendly rapport for trust building
- ▶ Offering assistance and resources when able
- ▶ Finding how your interests can benefit the peer
- ▶ Going to bat for their causes with leaders when able
- ▶ Genuinely affirming them among colleagues