

Moving FROM MANAGERS TO Shepherds

Elders will be most effective when they actually do what the Bible describes.

BY LYNN ANDERSON

(PART 2 OF 2)

What steps begin to move elders from the boardroom to the pasture, from managers to shepherds, from control to empowerment?

1. Learn shepherding skills

Before attempting to shift structures, the leaders must actually be shepherding people. As one friend put it, “I am not going to let anyone make an elder out of me unless I already have a flock.” Begin to learn shepherding and equipping skills.

2. Delegate management to the deacons and staff

Deacons are “spiritual leaders” too. The first deacons were to be spiritual men “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6). The qualities of deacons call for spiritual maturity (1 Timothy 3:8-13). And deacons are part of the leadership team (Philippians 1:1).

The difference between deacons’ and elders’ work is not that elders’ work is spiritual and deacons’ is menial. Rather, the difference seems to be determined by giftedness. As Peter put it, some leaders have teaching gifts while others have serving gifts (1 Peter 4:10, 11). But all these are spiritual gifts intended for the “good of the body.” This suggests that deacons are also mentors and equippers

for ministry. The expression “deacon” in our Greek New Testament could be translated “servant leader” in English. In our context at least part of their role is to lead and equip those who care for buildings, budgets, personnel, and programs.

Wise elders know that in order to free up time for shepherding, they must methodically delegate managerial tasks to good deacons. To pass the baton

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from the shepherds to the servants, a shepherd must:

- Spot servant leaders
- Clarify specifically what they are delegating
- Thoroughly train and equip those to whom it is delegated
- Be sure they are willing to let go! Assure the deacons they will be available for counsel and guidance, but promise not to take it back. (And keep that promise!)

3. Turn “The Herd” into “Flocks”

Slicing the church up into elder-specific chunks does not turn those fragments into flocks. Shepherding by zones

doesn’t work, either. Real flocks are made of folks who have relational affinity with their shepherd. Congregations achieve this in several ways. Here are two:

First, some work through the church directory, a few names at each shepherds’ meeting. Each shepherd tells all he knows about a family, thus clarifying what family belongs naturally in what shepherd’s flock. The families unfamiliar to any of the shepherds are assigned to an elder to assure that no person falls through the cracks, becoming sheep without a shepherd.

Second, in some churches members of the congregation select the shepherd they feel the most natural relationship with. Shepherds and sheep are linked on that basis, but the flocks are spread as evenly as possible. (For a helpful instrument, contact hopenet@ont.com)

4. Turn management meetings into shepherds’ circles

As the number of elders in a church increases, meetings can bog down into growth-stalling bureaucracy, taking the shepherds away from the sheep. Congregations have found helpful alternative approaches.

Some churches select from their elders an administrative trio (or duet or



quartet) to team up with deacons and/or staff to manage the buildings, budgets, personnel, and programs of the church.

Some rotate elders through this trio, with limited tenure in this role. Some delegate management completely to the staff. Others think it more biblical to delegate this management to capable deacons who, in concert with staff, touch base regularly with a small administrative trio of elders.

Some churches hire a full-time administrator.

Some use their own combination of the above. But, whichever approach is taken, it is terribly important that someone is minding the store. Equally as important, elders must spend more time being shepherds and less having meetings. Most meetings can then become shepherds' circles for prayer, encouragement, and Bible study.

5. Let leaders lead

What is everybody's business is nobody's

business. So things go best when there is a designated leader keeping "all the wagons headed west." However, by "leaders" we do not mean "bosses" or autocrats, nor merely charismatic personalities. And we definitely don't mean a "one man show" detached from the rest of the leadership team.

Rather, think quarterback. Or trail guide. Or player-coach. Envision a person who gathers up the values and passions of the body and points these in a doable direction. Think in terms of persons who trigger action and spell out plans and make sure things keep happening according to plan.

In most cases, the senior minister is most naturally this leader, but not necessarily so. Whoever this person is, he should be visionary with clear leadership gifts—ideally a person with some training in leadership—and who has time to lead.

Above all the church must empower this person to lead! Otherwise, as Lyle Schaller says, "You destine your church-

es to grow no larger than a committee of amateurs can manage—part time."

The journey from managers to shepherds may take a decade, but the benefits are very much worth it. When shepherds shepherd, good things happen: the flock gets better care, and more leaders are equipped and empowered, so the overall ministry capacity of the church expands. Then, the shepherds find multiplied shoulders upon which to spread the burden. Thus weariness diminishes, and leaders find joy.

Then God-hungry people in our post-modern world can find the integrity, community, and wisdom figures for which they long—right here in the body of Christ.

Most importantly, Jesus' style is implemented and God's designs are honored among his people.

Lynn Anderson is founder of Hope Network Ministries, which has developed a multimedia shepherd training package. For more information go to www.lynnanderson.org.