

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Accelerating Change: The Preservation Phase

Episode 157

Part 2: How the Pandemic Is Accelerating Decline in Churches That Were Already on the Declining Side of the Typical Church Lifecycle

Google “Covid Accelerating Change.” It’s happening everywhere—it’s rapidly changing the workplace, our habits, digitization, how we connect and much more. Over the past few years, the Church has experienced a significant amount of change. And, like the rest of the world, the pandemic is accelerating these changes—in-person attendance is falling, the increased use of online, fewer new people connecting to churches, etc. In this second episode of our 3-part series, Tony and Amy define the characteristics of the Preservation phase of the typical church lifecycle, and specific changes churches need to make if they find themselves here during this season.

Characteristics of Churches in the Preservation Phase

- **Priority focus: Keep people from leaving.** Churches in the Preservation Phase put very little focus on reaching new people for Jesus, and there’s a strong desire to “return to the good old days.”
- Decision-making gets bogged down in multiple committees and divisive church boards, making it almost impossible to implement ministry changes.
- Financial decline leads to protecting turf, rather than investing in ministry initiatives to grow the church’s Kingdom impact.
- Leaders tend to dwell on the problems, blaming those problems on things that are beyond their control (like a global pandemic, for example) rather than investing time and energy into solutions.

As Andy Stanley wrote, “Your church is perfectly designed to get the results you are currently getting.” If you want different results, you need to empower new leadership and support their efforts to implement a new ministry strategy.

The Change Cycle

The pastor has to lead the change. The youth pastor can't. The XP can't. The board can't. And that's hard because you can't keep everyone happy and experience the change that produces health.

- **Cycle One - Create Urgency:** The change cycle begins when the leader demonstrates the need for change. You create urgency by explaining why the change is necessary—and why it can't wait.
- **Cycle Two - Cast a Vision:** This is the time for the change to be communicated to all levels of the organization. You have to connect whatever changes you are making to the mission and vision of the church.
- **Cycle Three - Implement the Change:** This is when leaders become leaders, as courage is required. Until this point, change has only been a conversation. Now it's time for implementation. In these moments, fear can become very loud. Who will disagree? Who will get angry? Who will leave?
- **Cycle Four - Celebrate Early Wins:** Slow change is rarely positive change, so sharing quick wins will build morale and take away power from critics.

Most leaders are guilty of thinking that if they lead really, really well, then everyone will stick with them. Reality says you'll inevitably lose people after each phase of implementing change.

5 Attributes of a Church in Decline

- **They Lack a Focused, Compelling Vision for the Future** - Clarify your purpose and your vision. Why do we exist? Where are we going in the future?
- **They Have an Inward Focus** - Clarify your ministry strategy to reach people outside the church and outside the faith.
- **They Don't Have a Clear Discipleship Path** - Clarify how you are going to encourage people to become more like Jesus.
- **They Are Complex** - Clarify how you are going to invest your time and people resources.
- **They Don't Have Strong Leadership** - Clarify your decision rights so leaders are empowered to lead.

Next Steps

- **Where is YOUR church in the lifecycle today?**
Do you know what areas of your ministry are healthy and which areas are stuck or declining? An honest, objective perspective of where your church is today is essential if you want to start building a strategy and plan for the future.

[Take the Unstuck Church Assessment for Free](#) and it will help guide you as you take your next steps towards building a healthy church.

- **Does your church need to make significant shifts to thrive in the new reality?**
We've been coaching 50+ churches in the past few months, and 400+ churches over the last ten years, helping them clarify vision, mission field, strategy, structure and implement successful action plans. We can help you assess your starting point (and do an honest reality check), make a plan to lead your church forward, structure your team to be successful, and put the plan into action. [Let's talk.](#)

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