

“Don’t Wrestle With Pigs” (Thoughts on Handling Criticism)

BY SCOTT SAULS

I hate it when people criticize me.

Yet being criticized is to be expected when you are an influencer or a leader. Even the best parents routinely get criticized by their children, bosses by their employees, coaches by their players, athletes and artists by their fans, teachers by their students, and pastors by their congregants. If we are unable to handle criticism, we may want to consider doing something different with our lives.

Over the years, I have gotten better about receiving criticism from the people around me. When the criticism is fair, it actually helps me see my blind spots, address my weaknesses, and improve my efforts at loving and leading those around me. However, when the criticism is not fair, I can sometimes react in a negative and defensive way. And, honestly, I sometimes react that way when the criticism is fair.

Recently, a man who was traveling through Nashville and had visited our church sent me a public criticism on Twitter, telling me all of the things that, in his “humble opinion,” were wrong about my sermon. Feeling defensive and irritated, I foolishly retaliated with a criticism of my own, along with a Bible verse to justify my response. The man then sent five more messages on Twitter, piling on more criticism, taking my words out of context, and putting words in my mouth. I then responded a second time, again in a way that was not helpful.

My friend and unofficial big brother, pastor Scotty Smith, saw the exchange between the church visitor and me and swiftly sent me a text message that said, “Scott, dear brother, you forgot that you’re not supposed to wrestle with pigs.”

Scotty’s text was not intended as an insult to the man on Twitter. Rather, he was reminding me of a phrase that he and I had picked up from an article by Carey Nieuwhof about healthy leadership. “Don’t wrestle with pigs” is another way of saying that when people try to pick a fight with you or when they seem bent on criticizing you no matter what you say or do, it’s usually best simply not to engage them. Why? Because when leaders “wrestle with pigs,” we run the risk of ourselves becoming pig-headed in the process.

There is another disadvantage to “wrestling with pigs.” When we fight back—instead of seeking to defuse the situation by not responding or by answering gently—we condition ourselves to reject all criticism, even the kind that is fair. We do this to our own peril.

In each of us is the potential for great good and potential for exceptional evil. We are, at the same time, both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Scripture puts words to this dual reality in multiple ways. We are, at the same time, saints and transgressors, old man and new man, flesh and spirit. We are, as Luther said, *simul justus et peccator*—at the same time righteous and sinner. This means that we are at all times capable of heroic love and unspeakable evil. Even the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest Christian leaders who ever lived, recognized this about himself as he wrote in his letter to the Romans:

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have a desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing ...”

When I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin” (Romans 7:15, 18-19, 21-23).

Thankfully for all of us, this is not the end of the story for Paul. Having been brought low by his sin, he goes on in the next chapter to provide the hope-filled solution to his (and our) problem with sin. In Christ, who has redeemed us from the curse of God’s law, there is no condemnation. Christ, who is our legal advocate before the judgment seat of God, also gives his Spirit to dwell inside of us. The Spirit helps us to pray when we don’t know how, directs our minds toward the things of the Spirit and away from the things of the flesh, and reminds us that nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from his love (Romans 8).

Although it is never a good idea to get into a spitting match with an unfair critic who is behaving more like a pig than a friend, there are potentially redemptive ways to address her/his “unfairness,” should it seem right to do so.

The story is told of the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, who, while preaching the gospel to a large crowd, had his own “Shimei” experience (for the story of Shimei, see 2 Samuel 16:5-13). A young, self-assured, know-it-all seminary student in the crowd began to publicly challenge the things that Moody, the veteran evangelist, was saying. This student rudely interrupted him several times and tried to trip him up. Eventually, Moody got fed up with the young man’s rude behavior and snapped at him. The evangelist, widely known as one of the world’s most eloquent communicators, used his gift with words to punish the young man, sharply putting him in his place. Thinking that the young man got what he deserved, the crowd showed their hearty approval of Moody’s response. Then, later in his talk, Moody stopped himself and said in front of them all:

“Friends, I have to confess before all of you that at the beginning of my meeting I gave a very foolish answer to my brother down here. I ask God to forgive me, and I ask him to forgive me.”

Moody demonstrated true leadership and greatness in that moment. Though guilty of the seemingly lesser sin, he became the first to repent and apologize. He, the one “in power,” valued his character and the young man in front of him more than he valued saving face. Though he could have said nothing and gone home satisfied that he had soundly defeated the young antagonist in their public standoff, he instead humbled himself and publicly apologized.

If Jesus, who never committed even the smallest offense, would humble himself and make himself nothing for our sakes; if Jesus would lose face in order to save face for us; if Jesus would allow himself to be exposed, criticized, despised, and rejected in order to cover our shame and prove his great love for us, then it makes sense that we would want to follow in the footsteps of people like Dwight L. Moody and countless others by humbling ourselves when we are exposed for our shortcomings and sins. For although we are “worse than we think we are,” we are also, as Jack Miller also said, “more loved than we ever dared to hope.”

Bill Muehlenberg's commentary on issues of the day...

On Leaving Church

There are many Christians who have stopped going to church. They have not given up on God, have not renounced their faith, have not denied Christ, and have not become pagans. They simply are no longer going to church. That this is happening is not a matter of doubt, but why this is happening is in fact a difficult question to answer.

One recent article spoke about this trend. Entitled "The Rise of the 'Done With Church' Population," it looks at this scene – primarily in America – but does not offer us any clear indications as to why this is becoming such a problem. The article begins: John is every pastor's dream member. He's a life-long believer, well-studied in the Bible, gives generously and leads others passionately. But last year he dropped out of church. He didn't switch to the other church down the road. He dropped out completely. His departure wasn't the result of an ugly encounter with a staff person or another member. It wasn't triggered by any single event.

John had come to a long-considered, thoughtful decision. He said, "I'm just done. I'm done with church."

John is one in a growing multitude of ex-members. They're sometimes called the de-churched. They have not abandoned their faith. They have not joined the also-growing legion of those with no religious affiliation—often called the Nones. Rather, John has joined the Dones.

At Group's recent Future of the Church conference, sociologist Josh Packard shared some of his groundbreaking research on the Dones. He explained these de-churched were among the most dedicated and active people in their congregations. To an increasing degree, the church is losing its best.

For the church, this phenomenon sets up a growing danger. The very people on whom a church relies for lay leadership, service and financial support are going away. And the problem is compounded by the fact that younger people in the next generation, the Millennials, are not lining up to refill the emptying pews.

Why are the Dones done? Packard describes several factors in his upcoming book Church Refugees (Group). Among the reasons: After sitting through countless sermons and Bible studies, they feel they've heard it all. One of Packard's interviewees said, "I'm tired of being lectured to. I'm just done with having some guy tell me what to do."

The Dones are fatigued with the Sunday routine of plop, pray and pay. They want to play. They want to participate. But they feel spurned at every turn.

Will the Dones return? Not likely, according to the research. They're done. Packard says it would be

more fruitful if churches would focus on not losing these people in the first place. Preventing an exodus is far easier than attempting to convince refugees to return.

Hmmm, interesting. There would be many reasons why people stop going to church. We all might have our suggestions as to why this is occurring.

I have my own ideas. Let me list a few such possibilities here:

- Many believers are growing tired of the celebrity culture in our churches.
- Many believers are fed up with the incessant entertainment and worldly amusements found in the churches.
- Many believers are not being fed from the Word of God.
- Many believers are put off by the attempt to cater solely to youth, while ignoring their needs.
- Many believers are tired of just being bench warmers, with no role to play.
- Many believers are weary of the constant need to be "relevant" at the expense of biblical orthodoxy.
- Many believers are looking for the real deal. They want an encounter with almighty God, not just a razzmatazz stage production.
- Many believers are desiring genuine Holy Ghost revival, not just pep talks, self-help seminars, and a me-centred gospel.
- Many believers are starving for the reality of First Century Christianity.

Many more reasons could be mentioned. And this is just my take on things. Having spoken at so many churches and home groups and small fellowships over the years, I can get a bit of an understanding of some of these trends. And many of these believers who have left the church have not forsaken Christian fellowship though.

Mindful of texts like Hebrews 10:25 of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," they still meet with others. But often it is just a very small home group. Often it is just a small band of believers who meet in a small community centre.

They are still eager for God, but have been turned off by so much of the church scene today. Many are repulsed by the celebrity and entertainment culture that runs rampant in so many churches today. They just want to worship Jesus and encourage one another without all the worldly rigmarole.

I have spoken in many of these small fellowship groups. Some of their services can easily last 3, 4, 5 or more hours. They can't get enough of genuine Christianity and heartfelt worship. But they have gotten enough of churchianity. They are fed up with a church that increasingly resembles the world more than it does the New Testament.

While this move away from the churches may be a way these believers find a new outlet for Christian fellowship, it is obviously tough on pastors and church leaders. One thing they may have to do is slow down, think, pray and ask some hard questions.

But the problem is, so often our leaders are so busy doing church, that they do not have this needed

time to reassess, rethink, and re-evaluate. I once wrote a piece in which I made the serious suggestion that some churches might be best placed to actually shut down for a brief spell as the members, and especially the leaders, spend some quality time on their faces before God. I said in part: My recommendation is this: it may well be the best thing in many cases to simply shut our church doors and post a big sign on each entry with words something like this: "Dear friends, sorry but our church is now closed for repairs. It will be closed for perhaps a few days, perhaps a few weeks, and maybe even longer, until a full and thorough renovation has taken place. These doors will remain shut for as long as it takes. We will notify you when the doors will reopen. In fact, there will be no need to notify you, because it will be apparent to everyone when the renewal work is completed. Thank you for your patience."

Does that sound like a pretty radical proposal? Of course it does. But it may take something radical like this to deal with a church which seems to be losing its way, and is in many ways haemorrhaging to death. When things get that bad, radical surgery is indeed required.

I do not envy being a pastor or a church leader. They have a very tough job, and their work is often thankless, painful and exhausting. We certainly must pray for our leaders. They certainly need it. And they need regular encouragement as well.

But the church is going through tough times now. I certainly do not have all the answers for this. But we must be willing to at least pause and reflect, pray and seek God, as to how we might turn things around. We must at least begin there.

Let me finish with a few great quotes from a few great saints. Their words of warning and advice make for more helpful starting points:

"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference." A.W. Tozer

"Oh for radically Bible-saturated, God-centered, Christ-exalting, self-sacrificing, mission-mobilizing, soul-saving, culture-confronting pastors!" John Piper

"When the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first." Martyn Lloyd-Jones

"The church has lost her testimony. She has no longer anything to say to the world. Her once robust shout of assurance has faded away to an apologetic whisper. She who one time went out to declare now goes out to inquire. Her dogmatic declaration has become a respectful suggestion, a word of religious advice, given with the understanding that it is after all only an opinion and not meant to sound bigoted." A.W. Tozer

"The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men...Men of prayer." E. M. Bounds

SIX REASONS WHY LEADERSHIP TEAM CONFLICT IS GOOD

One of the most important steps a leader can take is to build a good team. Those teams take on a personality unto themselves, a personality that can be good or not so good.

There are obvious extremes that the leader hopes his team will avoid. On the one extreme is a largely passive and quiet team. The leader dominates the conversation; the team is really just his audience. Most comments made by team members are to please or affirm the leader. Team members can choose either silence or sycophantic comments.

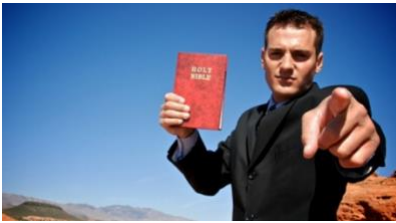
The other extreme takes place where team members simply do not get along. Most of them don't like each other. The leader has little control. Each team member is a judge in his or her own fiefdom with little regard for the organization as a whole.

The challenge is bring together a team where each member respects the other, but each member is also willing to engage in healthy debates or conflict for the good of the organization. These members care fiercely about the organization more than themselves, but they don't always agree about what's best for the organization. This conflict is healthy. Let's look at six reasons why.

1. **Good leaders will have strong opinions.** It's a good sign when team members speak up with good insights. It means the leader has assembled an "A" team with members who are confident and informed.
2. **An organization needs differing perspectives.** My leadership team is comprised of seven unique leaders. Each of them helps us see issues in differing lights. We have made some good decisions and avoided some bad decisions because of the collective wisdom of strong leaders with different viewpoints.
3. **Healthy debate and differences create "aha" moments.** One of the fascinating parts of being on a healthy team is to watch the momentum of a healthy debate. As one member challenges another, we sometimes make a "discovery" that one perspective alone would not have engendered. Some of our better decisions have come in the midst of a rather heated debate among team members.
4. **Conflict can help identify the stronger team members.** If leaders understand that peers will challenge them, they are likely to be better prepared to deal with the challenges brought before them. In that process, the stronger leaders emerge. They have done their homework. They think on their feet well. They are not intimidated or threatened when someone questions their insights. Team members unwilling or unable to participate in healthy debates or either intimidated, ineffective, or frustrated.
5. **Conflict engenders cross training.** Team leaders have different experiences, different backgrounds, different leadership styles, and different responsibilities. As they interact with one another in healthy debates, each member can learn from the other. "Iron sharpens iron" may be cliché, but it is nevertheless true.

6. **Team members that fight together are more likely to be united in purpose.** At first blush, that statement may sound counterintuitive. But healthy debate allows each member to speak his or her mind. Each member is free to make contributions. Each member is valued. As long as the differences of opinion do not degenerate into hurt feelings and true animosity, the team becomes stronger and ultimately works together better.

One of the most critical responsibilities of a leader is assembling a healthy leadership team. Jim Collins' well-known metaphor is highly applicable here. You must get the right people on the bus and then get them in the right seats. Those team members must be of unquestionable character, highly competent, and willing to complement and engage other team members in healthy debate and conflict.



Do you know any 'super-spiritual' Christians?

A few years ago a prominent charismatic evangelist gained a wide following when he said an angel was visiting him regularly during his televised revival meetings. The angel was supposedly dispatched to unleash the next great healing revival in the United States. One big problem: The revival didn't happen.

Yet month after month, the tales of this evangelist's wild spiritual adventures grew more and more incredible. At one point he wrote that he visited heaven and met the apostle Paul—and then said Paul admitted he was the author of the Book of Hebrews. A 2,000-year-old theological mystery was solved!

Looking back on these events now, it's hard to believe so many charismatics fell for these wild claims. Anyone with the most basic level of discernment knows God does not allow us to talk to dead people to get spiritual information. So why are we so gullible? I call this the "oohh, ahhh" factor.

In our charismatic circles, there are some super-spiritual people who know how to impress others with their revelations and experiences. They know how to get us to say, "Oooh, ahhh." In some cases these people are sincere but may have emotional problems or even mental illness. In other cases they are simply full of spiritual pride and end up being used by the devil to bring confusion and division into the church.

Time after time I have made it clear I'm unapologetically a charismatic Christian, and I believe all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are valid today. But I believe God is calling us to clean up our act and stop allowing fringe elements to discredit the power of God. Nothing is more dangerous to a genuine revival than a hyper-spiritual "charismaniac" who flaunts his gifts while displaying a lack of character.

Here are seven indicators of a hyper-spiritual person. If this describes you or someone you know, please seek spiritual counsel immediately.

1. Their feet rarely touch the earth. Super-spiritual people live in the ozone layer. They are not in touch with normal life. They may spend a lot of time in prayer (or claim to), and they may even fast or impose severe discipline on themselves, but their relationships are dysfunctional. Remember: Jesus did not live His life like a guru, floating around while dispensing ethereal wisdom. He lived in the real world and interacted in a healthy way with people. So should we.

2. They place too much emphasis on dreams, visions and spiritual manifestations. God speaks to us through His Spirit, and He can use dreams, visions or prophetic words. Yet His message always flows with love and brings peace. On the contrary, a spirit of weirdness usually follows hyper-spiritual people who claim to receive constant revelations.

Paul warned the Colossians about people like this when he said: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen..." (Col. 2:18).

3. They find it difficult to submit to authority. Hyper-spiritual people are usually full of pride and believe they are more gifted than pastors or other spiritual leaders. Therefore they find it impossible to receive instruction or correction from anyone. They become renegades, and they separate themselves from the body of Christ, which only puts them in a spiritually vulnerable position.

4. They crave attention. A super-spiritual person often lacks affirmation and love. Their emotional deficit pushes them to seek attention from people, and they find it by impressing others. Some people who seek to serve as intercessors or counselors, or even as members of the worship team, may actually need inner healing before they can be effective in these roles. If you give these people a microphone before they are healed, you will regret it!

5. They develop a victim mentality. Most of the hyper-spiritual people I know believe they are constantly being attacked by the devil—as if they are his biggest threat. The slightest problem in life—from a traffic ticket to a hangnail—becomes evidence of a demonic conspiracy against them. We need to help people realize they are not the center of the universe, and that Satan actually has a lot more important things to do than stop Brother Bubba or Sister Lulu from singing a song in church on Sunday.

6. They become harsh and judgmental. Charismaniacs who don't find a receptive audience for their visions and prophecies sometimes become bitter and resentful—and they end up condemning everyone to hell for rejecting them. I am aware of situations in which angry Christians ended up splitting a church because they became convinced the pastor was evil or the whole congregation was in sin. People who are full of bitterness will become instruments of the devil. Deal with them before they hurt others!

7. They often end up in deception. Super-spiritual people who reject correction or spiritual covering are headed toward disaster. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, started that cult after he declared that all Christian denominations were false churches. He cut himself off from the body of Christ and started the biggest heresy of the 19th century. People who become so focused on their spiritual superiority end up denying Jesus and justifying their own sinful behavior.

Church should be a healthy place. Don't let hyper-spiritual people take your congregation

down the wrong road.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of *Charisma*. You can follow him on Twitter at [leegrady](#). He is the author of *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale* and other books.

Jeff Bezos Uses This Simple Leadership Tip to Overcome Toxic Mindsets



Here's a simple trick that Jeff Bezos suggests using to overcome a basic business leadership problem. It stems from the fact that the most important business decisions are often also the hardest ones--and those tough decisions often result in an additional cascade of leadership challenges. It's pretty simple, really. If you make a choice from among several reasonable choices in your business, some of your team members or stakeholders will likely conclude you've made the wrong choice.

And once you've made that decision, they might have a hard time getting on board with it. Here's a basic example. Let's say you're debating the retail price of a new product. A low price might mean higher sales, but a high price might reinforce the perception of a premium product. Your sales team wants to make fast sales, so they'd prefer the low price. Your marketing team would rather promote something that's seen as more exclusive. And you can make the case for either choice. But you have to decide.

How do you get the team members who will inevitably think you've chosen wrong to move past that disagreement? That's where Bezos and Amazon come in.

Overcoming the toxic mindset

Let's call the failure to commit what it is: a toxic mindset -- although one that reflects such basic, human, emotional needs that it's hard to condemn people for it. Recognizing this, Bezos shared a technique to overcome it in the annual shareholder letter he released on April 17, 2017.

Bezos wrote that he values making fast decisions, which often means deciding before you have all the information you'd like. He puts the sweet spot at acting when you have 70 percent of needed information.

The lack of information makes tough decisions even tougher, however, and that prompts the cascade of leadership challenges described above. To overcome them, Bezos introduced a simple linguistic trick that stops these toxic mindsets in their tracks and cuts off the metastasis of difficulties.

It's just a three-word phrase. Bezos wrote: "Disagree and commit." The phrase can save a lot of time. If you have conviction on a particular direction even though there's no consensus, it's helpful to say, "Look, I know we disagree on this, but will you gamble with me on it? Disagree and commit?"

By the time you're at this point, no one can know the answer for sure, and you'll probably get a quick yes ... If you're the boss, you should do this too. I disagree and commit all the time.

Even the Kindle

Bezos goes on to give the example of when his team advocated for a particular Amazon Studios show that he personally didn't think made sense. He told them: "I disagree and commit and hope it becomes the most watched thing we've ever made."

And here's another high-level example I love even more: Jeff Wilke, a top executive known as the "second-most important Jeff" at Amazon, shared the story of how he originally thought the Kindle wasn't a good fit for Amazon.

But, he told The Wall Street Journal, "I disagreed and committed, and I'm very glad I did." So, let's unpack this powerful three-word phrase, and why I think it's so effective.

1. "Disagree ... "

It all starts here. How many times have you heard that the goal in a business decision-making process is to "build consensus"? But that's wrong: The goal isn't to convince everyone; it's to review facts and make fast decisions.

Sometimes, you'll make mistakes. By putting "disagree" right into the decision-making goal, you give people an option to go on record, record their opposition, and move on quickly to helping the team.

2. " ... and ... "

It's just a conjunction, true, but it points out that this isn't just a mechanism to "agree to disagree." There's a second component coming up -- a more important one, frankly.

3. " ... Commit"

The more I think about this word, the more I love it in this context. First, it makes clear once more that the goal here isn't agreement; it's concerted, coordinated action.

Second, it's an implicit promise from the members of your team who might have disagreed: "I might have made a different decision if I were the final authority. But I recognize we've made another decision, and I will now put my best efforts behind it."

Saying it helps inoculate against the all-too-human toxic mindset at the root of the whole problem. Commitment over consensus. It's a powerful concept. And if it works for Bezos and Amazon, maybe it can work for your business, too.

Every Leader Needs to Navigate These 7 Tensions



Summary. In decades past, executives were usually taught to practice command-and-control leadership. Today they're often advised to be more nimble, more adaptive, and less controlling. The truth is that most executives need to be able to move back and forth between those...more

In recent years, articles have claimed that old-style command-and-control leadership is “out” and a new way of leading is “in.” Instead of telling people what to do, leaders should ask them open-ended questions. Instead of sticking exactly to plans, they should adjust goals as new information emerges. Instead of working from the gut, a leader should rely on data to make decisions. And so forth.

Let's call this old-fashioned leadership model **traditional** and the new one **emerging**. Here's the challenge: in the current environment, most executives need to be good at both styles to succeed. That is, any leader who relies solely on positional authority will run into trouble; business, technology, and workforce expectations are changing much too quickly for that approach to be sustainable. But at the same time, any leader who fails to strive for perfection, who never tells and only listens, and who shares but never holds power, will also struggle to be effective.

In surveys and interviews with hundreds of leaders worldwide, we uncovered seven core tensions between the traditional and emerging leadership approaches. Those tensions create significant stress for leaders, as they are often unsure of what competencies, skills, and behaviors to exercise in a particular context. In this article, we describe the tensions, outline the dangers in ignoring them, and suggest coping strategies for balancing the two approaches.

Tension 1: The Expert vs. the Learner

Traditionally, leaders built their careers by developing deep expertise of some kind and demonstrating increasing levels of competence as they moved up the corporate ladder. Organizations assumed that they would bring superior insight to the challenge at hand. In the emerging approach, leaders must accept that their specialized expertise is limited (in some cases obsolete) and be open to learning from others. This is

especially true when it comes to digital knowledge, as many of the leaders who are tasked with leading digital transformations are not digital natives themselves. If this tension is not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of making bad or inappropriate decisions.

Tim Westergren, co-founder of streaming radio platform Pandora, was able to blend the two. He believed that a key to his success was combining his deep knowledge of the industry with an openness to learning from others about new trends and technologies. Prior to Pandora, Westergren worked as a record producer and composer for two decades, under the name Pandora Media, which was all about music discovery — this fed Pandora’s “music genome” algorithm, one of the keys to Pandora’s success. But then when the company shifted to a freemium business model, he was in new territory and had to rely heavily on insights and knowledge from employees and customers.

Tension 2: The Constant vs. the Adaptor

The traditional approach to leadership values decision-making conviction and consistency; good leaders “stick to their guns.” By contrast, the emerging approach recognizes that in fast-changing environments, decisions often need to be reversed or adapted, and that changing course in response to new information is a strength, not a weakness. If this tension is not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of seeming too rigid, on the one hand, or too wishy-washy on the other.

Early in his career, Jim Whitehurst, CEO of open-source software company Red Hat, decided to release a product that wasn’t completely open source, which was against company policy. Not surprisingly, the product failed. Fortunately, he had developed a reputation for providing a secure, solid base for his team. Consequently, when he openly admitted his error, employees and colleagues were willing to quickly move forward from the mistake.

Tension 3: The Tactician vs. the Visionary

The traditional approach to leadership calls for operational clarity and well-defined plans. The emerging approach suggests that leaders require a clear vision for where they want to go, without necessarily needing a concrete roadmap for how to get there. If this tension isn’t managed wisely, leaders run the risk of providing no “north star” for their team members. On the other hand, if they are not grounded in reality, they may serve up lofty, unrealistic, or intangible goals.

Vas Narasimhan, CEO of Novartis AG, believes that predictive analytics and artificial intelligence will revolutionize the healthcare industry. Therefore, he invested significantly in AI and challenged different parts of the organization to find their own way to deploy the technology. Most teams welcomed the initiative, but Narasimhan noticed that they often struggled to link AI to their daily work. Thus, he paid close attention to the day-to-day processes needed to allow these “bigger, bolder moves” to achieve results for the pharmaceutical giant. He infused predictive analytics and artificial intelligence into the operational heart of the company itself, as a tangible first goal, and launched a tool enabling real-time viewing of all 500 clinical trials around the world, which can be expanded into other areas such as manufacturing and regulatory affairs.

Tension 4: The Teller vs. the Listener

The traditional approach to leadership calls for leaders to tell others what to do and how to do it. The emerging approach values listening carefully to others before deciding. If this tension is not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of missing important information that resides in the team members

surrounding them. Conversely, if a leader refrains from providing their viewpoint, they miss the chance to apply their own valuable knowledge.

Angela Ahrendts, former CEO of Burberry, entered her role with a clear point of view: that the fashion brand needed to become relevant to a generation of Millennial shoppers in order to thrive. But when it came to specific operational decisions, she sourced ideas and opinions from a wide range of people, leading to an almost doubling of Burberry's operating profits during her tenure.

Tension 5: The Power Holder vs. the Power Sharer

The traditional approach suggests that leaders must lead from the top, make decisions, and take actions independently. In contrast, the emerging approach values empowering others to achieve goals. If this tension is not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of alienating and marginalizing promising talent. Alternatively, they may undermine their own authority by sharing power too broadly.

Mario Bizzarri, CEO of Gucci, held the power endowed to his position by managing the financial part of the business while giving Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele, the space to focus solely on what he does best — the design. But he also knew when to empower, creating a shadow board of Millennial employees to advise the fashion behemoth's executive team.

Tension 6: The Intuitionist vs. the Analyst

The traditional approach suggests that leaders build up an "expert gut" to make intuitive decisions. By contrast, the emerging approach says that leaders should base decisions largely on data. If this tension is not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of making decisions based on outdated and biased heuristics. Or, on the other hand, they risk ignoring their inner compass, which might provide valuable insights from past experience.

Barbara Coppola, CDO of IKEA, advocates for the importance of data-driven decision-making and data standardization globally, while giving regions the latitude to innovate to suit their immediate markets. Because data and certain metrics are standardized across regions, these can be benchmarked easily against all other regions, as well as globally. The benchmarking standardization tactic gives an overall picture from which intuitive hunches about which regional innovations could be experimentally expanded or leveraged globally.

Tension 7: The Perfectionist vs. the Accelerator

The traditional approach asserts that leaders should take the time to deliver a perfectly finished product. The emerging approach calls for leaders to acknowledge that doing something quickly, and failing fast, is often more important than doing it perfectly. If not managed wisely, leaders run the risk of delaying the launch of key initiatives or directives due to a fear of imperfection. Conversely, bringing initiatives forward without ample consideration and testing can lead to embarrassing results.

Charlotte Lindsey-Curtet, director of digital transformation and data at the International Red Cross, strives to maintain an impeccable, privacy-by-design approach to protecting the identity of refugees. However, she also explores ways to connect refugee families via new technologies, like biometrics, as speed is a critical factor in family reunification.

What can executives do to navigate these tensions?

Leaders improve their effectiveness not by consistently emphasizing one approach over the other, but by developing the ambidexterity to move between the two as the context requires. The difficulty of achieving this level of cognitive and behavioral ambidexterity should not be underestimated — but it can be achieved, with focused efforts.

Self-awareness. Understanding one's natural tendencies is an important first step. Where is your comfort zone? What's your default position? In the digital world, leaders can gain insight about themselves from real-time feedback apps or from online forums where members of their community post comments and provide assessments.

Learn, adapt, practice. Once leaders know their natural tendencies, they can work to develop a portfolio of micro-behaviors to address the tensions that they don't manage well. This process can be enhanced by formal coaching. That may come in the form of human coaching, or through a coaching bot, like Jolt.ai.

Contextual awareness. Becoming a more effective leader means not only expanding one's current leadership approach to incorporate new behaviors but knowing when to focus more on one side of the tension or the other. This requires both contextual awareness and emotional intelligence — sourced directly from the leader or from the surrounding social environment. Through programs like [reverse mentoring](#), leaders can rely on the diversity embedded within their workforces to give them advice on when it is appropriate to favor one approach more than the other.

Read more on **Leadership & Managing people** or related topics **Managing yourself** and **Decision making**

- **[Jennifer Jordan](#)**, Ph.D., is a social psychologist and Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at IMD. Her research focuses on power, ethics, leadership, and the intersection of these topics.
- **[Michael Wade](#)**, Ph.D., is a Professor of Innovation and Strategy at IMD and holds the Cisco Chair in Digital Business Transformation. He is the Director of the Global Center for Digital Business Transformation, an IMD and Cisco Initiative. His areas of expertise relate to strategy, innovation, and digital transformation. Follow him on Twitter [@mwade100](#).
- **Elizabeth A. Teracino**, Ph.D., is a Research Fellow in the Global Center for Digital Business Transformation at IMD. Her research focuses on leadership and strategy in emerging technology markets.

9 Traits of Church Bullies

By **Thom Rainer**

January 4, 2018

Church bullies are common in many churches. They wreak havoc and create dissension. They typically must have an “enemy” in the church, because they aren’t happy unless they are fighting a battle. They tend to maneuver to get an official leadership position in the church, such as chairman of the elders or deacons or treasurer. But they may have bully power without any official position.

Church bullies have always been around. But they seem to be doing their work more furiously today than in recent history. Perhaps this look at nine traits of church bullies can help us recognize them before they do too much damage.

1. They do not recognize themselves as bullies. To the contrary, they see themselves as necessary heroes sent to save the church from her own self.

2. They have personal and self-serving agendas. They have determined what “their” church should look like. Any person or ministry or program that is contrary to their perceived ideal church must be eliminated.

3. They seek to form power alliances with weak members in the church. They will pester and convince groups, committees and persons to be their allies in their cause. Weaker church staff members and church members will succumb to their forceful personalities.

4. They tend to have intense and emotional personalities. These bullies use the intensity of their personalities to get their way.

5. They are famous for saying “people are saying.” They love to gather tidbits of information and shape it to their own agendas.

6. They find their greatest opportunities in low-expectation churches. Many of the church members have an entitlement view of church membership. They seek to get their own needs and preferences fulfilled. They, therefore, won't trouble themselves to confront and deal with church bullies. That leads to the next issue, which is a consequence of this point

7. They are allowed to bully because church members will not stand up to them. I have spoken with pastors and church staff who have been attacked by church bullies. While the bully brings them great pain, they have even greater hurt because most of the church members stood silent and let it happen.

8. They create chaos and wreak havoc. A church bully always has his next mission. While he or she may take a brief break from one bullying mission to the next, they are not content unless they are exerting the full force of their manipulative behavior.

9. They often move to other churches after they have done their damage. Whether they are forced out or simply get bored, they will move to other churches with the same bullying mission. Some bullies have wreaked havoc in three or more churches.

Church bullying is epidemic in many of our congregations. They must be stopped.

20 Ways to Prevent and Resolve Conflict in the Church

Posted By *Ken Sande* On November 10, 2020 @ 4:26 pm In Home Page,RW Blog



The COVID crisis, combined with heightened racial and political tension, has triggered unprecedented conflict throughout our nation, as well as in the local church.

Churches are literally dividing over masks, racial policies and political positions. As a result, pastors are spending untold hours every week talking with frustrated parishioners, deflecting personal attacks and trying desperately to rebuild unity within their leadership teams and congregations.

Other serious issues are occurring more frequently in Christian homes ... and often end up in pastors' studies.

Marital conflict is on the rise, in some cases triggering threats of divorce. Some parents are taking their frustrations out on their children, many of whom are unable to leave home to find respite at school. Financial

pressures, workplace tensions, layoffs and struggles with alcohol and drugs are also increasing pastors' counseling workloads.

Having conciliated hundreds of church conflicts over the past three decades, I would like to describe 20 key peacemaking principles that have proven to be effective in healing church divisions, reuniting leadership teams, restoring marriages and settling multi-million dollar lawsuits.

Each principle is briefly summarized in this post, and then illustrated and explained in greater detail in a linked post that shows how the concept was applied in an actual conflict.

If you're a church leader, I encourage you to discuss the detailed explanation of each principle with your leadership team, either as part of your regular meetings or during a special weekend retreat. Then plan specific ways that you can model, teach and apply these concepts to the relational challenges your church and members are facing today.

If you're not a church leader, please pass this information on to your pastor. Before doing so, however, please read this post yourself. If you do, you'll see that these principles readily apply to the conflicts you face in your own marriage, with your children or in your workplace.

God's peacemaking principles are relevant to every relationship and conflict in life!

A PDF with live URL links is available at www.rw360.org/resolving-church-conflict ^[1]

1. Remember the Golden Result

We all know the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." But do you know the Golden Result? It's a direct corollary to the Golden Rule: "Other people will usually treat you the way you treat them." Not always, but usually. Because that's how God wired us.

Blame others and they will usually blame you. Admit where you've been wrong, and you'll be surprised how often others do the same. Listen patiently and openly to others, and hold off on making premature judgments, and others will be inclined to do the same with you, which will open the way for understanding and increase the likelihood of agreement.

So anytime you're in a conflict, ask yourself, "How do I want to be treated?" Then engage others by treating them exactly the same way (Matt. 7:12). You'll be amazed at how often this changes the course of your conflict.

For a real-life illustration of this principle in action, see [A Stolen Baby, \\$200,000,000 Lawsuit and an Astonishing Reconciliation](#) ^[2].

2. Bring the Gospel into Every Conflict

When Christians are in conflict, our tendency is to resort to "the law." We love to use God's Word to show where we're right and others are wrong. This approach only drives us further apart.

You can show your people a better way. Instead of bringing the law to others, bring them the gospel. Remind others of the forgiveness we all have in Christ. If we are trusting in him, our sins have been paid in full. We can put off the sinful patterns of the past and put on a new character and new habits, so that we act like Christ himself (Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 8:29).

As you remind yourself and others of these promises, you can bring hope, reduce defensiveness, make it safe to confess sin and inspire Christ-like behavior. I've seen this principle work with deeply divided elder boards, multi-million dollar lawsuits ... and even with a teenage girl whose protective force-field would have put the Starship Enterprise to shame (see [Penetrating Barriers with the Gospel](#) ^[3]).

3. Expose the Idols that Drive Conflict

James 4:1 provides a key insight on conflict: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

In many church conflicts, these passions are not inherently sinful. They are often good things we want too much. This gives rise to a downward spiral, which I often refer to as the "progression of an idol:" a **good desire** turns into a **consuming demand** that leads us to **judge others** and eventually **punish them** if they don't give us what we want.

For a detailed description of this destructive spiral and how you can keep it from crippling your church, see [Getting to the Heart of Conflict](#) ^[4].

4. Guard Against Amygdala Hijacking in Yourself and Others

The Apostle Peter's denial of Christ is a classic example of a neurological/emotional failure that today is commonly referred to as "amygdala hijacking." As Peter demonstrates all too painfully in Luke 22:54-62, this process typically involves sudden, intense emotions that trigger an impulsive reaction that is deeply regretted.

Most of us have experienced these types of impulsive reactions in our marriages, as well as with our children, coworkers or fellow church members.

The good news is that the Bible describes four simple steps you can follow to avoid this destructive dynamic and to take control of even the most intense emotions. This process is summarized in the simple acronym: **READ** (**R**ecognize and name your emotions; **E**valuate their source; **A**nticipate the consequences of following them; and **D**irect the power of your emotions on a constructive course).

For a detailed explanation of both the neurology and theology behind amygdala hijacking, and for two videos illustrating how the READ concept can be applied in daily life, see [Four Ways to Defeat Amygdala Hijacking](#) ^[5].

5. Weave Relational Wisdom into Your Church

When we get into a conflict, most of us have a tendency to go "two-dimensional." We focus obsessively on our own righteousness and the other persons' wrongs. Back and forth, back and forth, and the conflict gets worse.

Relational wisdom, which is gospel-driven form of [emotional intelligence](#) ^[6], helps people to always view their relationships "three-dimensionally" by seeking to be *God-aware*, *self-aware* and *other-aware* in every relational interaction, just as Jesus taught when he commanded us to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).

One of the easiest ways to help your people develop this type of relational wisdom is to teach them to practice four simple acrostics until these key relational skills become automatic habits. To learn more about relational wisdom and the **SOG**, **GPS**, **READ** and **SERVE** acrostics, see [Discover RW](#) ^[7] and [Five Ways to Weave RW into Your Life](#) ^[8].

6. Communicate So Clearly that You Cannot Be Misunderstood

Many conflicts in the church are triggered or inflamed by poor communication, often by leaders themselves. We know what we intend to communicate, but we don't take the time to carefully evaluate and adjust our words so that they cannot be misconstrued.

As one of my mentors once taught me, "For a leader, it's not good enough to communicate so you *can be understood*. You must communicate so clearly that you *cannot be misunderstood*."

No one will get this perfect all the time, but spending a little extra time on an email, a sermon or position paper or remarks you plan to make in a conversation or at a congregational meeting can save you many hours of unnecessary conflict.

For an example of what happened when I failed to live up to this standard, see [Clarity and Charity](#) ^[9].

7. Work Patiently with People As They Process Their Emotions and Experiences

People are always interpreting our words and actions through their own life experiences and emotions. As a result, a seemingly innocent statement in a sermon or conversation can trigger an intense emotional reaction in others. Our natural tendency in such situations is to defend ourselves and point out how unwarranted their responses are. That typically drives you further apart.

It takes time and patience, but it's possible to turn these types of interactions into opportunities for life-changing ministry if you'll take the time to gently and patiently help people process their emotions and life experiences.

This is exactly what happened when I deeply offended a woman through one of my blog posts (see [Seven Ways to Redeem an Offense](#) ^[10]).

8. Don't Be Misled by the Three Faces of Fear

When people react to you with control, anger or withdrawal, it's natural to become defensive and judgmental. But has that response ever helped, whether in your family or in your church? Probably not.

You can break this cycle by realizing that control, anger and withdrawal are often triggered by fear. It's how people instinctively react to protect themselves from being disappointed or hurt.

Once you understand this underlying dynamic, you can resist the temptation to become defensive and instead seek to discern and address the fear that is triggering other's behavior. When you do so, you can prevent conflict, minister to others and move your relationships to a whole new level.

[The Three Faces of Fear](#) ^[11] explains how this principle was applied to a city-wide racial conflict that was turned into a major motion picture.

9. Practice the Three P's of Satisfaction

Whenever you are helping others work through a conflict, you are far more likely to see a positive outcome if you work diligently to provide them with "the Three P's of Satisfaction," which are:

- **Process satisfaction**, which requires a fair, orderly, and even-handed process where everyone feels that they've had a reasonable opportunity to present their side of the matter,

- ***Personal satisfaction***, which requires treating everyone with respect, courtesy and equality, just as we would want to be treated ourselves, and
- ***Product satisfaction***, which requires a final solution that is as reasonable, just and equitable as is humanly possible.

Here's the key: although most people involved in a decision-making or conflict-resolving process will focus their energy on achieving a particular outcome (product satisfaction), in the long run they will also place a great deal of value on how they were treated during the process. This means that even if a final decision is not entirely to their liking, they will often accept the result with equanimity if the decision-makers provided them with a high level of both process and personal satisfaction.

I cannot emphasize this point too much: Give people process satisfaction (the opportunity to fully and candidly share their views), as well as personal satisfaction (treating them with sincere courtesy and respect), and you'll be surprised how content they'll be even if they disagree with your substantive decision.

To see how this process satisfied an attorney who lost a \$2,000,000 contingency fee, and to learn how you can put it into practice in your church, see [The Three P's of Satisfaction](#) ^[12].

10. Constantly Build Passport

Every time you engage the people in your church, whether in your study or from the pulpit, you are either building or destroying "passport." A passport is an authorization to go someplace you have no inherent right to be. In relational terms, it is the permission that people give to you to enter into their lives, to learn their secrets, to know their struggles and to offer advice and correction.

If you want your people to allow you into their lives—to have real relationship with them and to trust you to provide needed shepherding—you must earn a relational passport from every person you engage.

The best way to do so is to relate to others in such a way that they would automatically answer "yes" to three key questions:

- Can I trust you?
- Do you really care about me?
- Can you actually help me?

Each of these questions encompasses a variety of sub-questions that are always rolling around in people's minds when they are thinking of opening up to you. To learn how to engage people in such a way that they will open their hearts and lives to you, even when facing major challenges, see [Building Passport](#) ^[13].

11. Teach Your People to Practice Charitable Judgments

Many of the conflicts that arise in a church begin or grow worse because people assume the worst about others' actions or motives. The best way for you to prevent this tendency is to proactively teach your congregation to practice "charitable judgments" in every area of life.

Making a charitable judgment means that out of love for God, you strive to believe the best about others until you have facts to prove otherwise. In other words, if you can reasonably interpret facts in two possible ways,

God calls you to embrace the positive interpretation over the negative, or at least to postpone making any judgment at all until you can acquire conclusive facts.

To see dozens of Scriptures that support this concept and several practical ways that you can teach this conflict-reducing habit to your congregation, see Charitable Judgments: [An Antidote to Judging Others](#) ^[14].

12. When You Need to Negotiate, PAUSE

Many conflicts in the church involve the negotiation of substantive issues, such as hiring new staff, revising ministry priorities, setting the budget, adopting new Sunday school curricula ... or deciding whether to wear masks.

The Bible provides excellent guidance on how Christians can successfully negotiate the most challenging issues in life. This biblical wisdom may be summarized in an acrostic called the PAUSE principle of negotiating, which stands for:

- **P**repare (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- **A**ffirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- **U**nderstand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations or fears)
- **S**earch for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- **E**valuate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

In Philippians 2:3-4, the Apostle Paul highlighted one of the key elements of biblical negotiating when he wrote, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (see also [Matt. 22:39](#) ^[15]; [1Cor. 13:5](#) ^[16]; [Matt. 7:12](#) ^[17]).

To see how the PAUSE principle was used in one of the most challenging negotiation situations many of us will face in life, see [Asking Parents to Give Up Their Keys](#) ^[18].

13. Diffuse Explosive Meetings with a Six Part Format

Have you ever been in a church meeting that was about to explode? You could feel the tension building with each person's comments and knew it was just a matter of time before the dynamite went off. Once the explosion occurs, it's often impossible to pick up the pieces.

Such explosions are not inevitable. In fact, you can turn these types of volatile meetings into a time of humble self-examination and constructive problem solving by summarizing the issue to be discussed and then indicating that everyone who speaks will be expected to follow a six part format:

- Briefly stated, how do you feel because of this problem?
- What have you done that might have contributed to this problem?
- What do you think would please God as we work through this situation?
- What steps have you already taken to make things better?
- What are you now willing to do to help resolve this problem?
- What do you suggest others do to help resolve this problem?

This format can help people to become more God-aware, self-aware and other-aware by remembering God's involvement in the situation, empathizing with one another, recalling their shared frailty, getting the logs out of

their own eyes, showing respect and accepting responsibility, and being solution-focused rather than attack-oriented (see [Defusing Explosive Meetings](#) ^[19] for further discussion of this simple and yet powerful strategy).

14. Teach People to Focus on the Good Before Itemizing the Bad

When any of us get into a conflict, our tendency is to see our opponents in an increasingly negative light, highlighting their faults and recounting their wrongs. This is a perfect strategy for destroying relationships and dividing churches.

Since God commands us to seek unity and reconciliation in the body of Christ, he graciously provides wisdom principles that enable us to overcome our tendency to focus on others' flaws. One of these principles is set forth in Philippians 4:8-9:

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

I've seen God use this passage to change the course of bitter divorces, lawsuits and church divisions. To see how he made a baby moose the key element in such a reversal, see [Reconciled by a Baby Moose](#) ^[20].”

15. Be Approachable

Conflicts in churches often begin with misunderstandings and minor differences in opinion. Unfortunately, many Christians are afraid to approach their church leaders with their concerns, which sometimes allows those concerns to fester and grow until they finally explode into an intense conflict.

One of the most effective ways to encourage church members to share their concerns before they become major problems is for church leaders to strive earnestly to make themselves “approachable.” This requires the development of a variety of relational skills, including humility, empathy, reading subtle emotional cues and attentive listening.

To see how the presence of these skills greatly enhanced the ministry of one pastor and how the absence of these same skills killed the ministry of another pastor, see [Approachability: The Passport to Real Ministry and Leadership](#) ^[21].

16. Unleash the Power of Confession

At the beginning of this post, I described the power of the “Golden Result,” the fact that other people will usually treat you the same way you are treating them. This principle is especially true when you're in conflict. If you blame others for a problem, they will typically blame you right back. But if you instead confess your contribution to a problem, it's amazing how often others will follow your lead and begin to acknowledge how they have contributed to the situation as well.

One of the most vivid examples I've ever seen of this dynamic took place at a congregational meeting where a pastor had planned a scathing rebuke of his fellow elders. He was just minutes away from delivering an attack that he knew would probably split the church. But one of the elders got up first and confessed his sins to the whole church. To see how that pastor altered course and became an inspiring example to his entire church, see [A Wave of Confessions Saves a Church](#) ^[22].

17. Follow the Example of Lincoln and Reagan

I love to read biographies of individuals who model character qualities and relational skills that I want to develop in my own life. Two of my favorite role models are Abraham Lincoln, who led our country through the Civil War, the bloodiest period in our nation's history, and Ronald Reagan, who led us out of the Cold War, which threatened to annihilate human civilization.

One of the many characteristics that these two men shared was their exceptional ability to understand and manage not only their own emotions and interests but also the emotions and interests of the people they led and the opponents they wished to turn into friends.

Lincoln's relational skills are superbly illustrated in *Team of Rivals*, which describes how Lincoln turned former political rivals into his closest friends and allies. Reagan's remarkable skills are highlighted in *Reagan's Secret War*, which describes how he saved the world from nuclear disaster by winning over obstructionist leaders in the U.S. Congress and hostile leaders in the Soviet Kremlin.

As I read these books, I was amazed to discover that many of the skills these two men practiced are directly relevant to the battles that pastors often fight within their own congregations. To read a summary of these key leadership skills, see [Reagan, Lincoln, RW and You](#) ^[23] and [Lincoln's Relational Wisdom](#) ^[24].

18. Deploy God's Full Array of Peacemaking Processes

The Bible provides a variety of ways for Christians to resolve conflict, including overlooking minor offenses (Prov. 19:11), talking privately with the other person (Matt. 18:15), seeking advice from wise counselors (Prov. 20:18), pursuing mediation (Matt. 18:16) and submitting to binding arbitration (1 Cor. 6:1-6).

Although some conflicts are so complex that professionally-trained conciliators may be needed (such help is available through our [Christian Conciliation Service®](#)) ^[25], the vast majority of conflicts involving Christians can be fully resolved by spiritually mature leaders in the local church, just as God instructs in 1 Corinthians 6:4-5.

For detailed guidance on how you can apply each of these biblical processes to resolve the conflicts that arise in your church family, even if they involve financial or legal issues, download our free 72-page ebooklet, [Leading Christians through Conflict](#) ^[25].

19. Practice Redemptive, Gospel-Centered Church Discipline

Although most conflicts involving Christians can be resolved through the peacemaking processes described above, Jesus knew that believers will occasionally refuse to receive guidance and correction from church leaders. This is why the Matthew 18:15-20 process includes instructions on how to carry out formal discipline with believers who refuse to listen to the church.

Many churches shy away from this responsibility because they think it is unloving or legalistic, because they fear a retaliatory lawsuit or because they've never seen an example of successful church discipline. Other churches willingly pursue discipline but forget that Jesus calls us to approach such ministry as a gospel-centered "rescue mission" rather than a time to impose guilt and condemnation (see Matt. 18:12-14).

Neither of these approaches to discipline reflect the glory of the gospel, nor are they necessary.

As a church elder and professional conciliator, I have been involved in dozens of church discipline cases that were carried out in biblically faithful, gospel-centered and marvelously redemptive ways. These cases involved

issues such as a fraudulent business deal, an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, marital abandonment and an illicit affair between two church members.

To learn how cases like these resulted in repentance, reconciliation and joyful celebration by entire congregations, see [Four Amazing Church Discipline Cases](#) ^[26].

20. An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth Many of Hours of Conflict Resolution

There is one thing that is even better than successfully *resolving* a conflict: *preventing* a conflict in the first place.

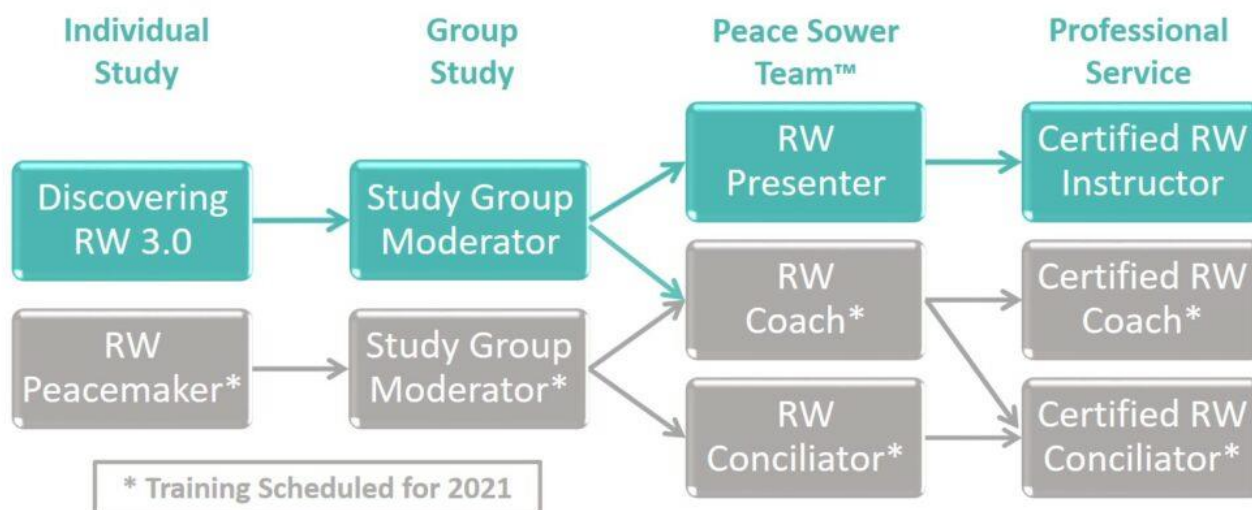
Many church leaders spend hundreds of hours every year putting out the fires of conflict. Pastors can dramatically reduce this type of draining ministry by investing just a few hours in training designed to improve their own relational wisdom and peacemaking skills.

Pastors can see an even greater reduction in their conflict resolution workload by encouraging their entire leadership team to pursue training as well. If leaders go one step further and bring this training to their entire congregation, most of the sparks of conflict can be extinguished before they ever have a chance to start a relational fire.

To learn how you can study, practice and share relational wisdom throughout your church, as well as in any ministry or business in which you are involved, see [15 Training Options and Opportunities](#) ^[27].

To learn how your church, ministry or business could develop an in-house **Peace Sower**

Team™ of **RW presenters, coaches and conciliators** who equip and assist others to live out the principles of relational wisdom and peacemaking, [click here](#) ^[28].



Put God's Peacemaking Principles into Practice!

If you're a church leader, I again encourage you to set aside time to discuss these principles in depth with your leadership team, either as part of your regular meetings or during a special weekend retreat. Then plan specific ways that you can model, teach and apply these concepts to the relational challenges your church and members are facing today.

A small proactive investment of time today could save you hundreds of hours of resolving conflict in the months and years ahead. As James 3:18 promises, “**Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**”

~ Ken Sande

A PDF with live URL links is available at www.rw360.org/resolving-church-conflict ^[1]

Reflection Questions

- Describe one or more situations in your church or ministry in which some of these principles might have resulted in a better outcome?
- Which of these principles might be especially helpful in addressing conflict that your church or ministry is currently facing?
- How many hours have your church or ministry leaders spent this year dealing with conflict?
- How might your church or ministry benefit if your leadership team discuss a few of these principles at each of your regular leadership meetings, or discuss the entire list during a leadership retreat?

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5 Right and Wrong Ways to Deal with Criticism

[Ron Edmondson](#)

Criticism accompanies leadership. The only way to avoid criticism is to do nothing. If a pastor is taking a church somewhere, and really even if he or she isn't, someone will criticize his or her efforts. The way a leader responds to criticism says much about the maturity of the leader and the quality of his or her leadership.

Here are five wrong ways to respond to criticism:

1. Finding fault with the critic

Instead of admitting there might be validity to the criticism, many leaders immediately attempt to discredit the person offering it.

2. Blaming others

Many leaders realize the criticism may be valid, but they aren't willing to accept personal responsibility, so they pass it along to others.

3. Throwing back criticism

Often a leader will receive criticism, and instead of analyzing whether there is validity or not, the leader begins to criticize other organizations or leaders.

4. Ignoring an opportunity to learn

This is a big one, because criticism can be a great teaching tool. It needs a filter, and the person and circumstances need to be taken into consideration, but with every criticism rests an opportunity to learn something positive for the organization or about the leader.

5. Appeasing

Many leaders are so fearful of conflict that they attempt to satisfy all critics, even if they never intend to follow through or make changes because of the criticism. If there is no merit to criticism, then don't act like there is merit.

What else would you add as a wrong way to respond to criticism?

I've been guilty of all of these at one time or another. Awareness is half the battle. Identifying the wrong ways to respond to criticism and working to correct this in your leadership is part of growing as a leader.

Let's be honest! Criticism can hurt. No one enjoys hearing something negative about themselves or finding out that something they do isn't perceived as wonderful by others as they hoped it would be. Criticism, however, is a part of leadership and, if handled correctly, doesn't have to be a bad part of leadership. There is usually something to be learned from all criticism. Allowing criticism to work for you rather than against you is a key to maturing as a leader.

Here are five right ways to respond to criticism:

1. Consider the source

In a stakeholder sense, how much influence and investment does this person have in the organization? This might not change your answer but may change the amount of energy you invest in your answer. Our church meets in two schools, for example, so if the Director of Schools has criticism for me, I will invest more time responding than if it's a random person who never intends to attend our church.

2. Listen to everyone

You may not respond to everyone in the same way, but everyone deserves a voice, and everyone should be treated with respect. This doesn't necessarily include anonymous criticism. I listen to some if it, especially if it appears valid, because I've learned from that, too, and always wonder if my leadership prompted an anonymous response, but I don't "criticize" leaders who don't. I don't, however, weight it as heavily as I would criticism assigned to a person. (Feel free to leave a comment about anonymous criticism and how you respond.)

3. Analyze for validity

Is the criticism true? This is where maturity as a leader becomes more important, because there is often an element of truth even to criticism you don't agree with at the time. Don't dismiss the criticism until you've considered what's true and what isn't true. Mature leaders are willing to admit fault and recognize areas of needed improvement.

4. Look for common themes

If you keep receiving the same criticism, perhaps there is a problem even if you still think there isn't. It may not be a vision problem or a problem with your strategy or programming, but it may be a communication problem. You can usually learn something from criticism if you are willing to look for the trends.

5. Give an answer

I believe criticism is like asking a question. It deserves an answer, even if the answer is that you don't have an answer. You may even have to agree to disagree with the person offering criticism. By the way, I save answers to common criticism received, because I know I'll be answering that same criticism again.

One of my favorite movies is *It's a Wonderful Life*. In one scene, George Bailey responds to criticism that the Bailey Building and Loan is going to collapse. I love how he takes the criticism seriously, considers the importance of the critics, responds as necessary, attempts to calm their fears, and refocuses on the vision. What a great leadership example during times of stress! Obviously this is an extreme example, but it points to a reality that happens everyday in an organization. Many times, people simply don't understand, so they complain...they criticize. The way a leader responds is critical in that moment.

What would you add to my list? Where do you disagree with me here? I'll try to take the criticism the "right" way!

Submitted by Jim Brewer