

Passing the Torch to the Next Generation

Rich Nathan
March 16 & 17, 2019
The Story Continues
Numbers 27:12-23

The father of modern management is a man named Peter Drucker. He once said,

Slide (with photo of Peter Drucker)
There is no success without a successor.

In other words, it's up to today's leaders to develop the next generation. Otherwise, previously great universities or companies or churches are just one hit wonders. They last a generation and then they disappear when their former leader retires or dies.

Success is incredibly hard to sustain. We see this in sports all the time. There is a team that will win one title, maybe two. But then injuries and age catches up with them. To win year after year with an entirely new team like the New England Patriots under Bill Belichick or the UCLA Bruins under John Wooden or the Yankees from the 1920's to the 1960's under a number of different managers. Sustained success is the mark of an extraordinary organization.

It's not just sports teams and businesses that have struggled to succeed past the first generation of leaders. We frequently see that in churches. How many of you are familiar with Robert Schuller and the Crystal Cathedral?

Slide
Robert Schuller pic

Schuller was an incredible success story. He launched his church right next to Disneyland in Southern California. He launched an incredibly popular TV ministry called "The Hour of Power". In 1980, he hired the famous architect Phillip Johnson to build the Crystal Cathedral. It had over 10,000 panes of glass and 3,000 seats. Schuller said it was the first church auditorium that was designed to function as a television studio.

In the late 1980's, Schuller built a \$250 million Family Life Center. When he turned 69, he announced that he was going to turn his ministry over to his son. Then he announced that he was going to continue to be the pastor of the church and yanked his son from "The Hour of Power" TV program. Things started to spiral down. Eventually, the entire ministry ended up declaring bankruptcy. There were hundreds of millions of dollars in debt. The Crystal Cathedral was sold to the Roman Catholic Church. And this

incredibly successful ministry stopped after one generation. The torch was not successfully passed.

Every leader is an interim leader. Every business owner is an interim business owner. No one lasts forever. We're all just one more link in the chain. The chain will either be cut with us or it will continue. Since no leader continues forever, the book *Next* suggests that

Slide

It's never too early to start succession planning.

Experts say

Slide

The best succession planning is gradual, thoughtful, intentional and one with lots of information shared along the way.

Passing the torch is something we've had to constantly think about here at Vineyard Columbus. We have created a church that's been incredibly intentional about developing our own leaders and then sending them out.

We've sent out over 30 church plants from this church. Well over 1,000 people from Vineyard Columbus have joined those church plants over the years. We've sent out dozens of full-time missionaries. We have planted churches all over the world. In our church, like every other church, we have pastors who move on to take positions at other churches or move to other cities, pastors who retire. We've constantly had to think about how to develop leaders and pass the torch to the next generation. I mentioned to you over the past couple of weeks that we are engaged right now in a giving campaign titled "The Story Continues".

Slide



The story of Vineyard Columbus is not over. God continues to be at work in our church, calling us along with every other church to partner together with him as his image-bearers to spread his good and kind rule throughout Central Ohio and throughout the world. The leadership of this church is praying that the future of Vineyard Columbus and those connected to it will be much brighter than it ever was in the past.

How can our story continue? How can we pass the torch successfully to the next generation? I want to talk about that today in a message I titled, “Passing the Torch of Leadership to the Next Generation”. Let’s pray.

Let me read to you from the Old Testament book of Numbers.

Slide Numbers 27:12-23

¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. ¹³After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, ¹⁴for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes.” (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

¹⁵Moses said to the LORD, ¹⁶“May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community ¹⁷to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

¹⁸So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. ¹⁹Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. ²⁰Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. ²¹He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”

²²Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. ²³Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

How can we pass the torch successfully to the next generation?

Slide

Successfully passing the torch involves imitating biblical heroes

There are so many examples in the Bible of one generation passing the torch to the next generation. Moses spent years training and developing Joshua and then he passes the torch to Joshua to lead the nation of Israel.

Elijah trained Elisha as his apprentice. He developed Elisha to be his successor. Jesus spent his final years on earth preparing the 12 to carry on his mission. He handed the church off to his disciples. He taught them, he trained them, he modeled life for them. He lived with them. He empowered his disciples to carry on his work in the world. By word and deed, Jesus demonstrated that there is no success without successors.

In the book of Acts, Barnabas disciplined Paul who eventually became the leader in the relationship. And Paul developed a number of important leaders in the early church. One stands out, and that's Timothy. Paul traveled with Timothy. He taught him. He encouraged him. He modeled good leadership for Timothy. And eventually, he entrusted the very important church at Ephesus to Timothy. And Timothy was encouraged by Paul to continue to hand the torch off to the next generation.

Here's what we read:

Slide 2 Timothy 2:1-2

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

The Bible is a book about the continuing story of God's work in the world. One generation is called to train up the next generation. The church is always one generation away from extinction. The torch always has to be handed on. Leaders always have to be on the lookout for their successors.

Successfully passing the torch involves imitating biblical heroes. And...

Slide

Successfully passing the torch involves finishing well

You know, the first task of a leader who wants to successfully pass the torch is to finish well. The Apostle Paul was absolutely obsessed with finishing well. Paul understood life to be a race that you have to run until you cross the finish line. You can't stop five yards short of the tape.

This past year, we've heard of nationally known church leaders, church leaders who have huge influence, church leaders who I respected from afar, who were discovered to be involved in affairs and sexually harassing behavior and addiction and molestation of

children, abuses of power and cover up. People have left churches by the droves. It's difficult for the successors to regain trust and initiate new vision.

Do you know there comes a time when the Lord will put somebody on the shelf because of repeated acts of abuse, disobedience or immorality? When the Lord will say, "You are disqualified."

Leaders, potential leaders, people, your doctrine of grace must include the notion of the Lord's freedom to say to you after repeated acts of disobedience, "You have disqualified yourself from leadership in my Son's body." I don't believe that a person can be disqualified from a relationship with God – if Jesus is really in your life, nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But I do believe that the Lord reserves the right to put a person on the shelf and to say, "You are disqualified from your present position of leadership."

Leith Anderson was a very successful leader not only of his own church, Wooddale Church in Minnesota, but also for decades the National Association of Evangelicals. Leith Anderson wrote a wonderful book on leadership 10 years ago titled

Slide

Leadership that Works

One of his principles of leadership was this:

Slide

Don't do anything stupid.

Here's what Leith said:

Slide

"I can't think of a more tactful way to say this: don't do anything stupid. Don't join a very long list of proven and potential leaders who did not finish well because they said or did something stupid and otherwise inconsistent with everything they had believed and taught.

The temptation comes in different forms for different leaders, but the top three have always been money, sex and power. Do whatever you need to do to avoid stupidity in these and other areas of weakness. Form an accountability group. Get counseling. Seek treatment. Whatever. But don't do anything stupid if you want to finish well!

Here's the thing about Moses. Though he stumbled badly several times in his life, he always got back up! He repeatedly turned his face back to the Lord. He modeled what repentance looks like. While he didn't get to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, Moses is an example of a man who finished well.

Slide

Successfully passing the torch involves imitating biblical heroes
Successfully passing the torch involves finishing well

Slide

Successfully passing the torch involves investing in future leaders

Here's what we read:

Slide Numbers 11:28

²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"

In church history, there are so many wonderful examples of individuals being developed through an internship or an apprenticeship. The great church father, Ambrose, trained Augustine in leadership. Martin Luther had an apprentice, a man named Phillip Melancthon, who was the author of the famous Lutheran Confessions.

A century and a half ago, people didn't go to seminary to become pastors. They would often move into the home of an older, experienced pastor and they learned from that pastor the disciplines of devotions to God. They were able to watch the pastor study and pray. The older pastor taught the younger intern how to preach and how to lead a congregation. The great Charles Spurgeon habitually trained young men to become pastors and then sent them out.

That's what I've tried to do over the past 25 years. I've had the privilege of having a number of interns who I've been able to raise up for pastoral ministry. Eric Pickerill who, along with his wife Julia, has been chosen by our leadership team to be my successors – Eric was my first intern back in the early 1990's.

Jay Pathak, who planted a successful church in Denver, interned for me. So did Jeff Cannell, who planted Central Vineyard. Amanda Nash who oversees Community Life here at Vineyard Columbus. Jonathan Rue who recently took over the pastorate of the Desert Vineyard and Insoo Kim. More recently, Dr. Charles Montgomery who pastors Vineyard Columbus East Campus interned for me as did Paige Goslin, one of our small group pastors. I've had intern after intern.

I mentioned to you that this giving campaign has four targets.

Slide

- New Campuses
- New Buildings

We want to send out new missionaries

Slide

- New Missionaries

Especially to reach Muslims and to people in post-Christian secular society. But we also want to develop

Slide

- New Leaders

To do that, part of this giving campaign is designed to create a Pastors Residency Program. The goal would be to bring highly qualified women and men to do a two-year full-time residency here at Vineyard Columbus and to have us invest personally and deeply in developing these men and women to be future campus pastors, church planters, missionaries, pastors in other churches. We want them drenched in God's Word and Vineyard's DNA. By 2025, we want to invest in at least 12 high quality young leaders that we have developed in order to pass the torch to the next generation.

Slide

Successfully passing the torch involves selecting the right leaders

What kind of leaders are we looking at? The sort of folks we're seeking to develop to pass the torch of leadership to – for the purpose of helping to remember these remarks, I've grouped them under three C's. The leaders' Calling, the leaders' Confidence, and the leaders' Courage. The three C's of successful leadership – calling, confidence, and courage.

Slide

The Leader's calling

We take this from the life of Joshua. Here's what we read:

Slide Joshua 1:1-2

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

We're not told how God spoke to Joshua. In fact, often in scripture, we're simply told that the word of the Lord came to one of the prophets. We're not told exactly how Joshua knew that the Lord was speaking to him; whether it was through a dream or a

vision or a prophetic word. It doesn't really matter how you hear from God. You just need to hear. A clear sense of calling is fundamental to selecting a leader.

Reformation tradition tells us that calling is not just a private matter, God speaking only to you as an individual. But every individual calling requires public confirmation. When someone tells me that they are called to pastor, I want to ask them what have they heard from other leaders who know them well? Are they experiencing a growing ministry of leadership, of teaching and gathering, of leading people to Jesus, have they ever raised up another leader? Have they heard from their small group leader? What does their spouse say? What are those over them in authority in the Lord saying about this? In my mind, one of the greatest reasons why the church in America has been so ineffective is that it is led by many people who have not been called by God to paid ministry.

I say this with all affection. There are many folks with the title of pastor in churches today who were not called by God. People try to occupy a position in the church out of their own neurotic need to establish their own importance, fulfill their parents' dreams for their lives, or their spouses' needs. We can never go beyond the calling that God has for our lives. We can never make a more significant contribution to the kingdom than the contribution that the Lord has assigned for us.

The issue of calling immediately leads to the second C of leadership selection and that is confidence.

Slide

The Leader's confidence

Here's what we read:

Slide Joshua 1:2-5

²“Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Success is rooted in confidence that God is with you in your ministry. It's confidence in God's promise of his presence is rooted in someone's knowledge of their calling. God called me to this. Whatever God calls you to, he will be with you. Do you know, friend, beyond a shadow of a doubt of a calling God has on your life? Do you know your called?

You can be confident that whether you're experiencing opposition or not, God will see you through.

Calling – we have to know that we're called. Confidence – we know that the Lord is with us. And, finally, Courage.

Slide

The Leader's courage

Three times in this text, Joshua is told to be strong and very courageous.

Slide Joshua 1:6

⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Slide Joshua 1:7

⁷ “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Slide Joshua 1:9

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

This is one of the theme verses of this giving campaign. Why is courage so essential to your future success in life and ministry? Why is courage so essential to Vineyard Columbus' future story? Because we're always in a war. Because the Kingdom of God at every turn is opposed by Satan's Kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. We can't accomplish anything in ministry without having the naysayers tell us why we're wrong and explaining why people will leave.

The very first thing that I did when I became our first senior pastor was to host leadership meetings on five consecutive Sunday evenings. During those five evenings I communicated that it was God's call on our church, just like it was God's call on every church, to reach out to the community and to grow.

I was severely critiqued. Some people said that I wanted the church to grow because of my ego. Some people said that I was destroying the church. Long-time members left. But God was faithful and began to grow the church and we started to see a steady stream of people coming to know Jesus and bringing fresh life into the church.

And then when we joined Vineyard and pursued the power of the Spirit, some people said they didn't sign up for emotionalism. Other people said that they had signed up for

a biblical church, not a church full of the Holy Spirit. And so, again, some people left. But you know, we experienced the power of the Spirit and we started to see people healed and other people delivered. And the church was filled with God's presence and continued to grow.

When I started to talk about racial diversity and God's desire to break down dividing walls and to reconcile people - that one of the marks of the kingdom was diversity, that before the throne of God we are going to see every tongue and tribe and people and nation, and we ought to see that reflected in local congregations today. Two of my dearest friends came over to my home; one of them I had led to Christ and personally disciplined, the other I personally led back to Christ. Dear friends left. They said the church was changing too much. They didn't like the kids who were coming to our youth ministry. They left, but God brought people from nearly 130 nations.

And when I began teaching about social justice, we had a lot of opposition and folks said that we were becoming liberal; we were becoming political. But God led us to build the Vineyard Community Center. I could go on and point to change after change that we've made at the church - purchasing property and capital campaigns and all the rest. Every single time there has been opposition.

Now we are at another crossroads. Are we as a church going to look backwards and build monuments to our pastor success or will we look ahead to and pray and give and sacrifice to accomplish what God still wants to do through Vineyard Columbus in reaching the next generations with the gospel message which alone can save and transform lives?

Successfully passing the torch to the next generation involves God's selection of the new leader

We read in Numbers 27:15-17 these words:

Slide Numbers 27:15-17

Moses said to the Lord, "May the Lord, the God of every human spirit, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

There is a tremendous principle for passing the torch to the next generation. The leader does not appoint the successor. The Lord appoints the successor. Moses did not submit a slate of candidates to the Lord and say, "OK, God, I've narrowed the list down to these four people. My strong preference, if you don't mind, is Candidate number two."

Slide 1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

What it took to lead the children of Israel through the wilderness is different than what it is going to take to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan River and do armed battles with the Canaanites. Only God knew the kind of leader needed for the future. What it took to lead Vineyard Columbus and our campuses in the past is different than what it will take to lead our church and its campuses in the future.

But we don’t know the future. That’s why we need to seek God as we pass the church. Our human reason will take us only so far. We need God’s revelation.

Let me apply this to the pledge you will make to this giving campaign I mentioned last week that we are asking everyone who considers Vineyard Columbus their church home – whether a member or not – to make a three year pledge.

These pledges will be made at a Celebration Service on Palm Sunday weekend, April 13 and 14. But how do you decide how much to pledge?

There are two very different approaches to deciding our pledge. One is human reason by itself. We look at our bank balance and subtract out our financial needs and our wants and give a percentage of what we have left over.

The other is simpler – it’s revelation. We ask God, “What do you want me to pledge?” And then listen. If you’re married, take some time over the next few weeks to pray separately. God, what do you want us to pledge? Then come together and pray over what you heard. Marlene and I have done this very thing in our previous giving campaigns and we’ll do it again for this campaign.

Parents, pray with your kids. Pray with your teens. Ask them to listen to God. What should they pledge over three years?

Brothers and sisters, we do not want Vineyard Columbus to be a one generation church. A one hit wonder. This giving campaign is all about continuing the story of God in our community through the continued ministry of a great church, this church, Vineyard Columbus.

Passing the Torch to the Next Generation

Rich Nathan
March 16 & 17, 2019
The Story Continues
Numbers 27:12-23

- I. Successfully passing the torch involves imitating biblical heroes
- II. Successfully passing the torch involves finishing well
- III. Successfully passing the torch involves investing in future leaders
- IV. Successfully passing the torch involves selecting the right leaders
- V. Successfully passing the torch involves God's selection of the new leader
 - a. The Leader's calling
 - b. The Leader's confidence
 - c. The Leader's courage