

MentorNet #33

Coaches Empowering Shepherds

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After rising back to life and before going up into heaven, Jesus shared with his appointed apostles a vision to disciple the nations, a strategy starting at Jerusalem, and a promise of power to do so, the Holy Spirit Himself.

Coaching authority Gary Collins* said that coaches do something similar to what Jesus did. “They help people find vision and develop strategies for reaching their goals, but coaches also empower people to move forward. Then the coach withdraws (in a way less dramatic than the ascension of Jesus).” While admitting that we cannot confer upon folks that spiritual power which comes only from God, Collins suggested that coaches (mentors) can empower others in eight ways. (The guidelines below are his, the comments come from us.) We added a ninth way that we believe to be a vital part of empowering new shepherds.

- **Guiding as they clarify (and cast) a vision for what they seek to do.**

Over several weeks and months of mentoring novice congregational shepherds and church planters, a mentor with foresight repeatedly asks them, “What would it take to help your flock obey Jesus” in this or that area of church development. Most will reflect on the question and come up with their own fresh vision and plan. A wise coach seldom dictates to novice leaders what to do. Instead, he helps them to think through their plans in a way that needed action becomes obvious.

- **Helping them determine what they need to reach their goals.**

Shepherds and church planters who have been “contaminated” by Western traditions often imagine that they require more education, expensive buildings, better equipment, highly-trained staff members, well-paid tithe payers, etc. To keep churches simple enough to reproduce without a lot of money, mentors must help their trainees to depend on available resources, easily imitable methods, and the five-fold gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to his flock (Eph. 4:11-12). A wise coach passes on a ‘light baton.’

- **Guiding as they get necessary training.**

Both classroom instruction and face-to-face mentoring have their place in training novice leaders in a church-planting movement. In the first year or so of novice leaders’ training, they must be mentored regularly. Classroom instruction provides a lot of helpful information for possible future use, but only personal coaching can provide the day-to-day guidance that leaders need in order to help their flocks to grow and reproduce.

- **Helping people find and manage needed resources.**

Part of most mentoring sessions is the trainer listening to each trainee in order to learn what their flocks need now. The mentor then refers to his “menu” of materials from which to make reading assignments that will help them carry out their immediate plans. Moreover, mentors often model new skills for their trainees and accompany them as they deal with people to practice those skills together.

- **Teaching them to create conditions that make success more likely.**

Researchers and specialists like David Garrison (*Church Planting Movements*), Mikel Neumann (*Home Groups for Urban Cultures*) and George Patterson (*Church Multiplication*

* June 19, 2003. Collins’ free, regular electronic newsletter is available from www.GaryRCollins.com.

Guide) have described the conditions under which churches and cells will likely reproduce in various culture groups. Mentors help their trainees to create or to find those conditions. One such condition that often is lacking is freedom for church planters, shepherds of new churches or cells and the flocks themselves to take initiative in their development and reproduction. A wise coach will provide guidance without controlling.

- **Helping them discover their gifts and unique abilities, because people are most empowered when they build on their strengths.**

A helpful exercise that mentors use with novice trainees is to have them fill in three columns of an empty chart. The columns are labelled Non-negotiable, Strong Preference and Weak Preference. As the mentor asks about past experience, training, different ministries, dreams, and so forth, the trainees class their responses under one or another of the columns. In their following sessions together, they envision how to build on the trainees' non-negotiable points, that is, areas of strength about which they have strong convictions and leading from the Holy Spirit. A wise coach keeps in mind these strengths and helps others to build on them.

- **Modelling what we teach.**

Mentors of novice shepherds and church planters are often themselves novice workers who have a little more experience than do their trainees. Thus, they understand each other's needs and struggles, and gladly share what they know and how to do it. Furthermore, the mentoring process (described in earlier MentoNet articles) can easily be followed by trainees as they begin training even newer leaders, in turn. Thus wise mentors use only easily imitable training methods.

- **Reminding Christians that the Holy Spirit who empowered the early disciples, still empowers Christ followers who want God's plan for their lives and who determine to be the people God meant them to be.**

Dependence on God who always does his part while we learn to do our part is an indispensable part of all successful congregational leadership and reproduction. The power and the spiritual gifts to do the work of the Lord come supernaturally and are always enough. Dependence on money and foreign methods usually eclipses the very power that the Lord Jesus promised to us. Thus, when churches commission new leaders by laying hands on them, they affirm their reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **'Laying hands' on those who are ready to start shepherding, praying for power to carry out their shepherding responsibilities.**

We believe this apostolic practice, found in Acts 13:1-3 and 1 Timothy 4:14 to be more than a mere ritual. We have witnessed and experienced the difference this practice makes in the confidence and enhanced capability in new leaders who have received this blessing of prayerful commissioning by other elders.

To find mentoring tools and sites, visit <<http://www.MentorAndMultiply.com>>.

To obtain information on *Train & Multiply*[®] (pastoral training combined with church planting) write to Galen Currah <Galen@Currah.us>.

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