

WHY CHURCH PLANTING COACHES?

Church planting is a challenging task; the rigors of church planting are well documented. In Australia the church has received significantly bad press of late, and if one was to adopt a “spiritual warfare” stance, the reality is that church-planting seeks to reclaim territory that rightly belongs to Christ. The enemy doesn’t give ground without a fight. Church planting is the front-line of the army of Christ.

*Supporting church-planters is a critically important factor in church-planting, arguably one of **the** most critical.* The front line needs support, resources, encouragement and equipment for the fight. Well-equipped church-planting coaches can play that role.

Dr. Ed Stetzer wrote his Ph.D dissertation focussing on how church planter support systems impact churches. “In one study, church planters who meet with a mentor or coach plant larger and more effective churches than those who do not. Church planters with mentors lead churches that are 12 percent larger during the first year, 13 percent during the second year, 16 percent during the third year, and 25 percent during the fourth year.

“Furthermore, the frequency of the mentoring meetings also impacted the success and size of the church plant. Church planters who meet weekly with a mentor lead churches that are 50 percent larger than church planters who only meet monthly or quarterly and are 100 percent larger than those who do not meet with a mentor. Statistics for supervisor meetings are even more pronounced indicating that church planters who meet weekly with a supervisor lead churches that are twice as large as those who meet only monthly.”ⁱ

In a study by the Foursquare Church they found that church planters who met with a coach regularly increased their baptisms by 150% and experienced significant increase in worship attendance in contrast to those who lacked a coach or mentor. Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl note that denominations that include strategic coaching in their systems have seen their church-planting success rates go from 30% to 50% to 80% to 90%.ⁱⁱ

WHAT’S THE PAYOFF?

It’s more than baptisms, conversions, and missional effectiveness – though it is at least all of these. The studies done and the data gleaned have more than adequately documented effectiveness at this level. So from an ROI (return on investment) perspective; it’s great investment.

Just as importantly, however, it is support for the front-line, a lower failure rate for church plants, less burnout for church planters, and greater use of the denominational dollar. It is pastoral care well applied, sustainability factored in, accountability well resourced, and a genuine leadership development for church planters, as well as improved performance.

Indeed, many research studies have shown that coaching is an effective modality for leadership development. A 2007 Ph.D dissertation by Dr. Fran Finn has demonstrated that coaching *per se* improves the competence and confidence of leaders. In 2008 Fran completed a PhD examining Executive Coaching as an Alternate Leadership Development Tool and was awarded the Dean’s

Commendation for Excellent Doctoral Thesis.ⁱⁱⁱ A 2013 study conducted by the International Coaching Federation noted that the broad ranging impacts of coaching include leadership development and performance, increased levels of employee engagement, reduced attrition and improved team working.^{iv} A 2015 research project funded by the Anglican diocese of Melbourne describes the positive role coaching has played in parish renewal.^v Research conducted in 2015 by the Baptist Union of Victoria recommends mentoring and coaching for emerging leaders.^{vi}

So what's the payoff? It is at least three fold. 1. More effective, stable and fruitful churches are planted. 2. More support and pastoral care for church planters; better accountability, and less burnout and attrition. 3. Ongoing leadership development and greater cohesion in team work. There is probably a fourth dimension as well – though it is an as-yet unproven hypothesis: coaches who coach church-planters are likely to be effective at coaching pastors and leaders of existing churches as well.

THE CHALLENGE. The challenges that Christian churches face are not insurmountable – however, they are considerable, and a well-trained church-planting coach can make an enormous difference. We're going to briefly headline some of the challenges.

- **Who does mission?** If William Carey is indeed the father of modern missions, then the rise of mission societies that emerged subsequent to his work meant that mission became the work of missionaries, evangelists and so on. Churches trained pastors, and pastors pastored churches. They did not do mission. Many churches have begun to realise this needs some realignment.
- **Erosion of position of privilege.** Churches in many western cultures have had positions of privilege, with chaplains in parliaments, in the armed services, in schools; with religious education, and a society based on Christian principles. With the rise of multiculturalism, people movements because of war and famine, the rise of the internet, and more, Christianity no longer holds its privileged position in society. Our age is an age of mission, and it is mission on our front doorstep.
- **Methods of evangelism.** Evangelism methods can no longer assume social values and mores built on Christian assumptions. With widespread biblical illiteracy, we can't assume people will understand. Throw postmodernism into the mix, and we find that people no longer accept our arguments either. Methods of evangelism or mission need to be other than those used traditionally.
- **Discipleship, evangelism, church-planting, or what?** Very few churches would disagree with Jesus command to make disciples – each of the four gospels concludes with that mandate. The principle is clear. The practice is far from clear. A dear Christian friend commented: "I'm not into organised, institutional Christianity." Kingdom yes, church – not so much. House churches, small groups, missional communities – it's all rather perplexing. What do we do with people who become disciples?

- **Organisational psychology and systems theory.** The challenges in maintaining a kingdom-gospel focus of making disciples are well known; churches quickly move to homeostasis, people resist change, aging membership, traditional theological formation tends not to equip pastors to be leaders or missionaries, issues of gender equality and ministry, social and technological change – the list goes on and on. How do we renew tired churches, stale leaders, and outworn structures so that they become the springboard to gospel growth?
- **Equipping church planters.** One of the key local church and denominational challenges is to think systemically about mission, evangelism and church planting. This includes the preparation and selection of church planters, training and awareness around different church planting models, helping church planters develop a philosophy of ministry, understanding the phases of development in a church plant, having “leadership farm” systems, and last but not least, support, accountability and development through coaching.

A STRATEGIC NEED

In the move to obey Jesus’ mandate, denominations, local churches and missionary organisations must think about how to develop leaders for the frontline and how to support them when they get there. Coaching fits into those spaces, and it does more; it helps the church planter to retain his or her focus, to develop themselves as a leader, to develop others as disciples, to identify different needs at different phases of growth, to believe in and stand with them through the process. There should be no church planter without a well-trained coach. Indeed, there should be no pastor, priest or minister without a well-trained coach.

What do denominations and local churches need to do? Essentially, they need to think about how to carry out Christ’s mandate in their local areas. That will mean a high commitment to prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit. It will mean developing leadership systems and training. It will mean realigning resources to Christ’s mission – budgetary allocation, training costs, and support costs. It will mean ensuring the frontline is adequately supported through coaching.

- **What could it look like?** In the church planting space it looks like (at least) monthly visits where goal-setting, strategy evaluation, leadership development and ministry effectiveness is on the table for discussion, and for action and implementation. In the early phases of planting that might be fortnightly or even weekly meetings. It builds a culture of high trust, is highly relational, is flexible, and provides people permission to have a go and to take a risk. It is on the job learning with constant review and constant forward focus.
- **It is communal.** The coach facilitates the church planter’s need for accountability within community. He checks in on the planter’s family. He helps the planter get feedback from the people he is reaching. He also ensures healthy relationships and communications are maintained between the church planter and those who support her or him. The coach is there solely for the planter – and if that is done well, all the communal relationships will be under constant scrutiny and review.
- **It is networked.** Coaching provides great interaction, learning and development with others also engaged in church planting. Learning from and learning with others is essential. Grounded

research, learning from the field, and working within communities of practice; planters and coaches meeting together to discern how God is shaping planters theologically (head); how God is forming Christ-likeness in the planters (heart), and how God is showing planters what effective practice looks like (hands). Such communities of practice will provide mutual support, encouragement, insight and learning, and a Christ-centred, kingdom focus.

Why church planting coaches? Because churches have a mandate from Christ, they have the power of the Spirit, they have men and women who are already actively engaged in reaching others for Christ, and coaching these frontline kingdom warriors is proven to be an effective method for seeing kingdom advancement.

Dr John Rietveld

John is a Reformed Church minister who has worked in church planting, denominational leadership, for CRM and ACOM. He currently works with NOVO Coaching

Questions:

Peter Wagner famously said: “Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven.” (See <http://www.acts29.com/why-church-planting/>) Do you agree? Disagree? How would you qualify this?

What is our current church planting strategy? Is it working? What’s missing? Can our current strategies adapt to a multiplicity of models?

What is our current strategy for coaching/mentoring key leaders of church plants? How might this be enhanced?

How do we currently identify, mobilise and train church planters? Coaches of church planters? What would help us do these things more effectively?

How might we approach evangelism in the West when “old methods” are less and less effective?

ⁱ From “Improving the Health and Survivability of New Churches,” Leadership Network

ⁱⁱ Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching*, 2008, B&H Publishing Group, p.79

ⁱⁱⁱ For a shorthand version of Fran’s thesis see: http://www.thirdsigma.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Effectiveness-of-Executive-Coaching-versus-Training-finn_icf_presentation_11-2005.pdf

^{iv} 2013 ICF Organizational Coaching Study

^v See <http://bishopperryinstitute.org.au/uploads/Report%20to%20Diocese%20-%20Final.pdf>

^{vi} GROWING THE SEEDS OF EMERGENCE: ENABLING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE BAPTIST UNION OF VICTORIA
DARREN CRONSHAW AND STACEY WILSON (19th June, 2015)