

Maximize

XPastor Seminar
February 22, 2018

You've heard the adage, "Develop leaders." We all believe it. We all talk it. Ideally everyone in the organization is growing spiritually, personally, and professionally. Imagine a place that is being cultivated by Christ *and* being energized at every level of individual and professional engagement. It would be at the top of every Favorite Workplaces list.

Such leadership engagement, however, is not the reality for many churches. Long seasons of constant change and stress wear down tenured leaders and corporate cultures. One storm front of change after another brings additional clouds of stress, eventually affecting work patterns through a day, week, month, or longer season. Our knee-jerk reaction to heightened change and stress is to hunker down, eliminate distractions, focus on immediate crises or tasks, and avoid the drain of relationships. Even our physiology closes ranks in seasons of change and stress.

Leaders use two words to describe leadership development during seasons of stress—manage and strengthen. Though these are important tasks, a wise leader will also seek to *maximize*. Seasons of change and stress have unique opportunities for maximizing leaders.

I. The distinction between managing, strengthening, and maximizing

The distinction in this workshop focuses more on perspective—a shift of purpose—rather than a paradigm shift. Consider the following definitions:

- To “manage” is to direct energies and resources so as to achieve a determined purpose.
- To “strengthen” is to give inward physical, mechanical, or emotional power or force to something that requires more effort.
- To “maximize” is to increase something to the greatest possible amount or degree. It is to make something fresh, new, and better. It is to discover something that was previously unseen, undeveloped, or insignificant and make it effective. Many practitioners believe that *protection* and *stability* are the primary goals during seasons of change. Yet maximizing—important during the normal rhythms of ministry—is ironically more important during seasons of change.

If your perspective is on managing, you're focused on current external structures and behaviors. If your perspective is on strengthening, you're focused on the inward psychological drives/capacities of individuals in the midst of change and stress. If your perspective is on maximizing, you're focused on the potentials in the future.

II. The reasons to maximize during seasons of change and stress

four reasons that leaders should be committed to maximizing, rather than just managing:

- A. We should be committed to maximizing because people will not be stimulated to grow by relationships outside the church when we live in a culture that is increasingly isolated and divisive.
- B. We should be committed to maximizing because people drift from the intentionality of growth.
- C. We should be committed to maximizing because the presence and power of God is heightened on the front edge of growth.
- D. We should be committed to maximizing because we all need other people to help us discern, stretch, and grow. In his excellent book, *The Power of the Other*, Henry Cloud affirmed, “The neglected truth is that the invisible attributes of relationship, the connection between people, have real, tangible, and measurable power.”¹
- E. Your example of learning during seasons of suffering and stress:

III. Risks for a maximizing leader

- A. We risk losing the “approval” (if we dare call it such) of those who fear sacrifice and brokenness.
- B. We risk investing in something that may not touch the current bottom-line of your organization. You may see the fruit of your investment only months, years later, or actually never see the fruit in your organization (it may only spring up somewhere else).
- C. We risk struggling with impatience as we wait upon God’s timetable. We must patiently release the staff member into the open spaces in Christ’s timetable, undoubtedly different than our open spaces in our plans.
- D. We risk disappointment when the staff member decides, consciously or subconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, to bury the opportunities that you’re suggesting.
- E. We risk discovering how much we ourselves still need to grow—i.e. the shallow pools in our own life.

¹ Cloud, Henry. *The Power of the Other: The startling effect other people have on you, from the boardroom to the bedroom and beyond-and what to do about it* (p. 6). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition. This is a recommended book for further reading.

IV. How do you maximize your staff's culture and effectiveness during seasons of change, even during seasons of great change? What habits² would a wise maximizer implement?

1. Being incarnational. Model the courage to change one's mindset.
2. Being curious—getting to know the person. Be curious about the staff member's soul. The psalmist often conversed with himself, pondering, "O, my soul." Be interested in knowing what's happening inside the staff member's mind and heart. Listen carefully to what staff says and does. According to the popular slang, "Keep your ear to the ground and your finger on the pulse." Every season of change and stress has its own glossary of terms that reveal what's really needed in the experience of a staff person. Researchers call this emotional and relational awareness.

Ask good questions: What is frustrating or irritating you these days? Anything discouraging you? If you've got the time, what are you reading, visiting, touring, learning? How would you complete the one-word dream, "If . . . ?" So what's God telling you? What is God bringing to an end in your life? What's dying so that something else comes to life?

3. Being observant. As a leader, learn "to see the small details in stories and activities that others may ignore or fail to recognize as significant."³
4. Being fickle. The word, fickle, for our purposes is interesting: "moving from one idea to the next without becoming fixated, developing deep biases or overanalyzing each idea in the moment."⁴ Much like a coach, listen to different aspects of a staff member's conversation and experience. Maximizers will follow—even pursue—various lines of thought, seemingly unrelated, until threads and patterns emerge in a person's life.
5. Being thoughtful. Take time to hear both surface and deep longings and struggles in the staff member's life. Be patient to build a meaningful perspective about alternatives, hopes, and skills.
6. Being free. Empower them with the authority and freedom to stretch, the freedom to fail, not hide.
7. Being formational. Understand what is needed for spiritual and professional impact. Every step, circumstance, and scene in a person's life is important. So become a spiritual director in one's leadership. You get to ask Christ for wisdom to know who every staff member is and what every staff member could become. Think of yourself as a mirror of what God is doing in the staff member, not as a spotlight for your own musings; you have the opportunity to be the formative person in the life of your staff.

² Bhargava, Rohit. *Non-Obvious: How to Think Different, Curate Ideas & Predict The Future* (Kindle Locations 441-444). Ideapress Publishing. Kindle Edition. In his book, *Non-Obvious*, Bhargava described five core habits of great curators who regularly discover new unheralded treasures in the fields of art and sculpture. He transferred these principles of art curatorship to discovering new trends in business, technology, and the world. His core habits also transfer to leadership that maximizes others. I have numerically and reflectively expanded upon his core habits for the purposes of this workshop.

³ Bhargava, Kindle Locations 479-480.

⁴ Bhargava, Kindle Locations 481-482.

8. Being elegant in your encouragement. Once again, the word, elegant, is interesting with art curators and trend observers “seeking beautiful ways to describe ideas that bring together disparate concepts in a simple and understandable way.”⁵ You can lessen anxiety, inspire change, and generate new ideas with picturesque descriptions. A maximizing leader will describe future possibilities, potential strengths, and movements of God in ways that catch attention and interest. Confidently offer thoughtful, hopeful ideas of something great, even risking the criticism that you sound “flowery.” Be willing to affirm, “I believe in you.” Though it’s a stretch to describe it this way, maximizers declare possibilities into realities, like pleasant seeds planted into fertile soil, when a staff member decides to act on a bigger stage because of your encouragement.
9. Being architectural as an organizational leader. Create the world in which they can succeed. Help them so they don’t stay stuck in the same expectations and environment.

V. Conclusion

Most of our staff subtly and quietly believe they are to be doing something more meaningful, but they can’t get their mind around what it is and how to get there. One of the ideal times to help them get there is during change and stress. Unlike one’s first impression, such seasons offer ideal opportunities to go beyond managing and strengthening to maximizing.

⁵ Bhargava, Rohit. *Non-Obvious: How to Think Different, Curate Ideas & Predict The Future* (Kindle Locations 485-487). Ideapress Publishing. Kindle Edition.