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Principles for Success in Succession of the Senior Leader

Phillip D. Goldsberry Sr.
pgoldsberry15@georgefox.edu

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS IN SUCCESSION OF THE SENIOR LEADER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PHILLIP D. GOLDSBERRY, SR.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Phillip Goldsberry

has been approved by
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Glenn Williams, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Calvin Habig, DMin

Lead Mentor: Jason Clark, DMin

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife and ministry partner, Pamela,
you have loved, believed in and supported me. Together we walked through
multiple successions and touched a lot of lives for Him.

I also want to thank the wonderful people who
allowed me to be their Pastor over the years. Your
relationship, encouragement and growth have
made my life call fulfilling.

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ABSTRACT

The succession of a senior leader is inevitable and all leaders will find themselves in their professional life being handed the title “previous.” The inevitability of succession exists within ecclesial and business contexts. The primary purpose of this research is to examine succession principles and processes within churches, and to secondarily look at business models and practices. Today’s aging clergy and narrow field of available successors is creating a potentially catastrophic future for the American church. The focus of this paper is to develop principles and preparation strategies that can be initiated to create a path to success for the three players in the succession process:

1. The Incumbent
2. The Organization
3. The Successor.

Drawing on Biblical patterns, business practices, and contemporary successions, this paper describes the reality and severity that accompanies the succession process. It concludes with a framework for success and a definition of what it can mean to end well. This dissertation will empower the three players to navigate the process and develop the principles necessary for success.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable in every area of life. In a world where change is determined by the cycles of life and dictated by the barrage of changing technology, we cannot escape the changing future that is looming on the horizon of every individual. Everyone is in a mode of transition in one form or another. Education, wealth, prestige, position, and socio-economic standing will not protect one from the inevitable: change.

Change within an institution does not necessarily have its greatest impact when regular employees, or the common laborer, decide to leave the organization. Change and succession of personnel are ineludible in one form or another within all institutions, business or ecclesial. Of grave concern and impact to any institution, is the transition or succession of the senior leader.

Whether successful or unsuccessful, every leader must acknowledge the sometimes-distant horizon of transitioning the coveted title of senior leader to another individual. The inexorable and unyielding cycle of life will happen in corporate America and in every religious organization. The uncertainty of life from health and aging, to market share performance of the organization, to the public persona of the senior leader, are never set in stone. These unknowns are the bedrock for the cause and need that precipitate the transition of the senior leader.

The success or failure of transitioning the senior leader requires adherence to protocols, procedures, and principles. Close attention will be given to the diverse factors that affect the outcome of the transition and help support a successful passing of the baton to the new leader. Careful study will be given to the principles that can help entities

transition with fluidity and strength, knowing that the antithesis is real and not imaginary. Case studies can be referenced from history, the Bible, and contemporary organizations, both secular and religious, that will help garner success and future growth.

Transition is going to happen ultimately to every individual and corporate entity. There are guiding principles that help to assess and create a successful passing of the baton. The matrices for transitions are as diverse as the types of corporations and religious organizations existing in the world today. The formula for “when” to transition consists of variables that range from quite nebulous to prescribed by term limits of the institution.

For the sake of this dissertation the focus will be on churches whose polity engages a local board of decision makers in cooperation with the congregation. The church world has varying ways that the senior leader is elected or appointed. Some denominational structures make the decision through an outside presbytery that serves as the governing body that determines who the senior leader is. This process could lend to an entire dissertation on the nuances and challenges that come from that environment.

A primary goal of this dissertation is to engage the reader in seeking principles that have historical precedent, foundational guidelines, and universal implications. A secondary goal is to knowingly anticipate the inevitable, impending timeframe of every institution in its pursuit of a new senior leader. Careful interest will be given primarily to Biblical context and secondarily to contemporary business factors that lean toward success. Careful examination will be given to the three players within the succession process: The Incumbent, The Organization, and The Successor. The desired end result is

that the reader will be able to assess and act upon guiding principles that will result in a successful succession within an institution.

The reasoning and motivation behind this dissertation is twofold. First, I have navigated through several senior leadership successions. I have experienced success and failure coupled with a broad range of emotions that resulted from the successions. Second, in the next ten to twenty years, there will be a significant shift of senior leadership within the local church. Of grave concern for successions is two questions: 1. Will there be a prepared and an adequate number of potential leaders to assume these new senior roles that will be vacated? 2. Will the organizations be prepared to accept the new breed of successors when that time comes?

My succession journey was marked with moments of euphoria and utter devastation. I have navigated several transitions ranging from the senior leadership in a church I founded, to transitioning to a mega-church founded by someone else whom I was to succeed. In these cases, original plans were implemented but the necessary principles were missing for sustainable success. Deep within I questioned how something that seemed to be God-ordained turned the direction that it did, and resulted in the devastation and disappointment of several thousand people. This will be addressed later in the dissertation.

The following statistics point to the impending dilemma that the church is moving toward. The retirement ages of senior leaders in both the church world and general the marketplace settings show:

Church World

- 61, retirement age of the most recent Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.
- 65, average retirement age for Presbyterian clergy (PCUSA)

- 72, required retirement age for United Methodist clergy
- 85, retirement age of the most recent pope, Benedict XVI (who was elected at age 78)

General Marketplace

- 58, average age of outgoing CEO's and S&P 500 companies in 2012
- 64 (men) and 62 (women), average retirement age in United States for *all* workers (any profession)¹

A January 2017 article in a leading Christian magazine, *Christianity Today*, stated the same concern with data from leading diagnostics within the church community. The article stated,

American pastors aren't as young as they used to be. As clergy live longer and stay in ministry longer, the average age of Protestant senior pastors has risen to 54 – a decade older than 25 years before, when the average age was 44. The pulpit has been graying for decades. In the 60's, a majority of pastors were under 45. In 2017, most are over 60. The shift stems from evolving career expectations and difficulty passing leadership on to millennial-aged pastors, Barna reported.²

An online article in October 2017 announced the impending succession of Bill Hybels. “The news comes amid Willow Creek’s six-year succession plan for the mega church, which was founded in 1975 and has grown to rank among the 10 biggest in America. The 65-year-old pastor joins a wave of greying leaders who have opted to go public with their leadership transition.”³ Jesus gave an outline on the development of his own succession

¹ William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession that Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 51-52.

² Kate Shellnut, “Only 1 in 7 Senior Pastors is Under 40,” *Christianity Today*, January 2017, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/only-1-in-7-senior-pastors-is-under-40-barna.html>.

³ Kate Shellnutt, “Willow Creek Chooses Co-Ed Pastors to Succeed Bill Hybels,” *Christianity Today*, October 2017, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/october/willow-creek-bill-hybels-names-co-ed-pastors-to-succeed.html?utm_source=ctweekly-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=7485850&utm_content=543397655&utm_campaign=email.

and planning for the inevitable shift that leaders will journey through. His words are both corrective and insightful,

And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!' Luke 14:27-30⁴

The implications of succession, cost, careful examination of the process, and possible market share loss are seen in this passage. If not careful, senior leaders in all genres can be inaugurated into their prestigious position and not count the cost of what their future, and the organizations' future, will look like when they exit.

Business author Jim Collins uses the analogy of clock-building versus telling time. Collins says, "Having a great idea or being a charismatic visionary leader is 'time telling;' building a company that can prosper far beyond the presence of any single leader and through multiple product cycles is 'clock building'."⁵ The challenge of this dissertation is to find principles that allows organizations to build clocks, in the face of the succession of the senior leader whose time is running out.

The research suggests a possible dilemma in today's contemporary church within the next two decades. Life expectancy is longer and the resource pool to draw from is both shrinking and pursuing other objectives. The need for guiding principles in the

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this paper are to the New Living Translation (NLT) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

⁵ Jim Collins, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 23.

succession of senior leaders is of necessity, as this challenge is facing both churches and businesses at an unprecedented rate.

The Inevitability of Succession in Ecclesiastical and Business Environments

The inescapable knowledge of every senior leader, in all organizations, is the impending and inevitable transference of their title to include “previous” or “past.” What is unknown is the cause and need that will precipitate this transition. Something, or someone, will be the catalyst that will inevitably cause an institution to seek a new senior leader.

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to examine the similarities and differences that occur in the succession of the senior leader in business and ecclesiastical settings. Leadership is inevitable to the success of any organization, irrespective if it is tagged religious or non-religious. Leading people through a succession in a not-for-profit versus a for-profit, revolves around a common theme: people. This one element – people – is the common denominator in the institutional makeup that cannot be overlooked or disengaged.

Another purpose is to seek for patterns, processes, and principles that aid in this inevitable time frame of every organization. Research reveals that there is no single path to success in succession. Succession techniques vary as much as the “product” produced by the institution. The Vanderbloemen Group, a cooperative that assists organizations in succession, states “People often ask us for the ‘secret sauce’ of succession planning.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all secret. It's an art, not a science. Every succession plan is dependent on many contextual factors.”⁶

Dr. J. Robert Clinton says that, “Patterns deal with the overall framework, or the big picture, of a life. Processes deal with the ways and means used by God to move a leader along in the overall pattern. Principles deal with the identification of foundational truths within processes and patterns that have a wider application to leaders.”⁷ The “three P trifecta:” patterns, processes, and principles, is necessary for success in the succession.

It would seem that there should be a natural, cyclical approach to the senior leadership of an institution that would proliferate, no matter the institution. This approach is the “pattern” or big picture view that many organizations base a succession on. The institution sees the impending and chooses to embrace a simplistic view that all will work out in the end. Patterns can tend to be sterile and free of heart and emotion.

Some institutions pay particular interest to the process and can either search internally, or hire external firms to help work out the process for all concerned. This process, which may seem robotic and contrived, may involve careful planning and implementation of coaching and training for the institution and the potential new candidate. An institution that attempts to move to succession with only pattern and process, will miss the much-needed principles.

Principles are the guiding factors that have heart and soul and have historically been, and will need to be, embraced into the future. Principles are the guardrails that align

⁶ Sarah Robins, “5 Considerations All Pastors Need to Think Through Now,” *Vanderbloemen Search Group Blog*, April 27, 2017, accessed May 3, 2017, <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/5-considerations-for-all-pastors>.

⁷ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 35.

the path and make clear the navigational tools for the organization. Principles can be elusive, but they are the organizational character that motivates and steers the institution, regardless of acknowledgment. They can make their way to a mission or vision statement, but their presence is the DNA of the institution that propels or prevents future expansion.

Similarities and Differences

The succession process of churches and businesses have similarities and differences that can lead to different outcomes and objectives. The similarities and differences fall into five categories. These categories reflect, and are the result of transitions, my personal insight from over three decades of ministry at different capacities. The five categories: People, Relational Chemistry (within the organization on multiple levels), Longevity of the Senior Leader and the Institution, Finances, and Understanding the Role of how People View Themselves in the Organization Structure (employee or attendee). These five categories can be found in both churches and business.

The purpose of looking at the similarities and differences of succession practices in ecclesial organizations and business entities is not to deify business or to monetize churches. The primary purpose is to examine best practices in both and to see the needed intermingling that can evolve for a healthy outcome. Churches have the ability to divorce themselves of healthy business practices and businesses have a way of removing the essence of God from their operations.

Throughout this paper the focus is primarily on the church world and the Christian worldview that flows from it in regard to succession. Yet the author does not

devalue the practice and expertise of healthy business protocol. Neither organization should deify or demonize the other in regard to succession.

David Livermore, in his book, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success*, defines the term cultural intelligence as, "...your capacity to function effectively in intercultural contexts, including different national, ethnic, organizational, generational, and many other contexts."⁸ Today's businesses and churches function in a global community. The thoughtful, and misunderstood, embracing of a golden era may keep the institution from viability and growth into its future. In the area of succession, the institution needs to be keenly aware of present reality and still balance the track record of the past.

Livermore challenges institutions to see the bigger picture that can unite the institution versus a myopic view of the senior leader to advance in his own lane of success and financial prowess. Livermore believes:

Although extrinsic motivators such as advancement in your career and salary are valid, at some point, culturally intelligent leaders need to consider something bigger as the ongoing source of motivation for culturally intelligent behavior. Ultimately, a bigger cause is need to sustain CQ Drive. ... John Elkington, dubbed the dean of the corporate social responsibility movement, coined the term *triple bottom line*, meaning businesses need to be equally responsible for people, planet, and profit. He argues that all three are the measure of today's successful organization: Are we causing people suffering, despair, or injustice in the process of making a profit (people)? How does our work affect the environment (planet)? Are we profitable, and if so, what goes along with the profits being made (profits)?⁹

The "triple bottom line" of people, planet, and profit translate into the church dynamics also. People, as will be discussed next, are the main agenda for church mission

⁸ David Livermore, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success* (New York, NY: American Management Association, 2015), ix-x.

⁹ Ibid., 60.

and work to be viewed as necessary to be successful. The planet is the call of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 to “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations...” (Matthew 28:19 NLT). The bottom line of profit is not exempt from the church on two fronts. First, churches must have a profitable financial base to stay open and able to minister. Second, the concept of true profit is an introspective journey into why ministry is done. Jesus said, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul. Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37 NKJV)

People

The first major similarity between these two worlds, churches and business, is people. People are the necessary component that engage, equip, and help to establish a vision of the institution that is both responsible and successful. The people are the backbone of the organization that will remain consistent after the incumbent has retired or moved on. The people, and how they are being engaged, is the telltale to the potential leader stepping in and stepping up.

The realignment that takes place, when people become the priority, is fundamental to the succession process. This one fundamental shift redirects the process of choosing a new senior leader from being a “business” only decision to more of a healthy disposition of these key individuals of the organization. All institutions need to assess how they are interacting with people in the process of making a profit. The definition and context of profit may differ from institution to institution, yet there will always be a causative agent that motivates the institution to open its doors on a consistent basis. How people act on behalf of businesses and churches can make or break the institution.

Authors Jim Collins and Morten Hansen conducted a nine-year research project that became the premise for their book, *Great by Choice*. Their goal was to answer the question, “Why do some companies thrive in uncertainty, even chaos, and other do not? When buffeted by tumultuous events, when hit by big, fast-moving forces that we can neither predict or control, what distinguishes those who perform exceptionally well from those who underperform or worse?”¹⁰

The premise of Collins’ and Hansens’ research describes the unknown and potential whirlwind that can ensue with the changing of the senior leader of an institution. The succession process, will face scrutiny and microscopic inspection of all that was and is to be as the wheels of change are set into motion. Collins and Hansen concluded that in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, there is one determining factor that determines chaos or thriving:

People do. People are disciplined fanatics. People are empirical. People are creative. People are productively paranoid. People lead. People build teams. People build organizations. People build cultures. People exemplify values, pursue purpose, and achieve big hairy audacious goals. Of all the luck we can get, people luck – the luck of finding the right mentor, partner, teammate, leader, friend – is one of the most important.¹¹

The allusive, unpredictable, and sometimes fickle component that is common to effective organizations, is people. This realization, in the discovery of the inevitable and impending transition of leaders that will ultimately take place, is one of the keys to a successful succession. People need to be placed at a high premium as one of the most important elements in the process.

¹⁰ Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen, *Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck – Why Some Thrive Despite Them All* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 1-2.

¹¹ Ibid., 161.

In the research for this paper, and in my personal experience in transitions, when people are moved into more secondary positions the potential for chaos ensues. The incumbent, the institution, and the potential candidate rests their futures in the responses and decisions that are made by people. These three will vacillate and change with age and need. Even though they are important to the process, when people are demoted in importance, all three may become unnecessary.

Relational Chemistry

The second category is relational chemistry. Relational chemistry is that elusive component that cannot be calculated on a spreadsheet, profit and loss, or balance sheet. Relational chemistry is the telltale to discovering if the institution and leadership are truly placing people first or profit.

Relational chemistry cannot be placed on an Excel spreadsheet to determine where an organization and its leadership are calculably located, for better or worse. It is more than just a feeling or an emotion that is dictated by cloud cover or a bright shining sun and blue skies. As vague and ill-defined as it may seem, it is sensed if is present or missing in an organization.

The necessary and needed relational chemistry is the byproduct of the leadership-to-people interactions that occur within an organization. John Maxwell says, “All good leadership is based on relationships. People won’t go along with you if they can’t get along with you. That’s true whether you are leading up, across, or down.”¹² When succession is inevitable, the relational chemistry of the institution should be assessed.

¹² John C. Maxwell, *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing your Influence from Anywhere in Your Organization* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Business, 2005), 119.

The relational chemistry of an environment can be ascertained by the senior management team and their interaction with their subordinates as well as their interaction, or perceived chemistry with the CEO. Maxwell offers a simple diagnostic test that can be implemented. The best setting and process for this test is, "...paying attention in informal settings, such as during hallway conversations, at lunch or in the meeting that often occurs informally before or after a meeting."¹³ This test, mirrors Livermore's cultural intelligence question and how organizations treat people:

- What makes them laugh? These are the things that give a person great joy.
- What makes them cry? This is what touches a person's heart at a deep emotional level.
- What makes them sing? These are the things that bring deep fulfillment.¹⁴

This test can also be helpful in ecclesiastical settings. If the church world causes people to feel like pawns on a chess board who are being manipulated by leadership, and not truly cared for, the result is catastrophic for the church.

Church organizations do not have a tangible product that produces a profit. The church world presents an invisible Creator that invites people into an eternal relationship. However, relational chemistry cannot be from God alone. The leadership, especially the senior leader, needs to embody engaged relationships, wholly and completely.

Longevity

The third category that affects both the church community and the business community is the longevity of the senior leader and the institution. Longevity can be the mixed blessing of being one of the greatest assets or one of the greatest liabilities. The

¹³ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴ Ibid.

tenure of the institution and its senior leader must be calculated and assessed as the process for “new” is being anticipated.

The blessing of longevity is a balance of name recognition and the ability to outlive your critics. The tenure of the institution and its senior leader becomes extraordinary power, based on the performance, integrity, and sustainability of the two. It is the difference between Edsel and Rolls Royce or Jimmy Swaggart and Billy Graham. Whether one knows the entire story, or has been swayed by a possible unsubstantiated report, the longevity perception can be a force for good or evil.

One of my journeys in succession was following a man that had been the senior leader for almost six decades. The good of the tenure was I knew the history and heritage. The challenging part was realizing how difficult it would be for the shift on his part and the church’s. The path had been set but the follow through became tainted as the longevity and realization of impending changes were realized.

The American Council on Science and Health published an article in July 2018 with the following information:

McDonald’s. Dell. Chrysler. Rolls-Royce. Sears. Trump. All are companies that bear the names of their founders. Does that matter? One would think not, as Shakespeare told us, ‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.’ But new research published in the *American Economic Review* begs to differ. The authors, all from Duke University, claim that eponymous companies (i.e., companies named after their founders) are more successful than others.¹⁵

Businesses can flourish under the longevity of name recognition, if the organization has maintained a market share that is appealing to the populace. Senior leaders can leave their

¹⁵ Alex Berezon, “Are Companies Named After Their Founders More Successful?” *American Council on Science and Health*, July 18, 2017, accessed October 20, 2017, <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/07/18/are-companies-named-after-their-founders-more-successful-11575>.

organization and pursue greater horizons, many times outside their original organization's focus. Take for example, the following business leaders who have impacted contemporary thought: former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Sir Richard Branson, Martha Stewart, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and John Grisham. Each of these household names have flourished due to their name recognition and celebrity status.

Following a senior leader in a church has multiple challenges. Former senior pastor Leith Anderson, who navigated through a senior leader succession, says:

Long-term pastors are hard to follow; they often seem to take most of the chips with them. Long-term pastors who died in the church are particularly unfollowable. And, if the previous pastor died in the pulpit preaching a superb sermon after 50 years in that same church, all the chips will be gone! In contrast are those marvelous predecessors who prepare the way. They teach the congregation to love and support the next pastor "no matter who." They even make a special point to endorse their successors and thereby confer hundreds (maybe thousands) of their own chips.¹⁶

In conclusion, longevity does not have a generic assessment for all organizations. The longevity of the senior leader or the organization can be either a positive or negative influence in the succession process. The choice of the outcome lies in the temperament and attitude of the players involved in how change will be accepted or rejected.

Financial Stability

The fourth category is financial stability. Both churches and businesses require finances to operate their organizations. Sound financial principles and practices are required for both to remain in business. The difference is in the evaluation of worth.

¹⁶ Leith Anderson, "How to Win at Parish Poker," *Christianity Today*, Winter 1986, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1986/winter/8611044.html?start=1>.

Churches have balance sheets and profit and loss statements. Churches can own property and have appreciable assets. The major difference between businesses and churches is that churches cannot offer an IPO (initial public offering) that would allow shares to be distributed to institutional investors. Government regulations guard inurement, especially to the not-for-profit status referred to as 501c3. The financial savvy of a church can be alluring or repelling to progressive leaders.

The appreciable difference between churches and business is the generated income from the organization, and their approval or disapproval of a potential new leader. The incumbent and their vision, charisma, people skills, and financial integrity may have been the causative agent for the organization to operate in the corporate expression that they were. The potential successor is possibly an unknown entity that has not proven their wherewithal in any of these areas, especially as the senior leader of the organization.

As authors Carolyn Weese and Russell Crabtree state in their work, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*, “‘Nothing educates like an invoice.’ Those words came from the young chair of a church finance committee. If the model of Jesus is not enough to educate us toward better leadership transition, then perhaps an invoice is. Our current way of carrying out change in leadership is not only questionable from a Biblical perspective; it is also extremely expensive.”¹⁷ Weese and Crabtree give the following scenario regarding finances during a transition:

¹⁷ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 29-30.

On the basis of our experience, we estimate that worship attendance typically drops about 15 percent when an effective pastor leaves, since resident associate pastors or an interim pastor are rarely as strong in leading worship as the pastor who has just departed from the church. ... A church of 750 worshippers will drop in attendance to approximately 635 each Sunday... a drop in giving may lag slightly as people temporarily send in their offering without attending. The church loses financial support of 15 percent or so on a million-dollar budget – approximately \$150,000 a year, or about \$200,000 in the eighteen months it takes to find a new pastor. Once a new pastor arrives, giving does not immediately rebound and may take six months to return to its previous level. This calculates to a further loss of about \$33,000. This puts the two-year income loss at \$233,000.¹⁸

Business environments are largely critiqued by their ability to create products and services that cultivate a sustainable cash flow by selling a tangible object or a desired service. It is not uncommon for a business to allow investment from outside parties in exchange for ownership, stock or shared ownership. While businesses are transformed by the bottom line, churches are “selling” someone who is unseen and promising a long-term return on your personal investment of yourself.

The major difference in the church setting is that people can vote for the leader with their mouth, but leave with their feet. The initial acceptance at the inception of the succession can be quickly thwarted by the actions, attitudes, and programs of the successor. The same person who had said “yes” is now choosing to leave which results in more than a “no” on the new leader. It is now the absence of their finances as they leave the organization.

Our American capitalism is part of our success story to the world. The sought after American Dream is a magnet that propels non-Americans to sacrifice all that they have to pursue this captivating and compelling dream and come to the United States. Both ecclesial organizations and for-profit businesses need to find the balance between

¹⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

profit and people. Neither group is exempt from this pull for success. When succession is the encroaching agenda, both groups will need to assess if they are in it for the money or whether there is a higher agenda.

Organizational Structure

The fifth category involves how the participant, the leaders and the organization view and engage themselves. In the senior leadership succession, within businesses and churches, the operating system, whether it is By-Laws or State and Federal regulations, require the constituency to be involved. This involvement can be mandated to a percentage of voting members or stockholders who are involved in the succession process.

The major difference is that ecclesial organizations are generally led by a person who helps to guide their personal and moral life. In most cases there is a Board of Elders or Advisory Board who help to steer and direct the vision alongside the senior leader. The interaction of these two is indicative of what is flowing down into the organization. Chaos at the top of organization flow chart will result in confusion as the chart goes down.

Businesses are looking for participants to hit quorum for voting so that a succession can be secured; hopefully focusing on greater market share and profits. The senior leader of a business organization is not seen or deemed as a moral compass or one who evokes truth into their followers, though truthfulness and moral turpitude. Though the focus may be different, the involvement of the people is both needed and necessary.

The similarity is the “how” of the people behind the engagement. The big question is, how are the constituents involved? Do they view themselves as employees or

attendees, knowing that their presence is expected and required? Or, are the constituents seen as invested in the process, knowing that their engagement is making a difference? This simple test is tantamount to the assessment of success for engagement that leads to successful succession and a reinforcement of the very first point that people are the high premium in the process.

Challenges and Principles

Both institutions have challenges and principles that are similar, as they are both in the people-business in one form or another. The proverbial “win” may differ in scope and magnitude, but one goal for both is sustainability of the people in the face of the stark realization that everything is in flux. This flux includes the senior leader who will ultimately step down.

This stepping down, or ending, will produce challenges for both institutions. This “timing out”, is painful and can challenge the core of the institution and its viability to step into the future. In his book, *Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward*, Dr. Henry Cloud states the following:

Life and business involve pain. Sometimes, as we have seen, creating an ending might cause a little hurt, like pulling a tooth. But it is good pain. It gives life to you or to your business. ... But there is another kind of pain, one that should not be embraced, one that you want to do everything in your power to end. The pain I am referring to here is misery that goes nowhere. That is normal, and when it happens, it is time to wake up. It is time to realize anytime pain is going nowhere fast, a few things must be occurring ... sometimes we ask for reasons that are truly outside our control. But more times we realize, we are not executing an ending because of internal factors, not external ones.¹⁹

¹⁹ Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 53.

The “ending” can be more than the realization of a time and tenure served. Another challenge is the reality of life winding down due to the unstoppable aging process.

The contemporary church world is watching as their senior leader is entering their later years. The challenges of leading a religious organization reach far beyond the Profit and Loss statement of the organization. Theology, personality, integrity, transparency, and leadership style can plague the succession process. When you couple that with the aging number of current church leaders, you have challenges that can seem almost insurmountable.

The aging process is not something that is only found in contemporary settings. Biblical leaders had to face their impending maturity and create and engage in a plan of succession. It is a definite challenge to face the fact that the beloved leader is now aging and there will need to be a replacement. Today’s church in America is facing this challenge at an unprecedented rate.

The principle of aging is not just a challenge in the church community. Business organizations and other professions have mandated age cutoffs that will not allow an individual to violate. Aging is a principle of life that carefully must be calculated to assess the senior leaders viable time of service.

David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, echoes this challenge. Kinnaman, speaking on the aging dilemma says, “The aging of pastors represents a substantial crisis for Protestant churches. In fact, there are now more full-time senior pastors who are over the age of 65 than under the age of 40. It is urgent that denominations, networks and

independent churches determine how to best motivate, mobilize, resource and deploy more younger pastors.”²⁰

In March 2017, the Barna Group released an article entitled *The Aging of America's Pastors*. The following information from that article is quite telling, describing the impending challenge for the local church:

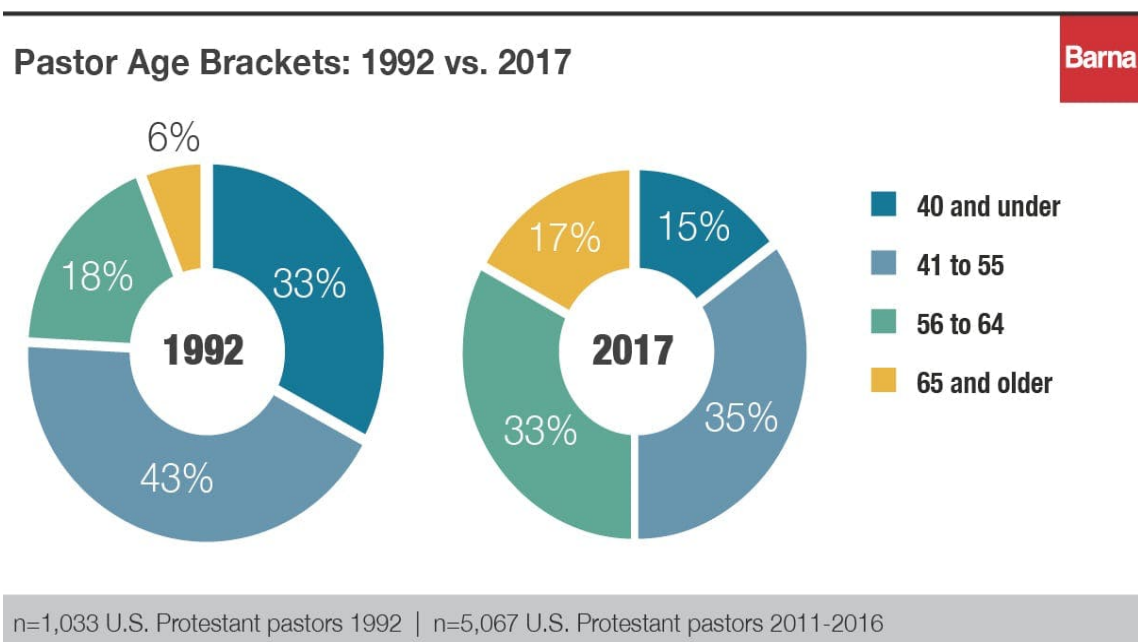
When George Barna published his 1992 findings in *Today's Pastors*, the median age of Protestant clergy was 44 years old. One in three pastors was under the age of 40, and one in four was over 55. Just 6 percent were 65 or older. Twenty-five years later, the average age is 54. Only one in seven pastors is under 40, and half are over 55. The percentage of church leaders 65 and older has nearly tripled, meaning there are now more pastors in the oldest age bracket than there are leaders younger than 40.²¹

A major challenge facing the next decade of church life will be the aging of the senior leader. With the average age of today's pastors at fifty-four, and the realization that pastors over the age of 65 has nearly tripled in the last twenty-five years, the American church is facing two major dilemmas when it comes to the senior leaders. The two dilemmas that are emerging, as the leaders age, are the possible extinction of present leaders and the absence of potential leaders under the age of forty.

The call to being the senior leader of a church and the process of preparation is not for the faint of heart who may see it as just another profession. Ministry is that divine nudge that calls an individual to give their talents and passions to a ministry that may not financially pay as well as other professions that require equivalent educational standards. The challenge is the potential pool of candidates and the aging of those presently in ministry.

²⁰ Barna, *The Aging of America's Pastors*, Research Releases in Leaders & Pastors, March 1, 2017, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>.

²¹ Ibid.



*Figure 1: Pastor Age Brackets*²²

The impact of the data presented in Figure 1, brings to light the present reality that is facing all three players in the succession process. The Barna Group went on to say, “The upward climb did not begin in the 1990s. In 1968, 55 percent of all Protestant clergy were under the age of 45—that is, the *majority* of all church leaders were in their 20s, 30s and early 40’s. In 2017, just 22 percent are under 45.”²³

²² Ibid. This study was conducted in partnership with Pepperdine University. A total of 900 Protestant senior pastors were interviewed by telephone and online from April through December, 2015. Pastors were recruited from publicly available church listings covering 90 percent of U.S. churches that have a physical address and a listed phone number or email address. Churches selected for inclusion were called up to five times at different times of the day to increase the probability of successful contact. The sample error for this study is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

²³ Ibid.

Business Transitions

Corporate America has realized the need for principles to help govern the individual who has their hand on the helm. “In the corporate world, succession planning is now a requirement for nearly all publicly traded companies. Facing a season when no one knows who’s in charge is just too risky. You need a plan.”²⁴ Financial bottom lines, stock prices, and employee security necessitate the need for principles that will facilitate potential growth when transition takes place.

It would seem, from a cursory look at business practices worldwide, that businesses are taking the succession of their senior leader seriously. Eben Harrell, senior editor at *Harvard Business Review*, describes the reality that businesses are experiencing:

Each year about 10% to 15% of corporations must appoint a new CEO, whether because of executive’s retirement, resignation, dismissal, or ill health. In 2015, in fact, turnover among global CEOs hit a 15-year high. Activist investors are increasingly forcing out leader they deem underperforming. Yet despite these trends, most boards are unprepared to replace their chief executives. A 2010 survey by the research firm Heidrick & Struggles and the Rock Center for Corporate Governance at Stanford University revealed that only 54% of board were grooming a specific successor, and 39% had no viable internal candidates who could immediately replace the CEO if the need arose.²⁵

The modern-day icon of business successions that resonates on multiple levels, is Steve Jobs and Apple Computer. In his biography of Jobs, Walter Isaacson sets the stage for Jobs’ broken succession in the introduction:

Along the way [Jobs] produced not only transforming products but also, on his second try, a lasting company, endowed with his DNA, that is filled with creative designers and daredevil engineers who could carry forward his vision. In August 2011, right before he stepped down as CEO, the enterprise he started in his

²⁴ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 10.

²⁵ Eben Harrell, “Succession Planning: What the Research Says,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 2016, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2016/12/succession-planning-what-the-research-says>.

parents' garage became the world's most valuable company. ... He was not a model boss or human being, tidily packaged for emulation. Driven by demons, he could drive those around him to fury and despair. But his personality and passions and products were all interrelated, just as Apple's hardware and software tended to be, as if part of an integrated system.²⁶

Apple, a world-wide innovative force that has changed the landscape of mobile cellular devices and the computer industry, had its own challenges with succession. Jobs and Apple had their differences that led to Jobs being temporarily removed from his leadership position and eventually restored to CEO. The story of Apple Computer was synthesized by ABC News:

The founding of Apple Computer is by now legendary. After dropping out of Reed College, Jobs and his buddy Steve Wozniak launched the company from his family's suburban California garage in 1976. ... In 1981, Apple Computer went public. Just two years later, Apple cracked the Fortune 500 and Jobs recruited John Sculley, the head of Pepsi-Cola, to be its new chief executive. ... "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?" Jobs famously said. Jobs was Apple's chief visionary, a role that put him in charge of the team developing Apple's next revolutionary product, the Macintosh computer. The Mac debuted in 1984 to rave reviews but disappointing sales, putting a financial strain on the company — and fraying Jobs' relationship with Sculley.²⁷

It would have seemed impossible for the demise of Apple's superstar, Steve Jobs and his iconic brand. The institution, Apple, seemed to be unstoppable with innovation and robust creativity. The nemesis was the transitioning of leadership within the organization and failure to develop and maintain the relational chemistry.

In *Icon-Steve Jobs: The Greatest Second Act in the History of Business*, the story unfolds of the 1985 takeover of Apple and Jobs,

The board finally took action on April 11, led by a taciturn investor who had been there from the start. Board member Arthur Rock was a quiet, tall man with a taste

²⁶ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2011), xxi.

²⁷ Joel Siegel, "When Steve Jobs Got Fired by Apple," *ABC News*, October 6, 2011, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/steve-jobs-fire-company/story?id=14683754>.

for finer things and an absolute abhorrence for prevarication or hype. Faced with a string of resignations, enormous unsold inventories of Apple IIs and Macintoshes, and sales of the Mac that continued below one-tenth of forecast levels, he felt compelled to make John Sculley take charge.²⁸

Businesses are not exempt from succession challenges. The size of the company, financial worth, longevity, and other known indicators do not allay the challenges that are present when senior leadership is in a state of flux. The key that seems to emerge is intentional planning, open communication, organizational relationships, and the comprehension of the relational chemistry of the institution.

Today there is a premium placed on future business potential, not just on past success. The concept of maintaining the status quo or “safeguarding what is their own” is unacceptable. Business succession places priority and principles on the need to amplify both sustaining the institution and increasing the revenue of an organization.

There are principles that can build the framework and track to run on for the organizational succession. Victoria Luby and Jane Stevenson, of the Korn Ferry Hay Group, frequently advise their clients on succession practices. Their article, “7 Tenets of a Good CEO Succession Process,” states the profound truth for any organization, “Perhaps no single factor has a greater impact on a company’s future — for better or worse — than the selection of a new CEO.”²⁹

The realization that the new senior leader holds the potential for success or failure is a daunting challenge for any organization. The potential for hope is found in

²⁸ Jeffrey S. Young and William L. Simon, *Icon-Steve Jobs: The Greatest Second Act in the History of Business* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005), 111.

²⁹ Victoria Luby and Jane Stevenson, “7 Tenets of a Good CEO Succession Process,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 7, 2016, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2016/12/7-tenets-of-a-good-ceo-succession-process>.

assessment of the proper formula that suits the incumbent, the organization, and the potential successor. Transparency within the organization can dictate whether this can be done internally or if there is a need to outsource a third party for assessment of the organization's present reality and impending development.

The implied vagary of no single formula is not to imply that there are not guiding concepts and theories that can help navigate an organization and its leadership as it enters this intersection of its organizational life. Luby and Stevenson imply that there are seven tenets that can help in preparation of finding and placing the new senior leader.

The following table outlines their concepts and processes:

SEVEN TENETS OF A GOOD SUCCESSION PROCESS

1. Align the board on future CEO profiles that are driven by business strategy. Start well in advance of a planned succession by engaging the board in a strategic alignment process to define short- and long-term business priorities.
2. Assess candidates against industry benchmarks, valid indicators of executive potential, and the CEO profiles you've developed. Acquire an accurate, unfiltered, multi-dimensional view of candidates' strengths and weaknesses in a mix that includes quantitative assessments that can evaluate not only relevant competencies and experiences but beneath-the-surface personal traits and drivers that will align with success.
3. Think 2-to-3 CEO moves ahead; don't just seek to replace the incumbent. CEO succession is an ongoing process designed to develop the talent pipeline — not an isolated event. Companies should develop a dual focus that includes both preparing capable near-and mid-term leaders and identifying those deeper down in the organization who possess future leadership potential.
4. "Cross train" generations of CEO successors with a mix of on-the-job training, intensive coaching, mentoring, and education. Once you've gone deeper to find not merely a replacement CEO, but generations of successors with the potential to serve as future CEOs, help that potential blossom with individually tailored development plans geared to both individuals' needs and what the organization will require in a future leader. As potential successors become real contenders for the role, the focus should be on identifying areas to accelerate growth and close critical gaps.

5. Become intimately familiar with the bench and their potential. There should be 7 potential CEOs in your company across several generations. Do you know who they are? In addition to enabling future CEOs to develop their potential, these individuals should gain regular exposure to the board in both formal and informal settings so directors can continue to assess their potential as possible future CEOs.
6. Keep CEO succession as a standing board agenda item since it ensures a multi-layered, multi-generational process. CEO succession is an ongoing, “evergreen” process that continues, even immediately after the appointment of a new CEO.
7. Ensure that your talent management and development planning is linked to your longer-term business strategy. During both regular board meetings and at intensive off-sites, many companies now link strategy sessions and talent development sessions to ensure that any shifts in the strategy will inform what will be required of future leaders.

Growing and maintaining a leadership cadre of this caliber requires a commitment on the part of companies and their boards and an investment over time. Internal succession candidates don’t spring up fully formed overnight. Capable successors are the product of years of planning, mentoring, and guidance — ideally as much as five years ahead of a planned transition — to ensure that they acquire the skills and experience they will need and that their hardwiring relative to their internal traits and drivers has a chance to emerge before they take the helm as CEO.³⁰

Interestingly enough, the above seven tenets can be translated quite easily into the succession process in the church world. Each of these tenets, if taken and reworded to fit an ecclesial context, could become part of the process for a Christian organization seeking a new senior leader. These tenets are another proof of the camaraderie that can, and does exist, between the ecclesial and business community.

Renowned business author and consultant Jim Collins, has analyzed hundreds of businesses to assess their principles, parameters, and potential for success or failure. Collins states, “Every institution is vulnerable, no matter how great. No matter how much you’ve achieved, no matter how far you’ve gone, no matter how much power you have

³⁰ Ibid.

garnered, you are vulnerable to decline. There is no law of nature that the most powerful will inevitably remain at the top. Anyone can fall and most eventually do.”³¹

Collins makes it clear that the prior success of an institution does not guarantee the ongoing or potential success in the future. The senior leader’s abilities, coupled with corporate advancement, do not offer a success mandate on their successor. This transition and succession are key no matter the present status of the organization.

Ecclesiastical Transitions

Principles of transition and succession that are more accepted on the corporate level are taboo in the church setting. Vanderbloemen and Bird painfully state that “Everyone wants to talk about succession...until it’s their own. For way too long, the subject of succession has been avoided in the church, in pastor’s gatherings, and even in the pastor’s home. Those in leadership may not talk about it, but succession happens anyway.”³²

Bob Russell, former senior pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky quotes a pastor who told his congregation, “There are three ways I can leave. You can carry me out, you can kick me out, or I can walk out.”³³ That statement has a lot of truth, but lacks wisdom on behalf of the person leaving and the institution remaining. The realization that ultimately everyone will transition, pastors included, fosters the need

³¹ Jim Collins, *How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 8.

³² Vanderbloemen and Bird, 9.

³³ Bob Russell and Bryan Bucher, *Transition Plan* (Minneapolis, MN: Ministers Label, 2010), 45.

for principles when that time comes. The absence of principles is equal to planning a long-distance road trip without a navigational plan in place.

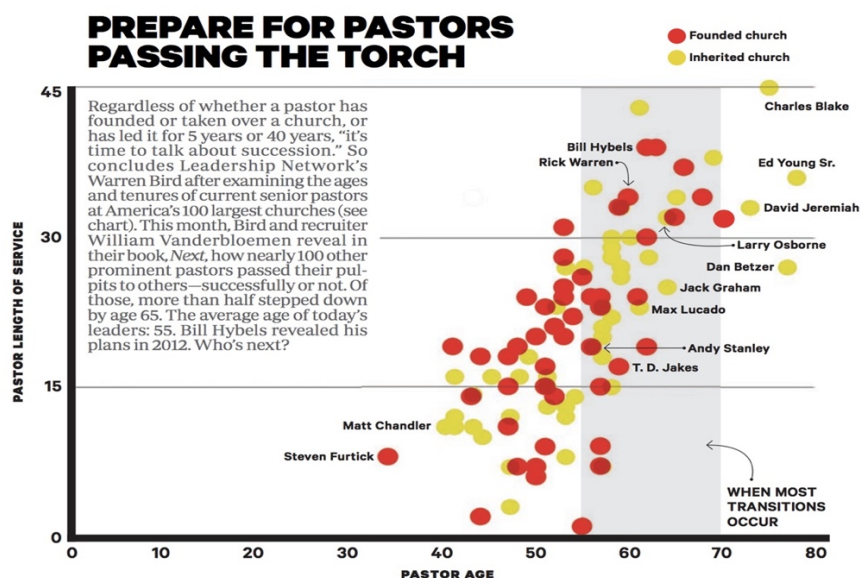


Figure 2: *Prepare for Pastors Passing the Torch*³⁴

Figure #2 makes it clear that the majority of America's top 100 churches are one decade from a transition. The "red dots" are founding pastors that will experience a higher level of challenges, as will be addressed throughout this paper. The age of sixty-five appears to be the norm and target date for these top 100 churches.

Transition for the senior leader is inevitable and is the necessary leap that must be calculated and facilitated with extreme planning and detail. Harvard Business professor, John P. Kotter, believes we need to "start learning now how to cope with change, to develop whatever leadership potential we have, and to help our organizations in the transformation process. Better for most of us, despite the risks, to leap into the future.

³⁴ Shellnutt, "Willow Creek Chooses Co-Ed Pastors."

And to do so sooner rather than later.”³⁵ The natural course for the organization is to learn now or face the consequences at a later date.

Using Luby and Stevenson’s, “*Seven Tenets of a Good Succession*”, as a template for ecclesial transitions, the following could be deduced as a possible framework in the succession process:

1. Alignment of the designated leadership or board, as outlined in the polity of by-laws, into what the vision and mission of the church is. This clarity brings together both the intangible concepts and allows it to merge with a potential individual to be the senior leader.
2. Create a set of benchmarks, comprised of both experience, education, and varying church advancements that will create a framework for a potential senior leader that will work within the agreed upon mission of the church. Proper usage of personality profiles and spiritual gift assessment tools will aid in this process.
3. Think two to three Senior Pastors ahead. Do not focus on finding a successor for the outgoing incumbent, create a long-term strategy that will extend generations. When alignment of the central message and mission of the church is understood, embracing the ever-changing methodology can be ameliorated by embracing potential new leaders as they are identified.
4. Cross train generations of potential leaders with on-the-job training. This exposure allows a varying view of the life and heart of the church institution and illuminates a more holistic picture of leading a church organization.
5. Identify and become familiar with the “bench” of possible senior leaders within the organization. Think generationally forward by giving regular and public exposure to potential individuals.
6. Allow succession to be a standing board agenda item. This consistent focus will keep the need for generational progression and identity in the forefront.
7. Create developmental strategy that identifies the training mechanism needed for emerging leaders. The intentional training and strategy identification will aid in the shifts that take place with the time and people that make up the church organization.

³⁵ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 185-186.

The above seven tenets have the potential to allow succession to move from being viewed as a negative to being viewed as a strategy for continual growth of the organization. No implication is being made to removing God, His will, or His call from the local church. If anything, encouragement is given to seeing God as actively involved on a long-term venture and recognizing who He is designating to lead.

Field Research

Part of the research for this dissertation was completed in the Field Research environments required for the DMin program. To a degree, Field Research can be sterile and detached lacking the human interaction, especially in the area of senior leaders of churches and their succession. Information gleaned strictly from research and the written page can be tainted with optimism and methodology.

The Doctor of Ministry is the empowering of an individual to step into their new role as a practitioner of a particular vein of study and research. The Field Research opened a pleasing vista of personal history, practical wisdom, purveyance of succession plans that were either in motion or being set into motion, and the back story of real people and their emotions. Having lived through succession, it invited me back to the process that others were working through.

This Field Research was cross-cultural because it took me out of my non-denominational and Spirit-led culture. The process of transition and succession in my childhood and early ministry years was not methodical or very intentional; you simply trusted God. When a pastor was needed, the search was built on relationships and commonality. In my early years, the idea of hiring somebody to help you to “hire a pastor” was extremely foreign.

This project involved a myriad of processes including complex search committees, professional organizations that were hired to acclimate the church to transition, and church polity that varied by church. Another process that aided this research was technology. One of the case studies was in Oregon. To date, we have never met face to face. Another stretching process was embracing the various organizational structures of both appointed and perceived leaders.

Methodology and Research Objectives

This Field Research involved the methodology of interviewing actual participants with prescribed questions in order to find commonality on the process of succession and transition. This process meant having fluidity with the questions so they would not seem antiseptic or unconcerned. The life stories that came from these were invaluable for my dissertation.

The objective was to remove the expected responses and hear the realities of emotion, finance, marriage, family, and church's health both before and after the transition. As the trust of the respondents was gained, the research anticipated the ability to show a level of expertise in the area of succession, and to help to move the communication to openly sharing the bigger picture. The ultimate goal was to find a full expression that would run the gambit of emotion and information.

The methodology for the questions were to uncover two basic and crucial elements from the interviewee: 1. The individual's personality, leadership style, and family dynamics, and 2. Their understanding of the organization's present health and institutional identity. The answers to these questions allowed the aforementioned fluidity

to reveal properties that would stimulate the conversation toward the individual, not just a process of questions and answers.

The following questions were the basic construct for the interview. The primary interviewees were, all except one, the current pastor in transition. The questions created a beginning format for two of the three players in succession, the incumbent and the potential candidate. The third player, the institution, was not engaged in the questions directly. In the Ohio transition, the search committee engaged me in questions, after I had interviewed the potential successor.

The INCUMBENT

What were principles/actions that you took to prepare for the transition?

What about your family? Were any of your family involved in the church during your tenure?

What were the major challenges that you personally faced heading into the transition?

How and what did you do to prepare yourself?

How was the culture of honor addressed?

The ORGANIZATION/CONGREGATION

How were they prepared?

How long did it take?

What were key principles that brought success and/or failure?

Was there polarization of the congregations by any of the influencers or polity?

The SUCCESSOR

How was the potential successor brought in?

At what point was the decision made and how was it made?

What was the role of the Elders/Board during this transition?

What was his/her style of leadership?

How did their personality profile compare to yours (DiSC, Meyers-Briggs, Strength Finders, etc.)?

Critical Analysis

The perceived sterile, precise, and unencumbered path to succession is far from reality. Successions and transitions are more than processes and procedures in an

institution's By-Laws that govern who, how, and when. It can be messy and end in utter failure and demise of the organization. It can be deep in the culture of the institution and be the necessary step to the next level of the institution's growth and expansion.

The players interviewed were living in, or preparing for, a transition. This was a reality check for this dissertation in that every transition can have the best of plans that seem impenetrable. The reality was that every individual was confronting obstacles and blessings that they had not planned for.

None of the interviewees are connected in any way. Thus, each palette was unique and varied with age, culture, denominational flavor, location (Ohio, Texas, and Oregon), and size of congregation. The common unknown for all was the process of succession and the outcome that was to ensue. This aspect brought out the attitude of practitioner in the interviewees that was willing to ask, evaluate, and give an opinion.

Pastor Jimmy Evans had pastored Trinity Fellowship in Amarillo, Texas for over thirty years and knew it was time for a succession. His leadership had led the church from 900 members to over 10,000 members in his tenure. At the time of our interview he was a little over one year from turning the church over to the new pastor. His *modus operandi* was succession should be within.

Pastor Steve Lee was pastoring Suburban Christian Church in Corvallis, Oregon when we first spoke in 2016. The search for a successor was being headed by a search committee from within the church and a professional organization to find their new senior leader. The process had begun in 2012 with the leadership team and then brought to the congregation in 2014. The decision to transition was Lee's decision based on the necessary energy that was necessary to develop a strategy and vision for the future.

Pastor Micah Sutton was a campus pastor of a multi-site mega church in Houston, Texas, Grace Church, when our interview began. Sutton had been a senior pastor in Hawaii prior to going to Grace. He had sensed a shift in direction was coming in his life and ministry. He was pursued by McCord Road Christian Church in Sylvania, Ohio after he had placed his name with a ministry search firm that connected him and McCord Road.

Two of the interviewees (Sutton and Lee) were involved with organizations that were Christian head hunters that had been the catalyst for searching outside the four walls of their church. These two took a business model approach to the succession process before them. The church were the shareholders and the leadership structure was the Executive Board.

Jimmy Evans (third interviewee) believed that a church needs three generations resident in the church (alluded to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or Grandfather, Father, and Son). Evans stated, “[Churches] do not [usually] have a generational view of transition, [they] have a corporate view. A senior pastor commonly quits, dies or there is a scandal ... then the best candidate is found to take the pastors place ... this is unnatural. The crisis is on the perspective – corporate, non-relational – rather than a relational and Apostolic form of government. Thus, we are operating as a corporation, not as a family.”³⁶

Evans’ perspective is one that resonates with a strong and reasonable Biblical approach. Yet in the interview, Evans admitted that Trinity Church had two failed transitions before they found the right replacement. In his defense, Evans said that the

³⁶ Jimmy Evans, interview by author, Tempe, AZ, March 21, 2017.

two failed were not catastrophic because the church understood their culture and trusted Evans in the process.

Lee and Evans, were unique in that Lee had family in the church and Evans did not. The family status, other than the spouse, was one of the realities that I wanted to address in the interviews. Each of the three had concerns for the well-being and future of their families. Evans made an interesting statement, “Depending on governance, a lot of pastors imbed their family in the church. When a transition comes, it threatens everything – security and position.”³⁷

Both Evans and Lee are staying connected to the churches that they pastored in one form or another. Lee’s transition took place in December of 2016, so the impact is yet to be determined with his presence. Evans still speaks into the life of the church and ministers in the pulpit several times a year. Sutton’s interaction with the incumbent is yet to be decided depending on what the incumbent’s role will be, going forward.

In her book, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader*, Shelley Trebesch says, “If a leader in an organization experiences a paradigm shift when no one else does, this paradigm shift may propel the leader into an isolation experience. Paradigm shifts change the way a leader does ministry.”³⁸ Each of the three interviewees faced this paradigm shift in one form or another. Each of them “sensed” their time was coming for change. This sense precipitated the paradigm shift, no matter the repercussions.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Shelley G. Trebesch, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 1997), 10.

Steve Lee, addressing the after-effect of his succession said, “It has required my wife and I to communicate. We are together more than ever. But we are adjusting to it.”³⁹ The Evans’ moved from Amarillo, Texas to Dallas, Texas. The Suttons, if the election goes forward, will transplant from Houston, Texas to Sylvania (Toledo), Ohio. The “leadership transition” can take place with ballots and voting, but the life transition is a process of learning ministry, time, interaction with people, and the impending future that is unknown.

After the senior leader has added “former” to their title, and the church organization is embracing the unknown successor, it is important to embrace a solid direction, a “true North” for both entities. The former senior church leader will face a metamorphosis that is cataclysmic in the discovery of their new normal, outside the church office. The institution will be stepping by faith into an unknown. The presence of an internal compass is necessary.

One area that shocked me in the Field Research, as these individuals were taking on the title “former”, was the lack of honor. Honor can take various forms of expression from words to tangible items that are given as a sign of honor. The lack of honor can create an unhealthy disposition in an organization that will ultimately pass to the successor.

Anthony Cunningham, in his work *Modern Honor: A Philosophical Defense*, defines honor as:

This vision is a relative newcomer in human affairs, so my conception of honor takes on a distinctly modern hue just by way of its ties to this vision. However, my conception of honor is not a complete rejection of honor’s past. My goal is to save what is worth saving, to purge the objectionable features, and to flesh out the

³⁹ Steve Lee, interview by author, Tempe, AZ, April 19, 2017.

picture in a way that does justice to what we might be at our best, individually, and as a people. Modern honor revolved around excellences in three aspects of life – character, relationships, and deeds. We can think of these aspects in terms of who we are, how we relate, and what we do.⁴⁰

Taking the time to journey backwards with the incumbent and their legacy, can be both a therapeutic and life-giving act of honor. As the journey is ending as senior leader, the intentional action of honor can also create an ongoing culture of honor inside the organization that will strengthen the three players. The other component that cannot be missed is the level of honor bestowed is also a chief indicator of the honor that will be granted to the successor and how they are to be perceived and honored.

The critical analysis that came from the Field Research was a strong indicator that today's modern church is not adequately prepared to move to healthy successions. The acknowledgement that there are three players, not just one, is a basic start. The embracing of a framework that is holistic and sets a framework to pursue successions, is the second step to navigate this season of the organization.

Bill George, professor of management at Harvard Business School, states:

It is knowing who you are and staying on the course of your True North. And of knowing that when you found you were off course, you were able to get back on track. There is no satisfaction in your professional life that can compare to this sense of fulfillment. No individual achievement can equal the pleasure of leading a group of people to achieve a worthy goal. When you cross the finish line together, all the pain and suffering you may have experienced quickly vanishes. It is replaced by a deep inner satisfaction that *you made a difference in the world*. Countless numbers of people, many as yet unborn, will benefit from your efforts. They will pass on the legacy to those who come along behind, because at the end of the day, the only thing you take with you is what you leave behind.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Anthony Cunningham, *Modern Honor: A Philosophical Defense* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 69.

⁴¹ Bill George, *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 203.

Continuums of Succession

Continuums are the driving force of how to engage or not engage in the succession process. At stake are several players in the transition: the incumbent senior leader, the new potential senior leader, and everyone else who represents the organization. Each of these have a vested stake and a defense mechanism to defend their place in the potential scenario.

The principle motivation for this dissertation was not to prescribe a set agenda that can be programmed into an organization, which, if properly adhered to would produce a successful succession. On the contrary, the research revealed that there are many different principles, values and sequences that can guide an organization. These continuums, if initiated and imitated early in the process, have the potential to inure and encourage all participants in the process.

Three elements emerge, out of a plethora of prospective principles, that will affect the outcome of a senior leader's transition. Each of these have the propensity for either negative or positive results based on the response of the players involved. The three are: Proprietorship vs. Stewardship, Individual Distinctive vs. Institutional Identity, and Stability vs. Instability.

Proprietorship vs. Stewardship

Proprietorship involves the question of who has the ownership of one's life, future, and existence. Ownership evokes a feeling of control of the individual to the exclusivity of their wants and wishes. Proprietorship can lead to a feeling of not being encumbered, or feeling the necessity to engage with a percentage or vested interest of the organization. Proprietorship can conjure a selfish motive behind this type of leader who

lives by the mantra, “I made this organization what it is and I have the highest vested interest and can do as I please”.

The incumbent senior leader, leaning toward proprietorship, senses that their investment had branded the entity to represent them, thus creating the corporate success and identity. The succession process is extremely challenged if the incumbent transitions from a perspective that the organization is indebted to them. This type of thinking damages the perceived worth of a potential successor and the people within the organization.

Tom Mullins, a founding pastor who transitioned, states, “I think one of the most difficult things for a lot of outgoing leaders is simply stepping away from everything they’ve built and invested in for a significant number of years.”⁴² The notion of proprietorship may seem foreign to a deeply vested senior leader. At the same time, that vested passion evokes a sense of protection over the investment of the leader’s lifetime that he/she can view is their legacy and the legacy of the corporation that they have led into the next vista of future opportunity.

Mullins also believes that this proprietary notion is more difficult for founding senior leaders. “Founders particularly fall into this category. When you start something, nurture it, and enjoy the privilege of watching it grow, you will naturally feel a sense of loyalty and pride in it.”⁴³ Authors Hehman, Hummel, and Kochis in their book, *Success and Succession*, use the term “founder-centric.” “Founder-centric firms have limited leverage, driven by their capacity constraints. These constraints come as the founder

⁴² Tom Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 38.

⁴³ Ibid.

either maxes out capacity or decides he or she wants to focus more on his or her own life than on the business. This lack of capacity leads to decaying growth.”⁴⁴

Acclaimed business author, Jim Collins, reflects on the selfish ambitions and ownership that a senior leader can exude. Collins states that this type of leader who is “concerned with their own reputation for personal greatness, often failed to set the company up for success in the next generation. After all, what better testament to your own personal greatness than that the place falls apart after you leave?”⁴⁵ This attitude may seem self-serving but has long-term negative impact on everyone concerned in the transition.

Beyond selfish ambition is the sheer resistance to change. What has been, will no longer be. Mullins states that this “can be seen in the outgoing leader who may agree to the need for transition, but can never fully commit to the process because he cannot accept that changes will be made under the new leadership.”⁴⁶ This tainted view of proprietorship culminates in a leadership implosion and respect for the senior leader that can have a domino effect on a potential successor.

Stewardship is recognizing one’s lack of ownership and the careful safeguarding of what is in one’s life at the present. A loyal, vested leader who operates with a stewardship perspective, realizes that the organization, and even their own life and ministry, is not theirs. They are on loan to the organization for the duration that is best for

⁴⁴ Eric Hehman, Jay Hummel, and Tim Kochis, *Success and Succession: Unlocking Value, Power, and Potential in the Professional Services and Advisory Space* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 11.

⁴⁵ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 26.

⁴⁶ Mullins, 45.

all participants. When an organization and its leader embrace stewardship everyone recognizes that all the players are involved in a season and that no one is the owner; everyone is holding their portion or position in trust until someone else can take their place.

Stewardship of the senior leader is embracing one's talents and abilities and offering them on loan for a specific period of time. Stewardship embraces the individual's brief narrative as the senior leader for a specific season in the life of the institution. When succession is viewed as stewardship, both the individual and the institution respect each other and realize that the season is temporary.

The talents that ushered you into the senior leadership position will become obsolete and fresh vitality will eventually be necessary for the institution. Healthy stewardship allows you to embrace the present state of reality as a gift that must be carefully unwrapped, coupled with an expiration date that every senior leader will encounter.

Individual Distinctive vs. Institutional Identity

The challenging portion of this senior leader transitional principle is ascertaining whether the present senior leader is drawing their identity from what they "do" versus who they "are." Victor Frankl wrote in his classic, *Man's Search for Meaning*,

...the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsibility; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities. Man constantly makes his choice concerning the mass of present potentialities; which of these will be condemned to nonbeing and which will be actualized? Which choice will be made an actuality once and forever, an immortal 'footprint in the sands of time'? At any moment, man must decide, for better or for worse, what will be the monument of his existence.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1985), 143.

Life has transitions; the principles that guide us through reflect the individual's belief about how they derive their self-worth. Succession is a catalyst for determining where one draws their value and identity from: who they are independently and who they are as the leader of the institution. When the institution defines the leader, the loss of their position within the institution can be devastating to their self-worth. This loss also affects the institution, handicapping the organization that they have invested themselves in.

Mullins truthfully addresses this notion in stating, "Our identity and association with our career transition of any sort is one of the most unsettling experiences you can face in life."⁴⁸ If the leader's individual distinctive principle is disrupted by the loss of position, the potential senior leader will feel second guessed and never truly take over the helm in leading the organization. This impediment creates an emotional dependency on the organization that is both unhealthy to the individual as well as to the institution. This emotional dependency can lead to physical and marital incapacities. Hehman, Hummel, and Kochis uncovered the following devastating statistics:

Business owners, like company founders and others who have linked their personal identity most closely to their work, are at the greatest risk of 'failing retirement.' They are unaware of the risks before them. For example, the highest suicide rate in the United States today is for men over the age of 70, who struggled to replace the purpose they found at work. The fastest-growing divorce rate is for couples over the age of 55, as relationships issues are heightened once partners spend more time together in retirement.⁴⁹

The thought of succession, change, possible retirement, and no longer leading from the lead chair can be catastrophic and life changing to an emotionally healthy

⁴⁸ Mullins, 40.

⁴⁹ Hehman, Hummel, and Kochis, 150.

person. Taking into consideration the aging process of both the leader and the institution, coupled with the uncertainty of the unknown of what will be, is a major dilemma with calamitous implications. The principle of assessing and understanding one's individual distinctive, outside of their institutional identity, needs to be proactive by all concerned in the succession.

Church growth consultant Tony Morgan believes we all have two buckets that we go through life with. Morgan says, "Everyone carries around 2 buckets with them: a bucket of water and a bucket of gasoline. One fuels change, and the other puts it out. Water fuels change because it douses the fire of resistance. Gasoline puts change out because it fuels the fire of resistance."⁵⁰ Our choice is which bucket do we choose to engage. The impending and the inevitable change that will be faced in a leadership transition can be fueled or squelched.

Collins, in *Good to Great*, describes five levels of leaders; Level One is the beginning point and a Level Five is the highest, most capable and effective leader. Collins describes a Level Five as an executive who "builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will."⁵¹ Of interest are two phrases, "enduring greatness" and "paradoxical blend" in defining a capable and effective leader. Collins suggests that Level Five leaders are more prone to downplay themselves as the success factor and see the larger picture of others and the organization in which they all serve together.

⁵⁰ Paul Alexander, "10 Keys to Leading Change in Church," *The UnStuck Group Blog*, August 9, 2017, accessed August 10, 2017, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2017/08/leading-change-church>.

⁵¹ Collins, *Good to Great*, 20.

Collins says “Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”⁵² Level Five leaders seem to find their identity in who they are, not in what they did.

The concept of institutional identity is the working principles, morals, dictates, and conscience that create the direction, drive and uniqueness of an organization. These identifying markers are imperative to not only guide but govern an organization. Of great concern is the individual leader and where they find their identity. The major question is where is the identity of the institutional leader? True life is not determined by what one does but by the distinctive that make us who we are.

This continuum represents the fundamental truth of a leader’s identity and their potential existence within the institution. The positive is when you are secure in both your individual identity and how it collaborates and enhances the institution, it can lead to a smooth succession. The negative is when you allow the institution’s distinctive to make you into something that you are not, the compatibility will be called into question.

In succession, this plays out in meshing a potential leader’s identity and how they are compatible with the institution’s identity. The attempt to bring together a misfit of identities, under the guise of hoping for either the potential candidate to change or the institution to morph, is the potential for bad chemistry. When either entity is attempting to be something that they are not, there is a false sense of realism.

⁵² Ibid., 21.

Stability vs. Instability

The stability of the transitioning incumbent senior leader is important, as the institution will have a new leader at the helm, and the potential successor will become the senior leader. Too many changes in a short amount of time can challenge the existence of an institution. Stability is a multifaceted element that ranges from financial stability to emotional wellness.

Mullins reflecting on his own transition, remarks, “a transition will be one of the greatest tests of your leadership, but it will also serve as one of the greatest rewards and testimonies of your legacy.”⁵³ Well known author John Maxwell wrote in the forward of Mullins’ book, “The true measure of success for a leader is measured by succession.”⁵⁴ With the testing and transitioning converging on the existing leader, the natural outcome is the notion that all that was stable is changing drastically and will not return back to the state that it once was.

Stability is threatened at various ranges for all the brokers in the transition. The incumbent is shifting to a life that they have not known before and that they may not be emotionally and financially prepared for. The new senior leader is dealing with the anxiety of acceptance and the ability to ignite a compelling vision for the entity. The entity itself is transitioning to someone that they have never followed before. Even with proper vetting, the institution will not really know what they have procured until they begin to lead.

⁵³ Mullins, 19.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xiv.

The power of vision during the transition will help foster stability. Harvard professor, John P. Kotter, recognized as an authority on change and leadership, said “Vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people. Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.”⁵⁵

One particular instability that is sometimes overlooked in succession is emotional stability. The incumbent leader recognizes the need and embraces the impending change for the greater good of the entity. This moment of introspection that necessitates a change, has the potential to negate the leader to examine their own emotional health in the process. This neglect, or simply oversight, is detrimental to the succession for the health and well-being of all concerned.

The individual’s emotional neglect, at the institution’s expense, is not an equation for long term health for all parties involved. Peter Scazzero, in his work, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, wrote “The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader’s internal life than with the leader’s expertise, gifts, or experience.”⁵⁶

The potential senior leader must be secure in who they are, not living in the rear-view mirror of the accomplishments of the previous leader. The new leader’s emotional stability is necessary, for their own health and for the entity as a whole. A classic

⁵⁵ Kotter, 7.

⁵⁶ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

example of emotional stability is Abraham Lincoln. Scazzero states that “According to some scholars, the four presidents prior to Abraham Lincoln were ‘compromise leaders,’ unwilling to confront the difficult issue of slavery between the North and the South. Abraham Lincoln, by contrast, was a mature leader with a solid sense of who he was. He knew what he believed and valued – regardless of the consequences – when he entered the White House.”⁵⁷

Embracing and recognizing these guiding principles is the corporate glue that keeps the organization and the leadership operating in check as the inevitable is faced. Guiding principles create a necessary framework for accountability during the succession process. These principles create a timeline that will help monitor the succession process.

Patterns of Transitions

Transition patterns are necessary to determine success in transitioning between a senior leader and the heir apparent or designated leader. Leadership batons have been passed from Biblical days to today, each with a combination of success and failure. The challenge, and the place of comfort, is that there does not seem to be a clear cut, singular, success-guaranteed pattern to follow. This one discovery underscores the need to rely on principles instead of formulas.

One healthy principle is to view the transition as a blank canvas with a desired landscape of the future residing in the heart and minds of the organization and leadership. This visualization helps to evoke and then embrace images that will be engaged and what

⁵⁷ Ibid., 36.

will be off limits. On the other hand, approaching succession with a set vision can alienate the other players and limit their involvement.

There are patterns that foster a greater opportunity for success in the transition. One example is what Collins calls, “a compelling modesty.”⁵⁸ Collins says that “we were struck by how the good-to-great leaders didn’t talk about themselves. During interviews with the good-to-great leaders, they’d talk about the company and the contributions of other executives as long as we’d like but would deflect discussion about their own contributions.”⁵⁹

Leadership and transitioning is inevitable. The senior leader’s input and direction is going to bring success, stagnation, or failure. Bill Hybels said, “Everything gets better when a leader gets better. No one wants to follow a static leader.”⁶⁰ The initiative and challenge of an organization’s leadership, especially the senior leader, should be for the betterment of the organization, not the individual.

The reality of the charisma and maturity associated with the existing leader, creates challenges for the new person stepping into the leader’s role. Many times, the talent and character of the present leader has been the stimulant for the growth and success of the organization. Mullins states “I am convinced that all successors crave the approval and encouragement only a predecessor can offer.”⁶¹ The incumbent’s future success depends on healthy patterns to guide the succession process.

⁵⁸ Collins, *Good to Great*, 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bill Hybels, “General Session 5” (lecture, Gateway Conference 2015, Southlake, Texas, October 6, 2015).

⁶¹ Mullins, 37.

The public, internal fighting and the eventual demise of the Crystal Cathedral represents the result of disruption, even within family transitions of leadership. Founding pastor Robert H. Schuller removed his son, Robert A. Schuller, from his position. The elder Schuller stated, “For this lack of shared vision and the jeopardy in which this is placing this entire ministry, it has become necessary for Robert and me to part ways.”⁶²

When transitions mirror the Crystal Cathedral, an unhealthy perspective of transition is easily disseminated. Kotter states, “People who have been through difficult, painful, and not very successful change efforts often end up drawing both pessimistic and angry conclusions. They become suspicious of the motives of those pushing for transformation; they worry that major change is not possible without carnage.”⁶³

Pastor Leith Anderson, in his article “How to Win at Parish Poker,” claims:

Like poker, pastoring is an exercise that combines skill and providence to sort out winners and losers, often with frighteningly high stakes. Just a desire to play and win never got anyone a seat at a poker table. A poker player needs chips to enter the game—a stake. When a new pastor is called to a church, a pile of chips is normally stacked up for use as the pastor chooses. They represent the good favor and support of the church people. They may be saved for a rainy day or risked in the first hand of play.⁶⁴

The transition of a pastor or CEO has great similarity. Careful study of the patterns of the entity, the perspective new leader, the vision and potential need to be articulated and understood. As Anderson said, the stakes of transitioning are high.

Thomas Rainer, CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention, anonymously quoted several pastors who desired a lasting legacy.

⁶² Associated Press, “Hour of Power Preacher Removed by Father,” *Fox News Online*, October 26, 2008, accessed Decembr 15, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/10/26/hour-power-preacher-removed-by-father>.

⁶³ Kotter, 17.

⁶⁴ Anderson.

He went on to say that “ambition and drive of these leaders cannot be denied. And that ambition is not limited to their personal success. They are ambitious for the church to be thriving and healthy well beyond their ministries and even their lifetimes.”⁶⁵ Their sentiments reflected on what was to come instead of reminiscing on what had been:

- “I am working with the leadership of the church to make certain a good plan is in place to call my successor on or before my retirement.”
- “I pray that God will allow me to look at this church from heaven fifty years from now and find out that the fruit of what we did was lasting.”
- “Every time we look at doing something new or making some change, we ask how this might affect the church twenty-five years from now.”
- “Some of the ideas we have may be quick fixes. We are asking God what will work for the long haul.”
- “I pray that the church I leave one day will be a better church for my successor.”⁶⁶

Team mentality is an effective transition pattern. No longer is success or failure laid upon one individual at the top: the senior leader. John Kotter states, “I can imagine a day not long from now when succession at the top of firms may no longer be an exercise in picking one person to replace another. Succession could be a process of picking at the least the core of a team. With the basic elements of a sensible team in place on day one, a new CEO would be in a much stronger position to build the kind of coalition needed to handle change.”⁶⁷

The inevitability of transition of everyone, in one form or another, is a challenging dynamic that does not have a singular, prescribed formula to bring about success. The realization of “today’s” success, or even failure, can be temporary and quickly fleeting. This knowledge draws us into a larger narrative of life’s brevity and our

⁶⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Kotter, 164.

role in the bigger narrative. The success of previous succession in an organization or the accomplishments of bygone years does not offer a definitive win for tomorrow.

Organizations and senior leaders do not escape this looming challenge, no matter the present status of the organization in the pre-succession period.

Dr. Henry Cloud refers to this looming transition as “The Universality of Endings.” He describes endings as follows:

Why endings? Whether we like it or not, ends are a part of life. They are woven into the fabric of life itself, both when it goes well, and also when it doesn’t. On the good side of life, for us to ever get to a new level, a new tomorrow, or the next step, *something* has to end. Life has seasons, stages, and phases. For there to be anything new, old things always have to end, and we have to let go of them.⁶⁸

In conclusion, transitions are going to happen. The pattern, principles, or continuums are going to bring the three players into a cohesive plan of action or there will be self-inflicted and selfish desires that will flourish tainting the succession. The choice needs to be clearly embraced by all three players.

⁶⁸ Cloud, 6.

CHAPTER 2:

BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR SUCCESSIONS

Leaders have passed the baton to their successors throughout history. These succession stories include a combination of success, failure, principles, and parameters. The church and business community in America can learn guidelines and principles for succession from Biblical precedents and history.

Biblical Examples

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, outlines the story of the Creator God transitioning leadership to his creation, Adam. Genesis 1:28 outlines how God passes the authority of creation to human creation. This first baton pass represents a precedent that has been repeated time and time again throughout history. With that first baton pass from God to Adam, there were challenges that still have implications today. History, Biblical and secular, shows that not all transitions end well for the individual or the organization.

Jesus Christ, Savior and initiator of the New Testament church, initiated the concept of succession. As a follower of Christ, succession should be second nature or a rite of passage, because it encapsulates the ministry and life of Jesus. Since the church is his body, and we constituents are interconnected within that body (Romans 12:4-5), the contemporary church should be integrating the protocol, principles, and patterns of Jesus for succession practices. Contemporary succession within churches, is far from that.

As Weese and Crabtree state,

Choose a number between one and twenty. There are that many reasons why the church must manage leadership transitions in a different way. But the most compelling reason is as simple as it is basic: Jesus did it differently. It is

fundamentally an issue of discipleship. How can we claim to be following Jesus, when our practice of managing leadership transition runs directly counter to the model of His life?¹

Today's modern church can be guilty of searching for talent, charisma, and name appeal that can garner a market share of growth, rather than following the example of Jesus.

Jesus was involved in two major successions. First, he came and fulfilled his purpose on earth and transitioned back to heaven. Second, knowing the brevity of his mission, he had to select leaders who would succeed him and lead a movement that would bear his name. Leaders in the Christian faith are destined and marked for transition and succession as they emulate the founder of the New Testament church.

Jesus' model was one of taking potential candidates and exposing them to who he was and what he could do and then empowering them to assume senior leadership positions. His was a long-term vision that gave great authority and power to potential candidates. Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. (John 14:12 NLT)

Jesus' succession model and pattern can be seen in his own words to them, "You didn't choose me. I choose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name." (John 15:16 NLT)

Numerous Biblical references to transitioning of the senior leader, seem to possess unusual caveats. The Bible, as informative and exhaustive as it is, does not offer or state a single plan or model for succession. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird,

¹ Weese and Crabtree, 15.

in their book *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works*, point out that succession is varying in style but consistent in the need for a successor:

- Moses...leads until his death, but before then he spends many years training and grooming Joshua – who is not one of his sons or nephews.
- Aaron's third-born son Eleazar, rather than his firstborn son, becomes Aaron's successor (Num. 20:25-29).
- Saul wants his son Jonathan to succeed him but learns that God wants David, an outsider (I Sam. 23:16-17).
- Elijah apprentices Elisha, but before their leadership transition, God makes it clear that Elisha is to be the successor, and in the transition, Elisha asks for and receives a double portion of the anointing that was on his mentor (2 Kings 2:9).
- Barnabas disciples Paul (Acts 9:27; 11:22-30), but over time the roles reverse and Paul becomes the lead player (e.g., Acts 12:25 – 13:7, 13:42 – 14:3, 14:14, 14:23, 15:2).
- Jesus spends his final days on earth preparing others to carry on the mission he has begun (John 21). Jesus hands off the church to his disciples, a handoff he's openly spoken about, prepared for, trained them for, and empowered them to do. By both word and by deed, Jesus demonstrated that success in ministry is defined by successors.²

The common theme of these examples is acknowledgement and advance notice of the successor. This unveiling was sometimes commonly known and understood, and other times it came as a surprise. Jesus used this methodology while on earth to transition his power to his disciples and then ultimately to his church.

Biblical transitions were accompanied by a power shift. In the case of Moses and Joshua it transpired like this: “The Lord replied, “Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. Present him to Eleazar the priest before the whole community, and publicly commission him to lead the people. Transfer some of your authority to him so the whole community of Israel will obey him.” (Numbers 27:18–20 NLT) The succession process from Moses to Joshua was public, ceremonial, a public

² Vanderbloemen and Bird, 25.

commission was decreed, and power was transferred. Other Biblical successions had similar principles. The church should learn from these simple, yet flexible, principles.

Biblical succession, as in the case of Moses and Joshua, was not committed in a back room by a handful of decision makers. What may be deemed as an archaic celebration can be synthesized into a contemporary setting to usher in a new leader. The public side, is the openness to the organization that allows transparency and an invitation to the process. The ceremonial side can be implemented by a special service with a laying on of hands in prayer and signifying a rite of passage. The public commission is the formal announcement and acknowledgement of the new leader. The power transfer is the practical side of stepping in as more than a “potential candidate” to being the successor and leading the vision into the future.

Juxtaposition of an Eternal God and Finite Man

The characteristic of God’s immutability does not translate into his crowning creation, man. An unchanging God entrusts his earthly work to a creation who exists in imminent, continual change. This juxtaposition of the eternal, unchanging God and finite man can be part of the challenge when it comes to transitions.

Our limited grasp of what the future holds can propel us toward God’s character or to our own. The ethereal faith, the substance of our salvation and Christian maturity, comes under the microscope when our destiny is quickly approaching. Our finiteness, in contrast to God’s immutability, propels us to seek wisdom from someone, something, or God.

Our finiteness is brought to heightened state when a succession is out necessity rather than a planned and methodical transition. Succession can have the appearance of

never coming at an opportune time for someone in the process. “God’s church depends for more on the Great Shepherd than the human undershepherd (I Peter 5:1-4). Any church’s future depends ultimately on God far more than the coming and going of human leadership.”³

God’s eternal view is one of order and preparation. “God seems to be very active in preparing leaders and churches for the inevitabilities of pastoral transition, even before successors realize they are being prepared for a transition.”⁴ In the case of Moses’ succession to Joshua, the Bible outlines God’s process of succession. “After the death of Moses the Lord’s servant, the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant. He said, ‘Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them.’” (Joshua 1:1-2 NLT)

Scientist and educator Leon R. Kass outlines in his book, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, how the renowned Old Testament patriarch Abraham influenced the potential of the nation of Israel,

Abraham is eager to be the founder of a great nation. But he has an incomplete understanding of how a nation becomes truly great. It must, of course, be able to preserve itself, to survive in a world threatened by its enemies and by those who would profit from its downfall. Accordingly, it requires leadership and manly prowess, to rule the unruly and to inspire the unruly and to inspire the timid, at the very least in order to safeguard what is their own, perhaps even to expand and extend their influence and dominion.⁵

³ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 24.

⁴ Ibid, 22.

⁵ Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 266.

Not a lot has changed since Abraham's day. As Kass says, "at the very least in order to safeguard what is their own, perhaps even to expand and extend their influence and dominion". Humanity possesses an innate desire to create interaction through family, coupled with a desire to survive, seems to work counterproductively when it comes to transitioning in leadership. Resident in our human nature is self-preservation that is expressed in self-propagation. Human nature desires interaction with others, yet desires to manipulate and control, in order to be perceived as successful and self-sustainable.

The historical record of the Bible and the transitions of contemporary corporations, present strong evidence that the success of the transition is critical to the success of the entity. Succession to the next leader is catalytic, but it seems to lack a specific norm or pattern that is repeatable. This vagary necessitates a historical look backwards and an in-depth analysis of entities that are contemplating and navigating succession today.

CHAPTER 3:

THE GAME AND THE THREE PLAYERS IN THE SUCCESSION PROCESS

Leadership is accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty.

— Marshall Ganz, *Leading Change*

The Game

Successions can be likened to a game in the sports world. The vernacular of game is not intended to imply frivolity or simplicity. The use of game is to clarify the procedures and processes, rules of engagement, interaction of multiple individuals, healthy competitiveness, team spirit, and a hope of winning and succeeding.

Great orchestras are the collective ability of the members to function with expertise on their instrument and playing their score with precision. Each member knows when to play, when to rest, when to emphasize, and when to be quiet. How the players response to the conductor determines the quality of music and the favorable experience of the audience.

Exceptional professional sports teams develop, train, and coach the players and their effect on the team's performance and possibility to win. Each player operates in their position, under coaches, to accentuate their teammates and ultimately the team. Great teams learn how to alternate their players at the proper time of the game to showcase the individual's best performance and ultimately achieve a team win.

Successful transitions of the senior leaders of an organization, can learn from orchestras and professional sports teams the role, timing, and implementation of the three players in a transition. Just as orchestras and sports teams long for a successful season,

organizations desire the same with their players. The focus of this work is on the roles, interaction, and principles of three players in organizational transition of a senior leader: the incumbent leader, the organization, and the successor or potential leader.

The term “game” is not meant to demean or underestimate the importance of the interaction that takes place within an organization. It is descriptive and embraces the interaction and competitiveness of the players who determine the success or failure, win or loss of the team when it hits the field and begins to engage. Organizations, embracing the game mentality, can refocus the attention and overcome challenges by visualizing a win.

The term “game theory” is a relatively new thought process. My use of “game” is not congruent with this terminology. The usage for this dissertation was from a sporting perspective of the necessity of different players needed for a game to be played successfully. Game theory is based more in mathematics than in the sporting world.

In their article, “*Game Theory and Family Business Succession: An Introduction*” the following definition is given for game theory.

Game theory is a tool for analyzing interactions among two or more entities (see Osbourne, 2003, for an overview). Its greatest power comes from simultaneous consideration of actions by multiple actors, in the form of individuals, groups, or organization, and the interrelationships of the outcomes of those moves. Although game theory is based in mathematics, one of its earliest applications was in analyzing political situations, especially interactions among adversarial countries during the Cold War. The 2005 Nobel Prize for economic sciences was awarded to two game theorists, one of whom (Thomas C. Schelling) is regarded as a social scientist rather than a mathematician. Over time, its use has expanded to social and managerial settings as well, including general business activities (Papayouanou, 2010), strategic management (Dixit & Nalebuff, 1993; Grant, 2009), and career management (Bennett & Miles, 2011).¹

¹ Tim Blumentritt, Timothy Mathews, and Gaia Machisio, “Game Theory and Family Business Succession: An Introduction,” *Family Business Review*, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0894486512447811>.

The Three Players

Successful transition of the senior leader of an organization revolve around the directives, actions, and interaction of three key players who are engaged in the game. The three players are: the incumbent leader, the organization, and the successor. These three are the catalyst for success or an impediment to the potential of the organization and its longevity. Each player offers a unique perspective to the transition that, when embraced correctly, will bring harmony and organizational success.

The three players face certain rules of engagement that allow the team to be in the game and continue to remain in the game. As the research shows, there is a certain amount of competition and invasion of other players' territory that will ensue as the transition unfolds. Acknowledging these factors helps to mitigate how the game will be played and how the players will interact.

It is one thing to have a good run as a senior leader, but ultimately you will time out and another player will need to step up. To keep playing past your time and ability not only opens you to pain, but impedes the organization from its potential. In professional sports, there is an aging out that takes place due to the ability of the player to compete with the young and new talent that is rising up. In religious organizations, this analogy can be difficult to balance and embrace since age can be viewed as maturity and stability.

Author and management guru Manfred Kets de Vries says, "The acid test of excellent leadership is what happens when the leader is no longer there. How seamless is

the succession? Does the process occur without too much drama?”² This is the acid test for transition and successions: Will the organization/institution survive or thrive when the senior leader’s time is complete?

Kets de Vries’ “acid test” includes two components: 1. Seamlessness and 2. Lack of drama. Both reflect the fact that the transition will be tested and the three players are part and parcel to the process. Organizations are not exempt from being tested. The key is how the players respond individually, and how they respond to each other when the challenges arise.

The question for an organization is, “Can there be a seamless transition that does not have drama?” This simple question reflects the human element of self that cannot be overlooked. Self-worth, self-exaltation, self-reliance, and self-denial all come into play as one transitions from, and transitions to, a senior role.

The role of the leader often determines what defines him/her. The leader is often seen as the thermometer of the organization’s credibility; whether it was successful, whether it was intentional in its focus, or whether it has viability to continue its existence. The challenge and balance point is to transition the leader without destroying the organization. In the analogy that we are using, it is playing the game and making sure to assemble the right players for success.

The analysis of the three players (the incumbent leader, the organization, and the successor) indicates that there is culpability on all three. Edwin H. Freeman, in his book, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, confronts contemporary

² Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique: Leading Behavior in the Human Experience* (New York, NY: Prentice Hall, 2001), 226.

leaders who seek a “quick fix” versus seeking long-term solutions. Transitions of senior leaders is a methodical marathon consisting of the crucial baton passes of a “well-differentiated leader.” The quantitative value of the succession is not in the speed of the transition rather the ongoing quality of all three players.

Friedman uses the term “well-differentiated leader” throughout his book.

Friedman’s definition of this type of leader is “...someone who has clarity about his or her life goals, and therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about. I mean someone who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence.”³ This character and response is required of two of the players: the incumbent and the potential leader. They must possess clear, non-anxious know-how in order to remain connected and face challenges.

Eben Harrell, senior editor at Harvard Business Review, reviewed the recent research on succession planning and describes research by Claudio Fernández-Aráoz:

In his book, *It’s Not the How or the What but the Who*, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz of the search firm Egon Zehnder lays out six succession-planning guidelines for busy directors: First, start early, ideally the moment a new CEO takes charge. Second, create strict performance metrics and a process for evaluating the CEO against them. Third, identify and develop potential successors within the firm and then benchmark them against external talent. (Useem says directors can go deep during vetting by interviewing all the direct reports of the internal front-runners.) Fourth, look externally to widen the pool of candidates, through executive search firms that don’t use contingency arrangements or charge percentage fees (which Fernández-Aráoz believes create perverse incentives). Fifth, require the board to conduct periodic emergency succession drills. And finally, put in place an extensive transition process to help with onboarding, which is especially important given that 80% of CEO appointees have never served in a chief executive role before.⁴

³ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2007), 14.

⁴ Harrell, Succession Planning.

The “how” and “what” are important to the game of senior leader succession. As Claudio Fernández-Aráoz’s book describes, it is the “who” that becomes the focus.

The transition game has its rules and definitions of perceived roles. The players play both individual and collective roles that sometimes have vague boundaries that are written and defined as each player engages. The common theme and rule of engagement is that all players are in transition and ultimately will step up and eventually step down.

CHAPTER 4:

PLAYER ONE — THE INCUMBENT SENIOR LEADER

All leaders are in transition and facing succession: whether they are in the genesis of their career, or the impending sundown of their working days, transition and succession is inevitable. Transitions are more than a job or career change, they are the defining end of an era for the leader who has been at the helm. Now, what will they do?

Chapter four addresses player one – the incumbent senior leader. A careful look will be given to the inevitability and to potential barriers that the incumbent will deal with during a succession. Player one will deal with an array of emotions and life changes that the other two players will not encounter.

Inevitability of Succession

A typical scenario that many churches experience, follows this path: The First Church of ABC has successfully grown in outreach, attendance, staffing, ministries, and income. The congregation under its founding pastor, Bob Smith. Smith, now approaching his mid-sixties, has invested over forty years of leadership, charisma, and God-given direction to the small congregation of eighty-five people that he started with. Smith is greatly loved and respected and intends to find who and what is next for ABC.

The challenge has been that Smith is reluctant to let go and allow the transition process to unfold for his successor. In fact, ABC has lost two potential senior leaders because of Smith's inability to let go and bless the new leader. The church is beginning to age and the influx of the next generation of leaders is being ostracized, not only by Smith, but by others in senior leadership.

The finances are stabilized, due to the passion and giving of the older members. The transition must incorporate the blending that is necessary for the old and young to seize the vision for the future. The outgoing and aging leader must incorporate ways to allow their successor to embrace their individual and more youthful distinctive, yet balance the also aging mix of congregants in the congregation.

The incumbent senior leader, when facing transition, is at a crossroads of their life. Transitions tie us back to our purpose, mortality, and self-worth. Kets de Vries states, “Acknowledging the impending loss of power that stepping down will bring threatens the deep-seated wish we all have to believe in our own immortality. Let’s face it: succession arouses basic fears of death.”¹ The thought of becoming a has-been is overwhelming to a senior leader.

Seven Barriers to Succession

Recognizing your own “expiration date” can arouse multiple emotions that influence and direct decisions and initiatives for the impending transition. A well-vested and concerned senior leader will focus on ending well, knowing that there are barriers that can keep them from this accomplishment. The focus on ending is where the challenges emerge in the life of the incumbent.

J. Robert Clinton and Richard Clinton, wrote an article called, *The Life Cycle of a Leader*. In this work, published by George Barna, they outline seven major barriers that can derail a leader from ending their tenure well:

Barrier 1. **Finances** – their use and abuse;

¹ Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 224.

Barrier 2. **Power** – its abuse;

Barrier 3. **Inordinate Pride** – which leads to downfall;

Barrier 4. **Sex** – illicit relationships;

Barrier 5. **Family** – critical issues;

Barrier 6. **Plateauing**; and

Barrier 7. **Emotional and Psychological Wounding**.²

As the inevitable is unfolding, the choices between present reality and the impending changes that are the result of the transition are necessary paths that should be explored. The ability to live and exist in the new normal can be better addressed by looking at these seven barriers. The failure to address them can result in a lack of focus and direction that alienates the individual from the things that mean the most to them.

Barrier 1 – Finances

The impending changes in financial status are a challenge, not just for the incumbent, but for all three players. This is real in both the for-profit and the not-for-profit worlds. The CEO, President, or Lead Pastor, has benefited financially from their position at a rate higher than most individuals in their organization. The thought of transition and a new successor now takes on a different light when money comes to the forefront.

The church has not been a place with extensive compensation packages for its senior leaders. Wallace Erickson encapsulates the bottom line for pastor's finances and the succession process, "I have seen too many pastors who reached retirement age having

² Ibid., 153.

accumulated very little financial stability. I have heard executives say, ‘I can’t retire. I can’t afford it.’”³

The National Association of Evangelicals released a report on the financial challenges of pastors in America. This extensive work was begun in 2015 highlighting the following staggering facts:

The poll, conducted by Grey Matter Research in July 2015, found that of the 4,249 pastors surveyed 80 percent serve in congregations with fewer than 200 people, and 55 percent have fewer than 100 people in their church. Half of the pastors serve in churches with annual budgets under \$125,000 that must cover the cost of the church facilities, programs and pastor/staff payroll. Fifty percent of pastors receive less than \$50,000 per year in compensation with 30 percent having student loan debt averaging \$36,000.

Many pastors also struggle to secure long-term financial stability. Thirty-three percent have under \$10,000 in retirement funds. Twenty-nine percent have \$0 in personal savings. When asked to rank their financial concerns, 92 percent identified lack of retirement savings, 84 percent felt they did not have needed funds for emergencies and larger purchases, 60 percent were concerned about medical insurance/bills, and 54 percent were concerned about lack of college savings for their children's education.

Over 85 percent of pastors said they did not receive financial training from their seminary. Many pastors (37 percent) are not familiar with what resources their denomination offers for personal finances. Over a third of pastors said they have no one outside their household in whom they can confide about the things that stress them financially.

Additional findings include:

- * Ninety percent of pastors feel some level of financial stress in their family and church work.
- * Seventy-six percent of pastors know other pastors who left the ministry due to financial pressures.
- * Sixty-three percent of pastors' spouses work outside the home.
- * Thirty-one percent of pastors work a second job to help make ends meet.
- * Around 60 percent of pastors do not receive health insurance or retirement funds from their church.
- * Twenty-five percent of pastors have medical bills averaging \$7,253.
- * Over 80 percent of pastors serve congregations in rural and smaller communities. Only 19 percent serve in a large city or large city suburb.

³ Ibid., 301.

* Over half of pastors have served their current congregation for more than six years.⁴

The full and extensive study can be accessed for further study through the National Evangelical Association's website at: http://nae.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NAE-Grey-Matter-Pastor-Study-Report_July-2015.pdf.

The impact of finances should not be overlooked by the institution as it honors the incumbent and conveys to the new successor a tangible form of his worth – his salary. Thom Rainer, church consultant and author, in his article, “*Eight of the Most Significant Struggles Pastors Face*”, lists financial problems as one of these. Rainer said, “Most of the world hears about the few pastors who make huge salaries. The reality is that the majority of pastors struggle financially.”⁵

Careful consideration should be given to the outgoing incumbent and their financial situation after their employment has terminated. The dialogue between the incumbent and the leadership of the organization brings a sense of honor and concern that will be observed and potentially passed on to the successor. This single gesture of finances demonstrates to all three players that the organization desires to recognize and acknowledge the investment of the incumbent.

The following questions are a beginning point for the conversation on the incumbent's finances:

- a. Will retirement income cover a certain number of years or a lifetime?
- b. Is it to cover the retiree only or a surviving spouse?
- c. Will it be a flat income or supplement other sources of income?

⁴ “Majority of Pastors Suffer in Silence Over Financial Challenges,” *Targeted News Service*, April 27, 2016, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/1784667928?accountid=11085>.

⁵ “Eight of the Most Significant Struggles Pastors Face,” Thom S. Rainer—Growing Healthy Churches. Together, March 1, 2014, accessed March 19, 2018, <https://thomrainer.com/2014/03/eight-of-the-most-significant-struggles-pastors-face/>.

- d. What is the life expectancy of the retiree? This will determine the long-term liability.
- e. How is the plan going to be funded? There are several ways to do this and some have real advantages for tax purposes.
- f. If monies are set aside for this, is it to be invested, and, if so, at what level of risk?
- g. If the retiree dies soon after retirement, what happens to the balance of the fund?⁶

The great concern with finances and proper funding is where to start the conversation and choosing the appropriate mechanisms to fund it. This dissertation is focused on the succession process. For further information and exploration, one is encouraged to explore a “Rabbi Trust” for funding a retirement benefit and implementing a 403B program for the senior leaders that can accompany their compensation package.

It is noble to think that the senior leader is deeply concerned about the organization but, “The incumbent CEO will always have a personal interest in his or her successor, either for reasons of legacy or because the CEO has a financially vested interest in how the company will be led. In some circumstances, a large part of the CEO’s net worth may still be tied up in company stock. A handpicked success may be the outgoing CEO’s way of maintaining the status quo of the company, to continue his or her legacy, or protect personal wealth.”⁷

A pastor’s financial stability is often the determining factor when they are considering whether to initiate a process of succession. In addition, the perceived financial condition of both the incumbent and the organization affects the decision of any

⁶ Russell and Bucher, 65.

⁷ Thomas J. Saporito and Paul Winum, *Inside CEO Succession: The Essential Guide to Leadership Transition* (Somerset, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 81, accessed December 9, 2016, ProQuest Ebrary.

possible succession candidate. Unstable finances can bring insecurity and stalemate into the process of succession.

Barrier 2 - Power

Senior leaders acquire specific kinds of power by virtue of their position. The position carries perceived inalienable power that can be a force for good or evil.

However, the positional power is not only reserved for the incumbent. Power is held, and can be wielded, by any of the players in a succession process.

Power can manifest in how the three players interact during the succession process. Kets de Vries addresses this interaction,

Many senior executives have a hard time dealing with their successor, even if they themselves have named the crown prince. Archaic Oedipal feelings about parent-child competitiveness seem to reemerge. A major reason is that CEOs are, almost by definition, masters at power calculation: power is an important property to them, and they know how to acquire and manipulate it. Appointing a successor changes the power equation. Power starts to flow away to the newly named candidate, and CEOs experience subtle changes in power relationships almost immediately. Loyalties quickly shift; relationships realign; new power structures begin to emerge.⁸

This shift of force can be sensed by all parties due to the necessary refocusing of the incoming new senior leader.

The nature of power, much like a healthy respect for fire, nuclear power, and electricity, is in its ability to be harnessed and contained for a directive purpose. When power is left unchecked and without restraint, it can decimate and level a successful

⁸ Manfred Kets de Vries and Elisabeth Engellau, "A Clinical Approach to the Dynamics of Leadership and Executive Transformation," in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, eds. Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 203-204.

organization quickly. There is a mental and emotional balancing act that a senior leader must recognize and embrace to keep power in check.

Nelson Mandela said, “Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate, but that we are powerful beyond measure.”⁹ Introspection by the senior leader about their authority and capacity, highlights the necessary and ongoing realization that they are finite in their leadership power. This is true with the potential candidate also. The personal presentation that they are “powerful beyond measure” will not ameliorate their position, nor the position of the incumbent. The opposite will take place in displacing the incumbent as inadequate and lacking and the potential candidate as arrogant and beyond control.

The forgotten transitory position of senior leader can be swept away with the intoxicating, delusional effect of absolute power. In an article entitled, *The Last Act of a Great CEO*, this reality is brought to life.

For departing CEOs who aren’t full-blown narcissists, pride can get in the way. The experience of losing power, feeling cast aside, and perhaps being struck hard by the fact of aging is enough to bruise even the most durable ego. One ex-CEO we interviewed made a wry comment on his experience: “The first day after I left, I sat in the back seat of the Mercedes and it didn’t go anywhere.” It may be only natural that a person feeling such loss would hesitate to be of assistance—particularly if the new CEO had somehow hastened things along. It has no doubt occurred to many departing executives that the worse the new one performs, the better the old one looks in retrospect. Perhaps this is why the CEO coach Bob Mintz has complained that executives in these situations act like “little boys on the playground.” Reflecting on a long career of mentoring, he said, “I’ve been involved in three dozen transitions and never seen a good one.”¹⁰

The position of the senior leader inures an inherent and delegated amount of power. The barrier in the succession process is the abuse and misunderstanding of that capacity of

⁹ Collins and Hansen, 178.

¹⁰ Thomas J. Friel and Robert Duboff, “The Last Act of a Great CEO,” *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2009/01/the-last-act-of-a-great-ceo>.

power, and at times the implied power of the position held. “Furthermore, the power inherent in a leader’s presence does not reside in physical or economic strength but in the nature of his or her own being, so that even when leaders are entitled to great power by dint of their office, it is ultimately the nature of their presence that is the source of their real strength.”¹¹

Barrier 3 – Inordinate Pride

One of the greatest basketball players in history, Michael Jordan, was challenged in his own multiple transitions. Jordan went from being the premier leader of the Chicago Bulls on the court to attempting to find his next phase of life after his time playing in the National Basketball Association. Jordan was adored by his fans and fellow players for his expertise and style on the court. The challenge to Jordan was how to end well and move on, knowing that he was revered as the best of the best.

A poignant Sports Illustrated article on Jordan shed light on his challenges:

The isolation play always brought Michael Jordan closer to us. Waving his arm as if parting tall weeds-the signal for his teammates to clear out or, in truth, get lost-Jordan was at his most awe-inspiring to the masses when seen all alone. In this spot shadow he controlled the next move, a diabolical voodoo artist with an opponent to prick. Would he torture his defender with a crossover or a fadeaway or a spin move? Ruthlessness was never so rewarded with adoration. MJ felt love everywhere he traveled (or pushed off) because of one remarkable trick in his swoosh-marked duffel: He had the ability to package the dark side of his competitiveness on the court with the lighter side of Mike off it. He was engaging in postgame interviews, embraceable with sidekick Mars Blackmon and accessible in his Be Like Mike glory. He was the warmest of cold-blooded players as a Bull. But after Chicago ... just cold. Over the last decade Jordan's transition to icon afterlife has been mottled by a succession of crabby get-off-my-lawn moments. In Washington, as an executive in a jersey, Jordan failed to gain closure with one last lap around the league, failed to find a player in his own likeness on the team he put together. He played with urgency, as if a dungeon awaited the loser. His teammates played for the final buzzer as if it signaled an escape from

¹¹ Friedman, 231.

their keeper. Wizards owner Abe Pollin put a jarring end to the Jordan experiment, firing him on May 7, 2003.¹²

The transitioning incumbent leader deals with their “story.” What will be told of and about them once they exit their office? Friedman’s “well-differentiated leader” is said to be concerned with legacy. Legacy is what is said after your “story” is forgotten.

Transitioned leader, Russ Crosson, CEO of Ronald Blue & Company says, “When leaders come to realize they are indeed dispensable and won’t be around forever, they recognize that the only way anyone will know they were on the planet is by the marks they leave through their families and the people who follow them in their entities.”¹³ A senior leader’s investment of time, talents, leadership and influence is important to their time in office. Truly great leaders are concerned about what happens after their investment and efforts are gone.

Being a senior leader has great benefits and perks, while you are successfully serving, and are considered age appropriate to your position. But growing older is a reality that no one escapes. Kets de Vries, with a spin of humor says, “Some people turn into good wine as they age; others, becoming increasingly sour with each passing year, turn into vinegar. As I’ve said heard it said, some people *immature* with age. Executives as a group have as much trouble (if not more) with the process of aging as does the larger population.”¹⁴

¹² Selena Roberts, “New Adventures of the Old MJ,” *Sports Illustrated*, March 29, 2010, accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.si.com/vault/2010/03/29/105917356/new-adventures-of-the-old-mj>.

¹³ Russ Crosson, *What Makes a Leader Great: Discover the One Key that Makes the Difference* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014), 129.

¹⁴ Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 214.

Richard Vancil, Lovett-Learned professor of business administration at the Harvard Business School, has studied succession issues. Vancil's research, one of the few systematic reviews of succession practice, reveals that the two most common methods are the "relay race" and the "horse race." In the relay race, the CEO chooses and grooms a successor until the CEO decides to pass the baton. This process usually results in a seamless transition. The horse race technique corrals several potential successors and makes them jockey for position until a winner and, inevitably, losers are identified.

The newest, most significant exception to these standards is the selection of an outsider as CEO. In the past, an outsider was defined as a contender with less than ten years' tenure in the company. More recently, however, this person has truly been an outsider, often the product of a highly publicized external search, who enters the company to provide a new, aggressive agenda for the future. This method is usually a critical comment on the performance of the prior CEO. Vancil's research found that only four percent of CEOs actively resist their own departure.¹⁵

All senior leaders are not created equal. All senior leaders will not exit the same way. The "has been" or "previous" tag is a reality, the challenge to the incumbent is how do they exit when it is their time to leave. Inordinate pride focuses the attention on the individual and not on the institution.

Barrier 4 – Sexual Impropriety and Illicit Relationships

An emotionally painful and quick way to derail a senior leader from ending well is sexual misconduct and illicit relationships. Not only is the personal life of the leader

¹⁵ Elaine J. Eisenman, "Succession and the Reluctant CEO," *Corporate Board*, Jan-Feb, 1995, accessed July 19, 2017, GeneralOneFile.

held in question, the trickle-down effect into the organization can be catastrophic as the lingering question is fielded, “How did this happen?” When inappropriate sexual behavior transpires, a potential successor will be forced to live in a glass house for a very long season until their integrity is proven.

The business and Christian communities have been inundated with claims of sexual misconduct. From a former president to a former chairman of General Electric to the large number of priests in the Catholic church to televangelists, both have succumbed to the age old illicit desire that can steal the future from a successful leader. Sexual misconduct and illicit relationships began in the book Genesis and run through today with sordid story after story.

The implied power and influence of a senior leader is often the catalyst to thinking that they live by a difference set of guidelines that allow certain freedoms that do not apply to others. The mind and intellect that allowed them to achieve a place of distinction and notoriety can become the seedbed of illicit thoughts that can be justified with a sense of entitlement and seen as necessary. This type of thinking has taken its toll in both business and ecclesial organizations.

Gill Valentine, in his book *Social Geographies: Space and Society*, attempts to expound this dualistic thinking process. Valentine writes,

The seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes established a dualistic concept of mind and body. He argued that only the mind had the power of intelligence, spirituality, and therefore selfhood. The corporeal body was nothing but a machine (akin to a car or clock) directed by the soul (Turner 1996). His philosophy is captured in his famous phrase: *Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am. Although his view was contested by other philosophers both at the time and since, the Cartesian division and subordination of the body to the mind and the

emphasis on dualistic thinking and scientific rationalization had a profound impact on Western thought.¹⁶

Western thought has produced senior leaders who embraced Descartes mantra, “I think therefore I am,” with little regard for the derailing that would take place in their life and the life of the organization they led. The anesthetizing of human morality due to sexual immorality has a great emotional and relational price, but there is another cost. The financial cost of illicit and inappropriate sexual activity is substantial to an organization. The fallout of goods and/or services is just one portion. A 2014 Wall Street Journal article looked at the financial fallout that can be associated when CEOs are involved in misdeeds. Chief executives are rarely terminated for alleged serious misdeeds and even more rarely do the ousted few fight back. Those who do often end up facing huge bills in legal battles that last for years – with mixed outcomes.

When a fired CEO and their employer lock horns, “you can burn up \$8 million or \$9 million” in legal fees, says Robert M. Sedgwick, head of the executive-compensation practice at Morrison Cohen LLP in New York.¹⁷ In a litigious society, the financial aspect of inappropriate behavior is not a small matter. A hint of sexual misconduct can end a long-term senior leader and handicap the organization.

In the church world, a senior leader’s impropriety, most likely will not have a multi-million-dollar impact on the budget and economic status of the church. The moral and spiritual loss is greater than any dollar amount when a religious leader chooses to

¹⁶ Gill Valentine, *Social Geographies: Space and Society* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd, 2001), 16-17.

¹⁷ Joann S. Lublin, “Legal Costs Soar when Fired CEO’s Fight Back,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 27, 2014, accessed October 22, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/costs-soar-when-fired-ceos-fight-back-1403822736>.

violate God, the Bible, and the people that they are called to lead. When a forced succession takes place due to immorality and impropriety, the shadow of mistrust and embracing of a new leader is heightened.

Barrier 5 – Family

The barrier to succession that is sometimes overlooked is the family. The influence and dynamics of family members and their relationship to the senior leader has a great impact on the organization. Negligence in the handling of the families of the incumbent and the potential successor is of prime importance.

This barrier has a Biblical mandate that defines the credibility and availability of a Christian leader. “For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:5 NLT) In the first verses of I Timothy 3, Paul outlines the acceptable protocol and activities of someone who aspires to be a leader in a church.

The capacity to lead an organization is commensurate with the interactions of the family and the inner personal life of the leader. Renowned author and speaker on relationships, Dr. Gary Smalley, said, “People who have a healthy relationship with themselves are better positioned to deal with relationship problems because they can see themselves objectively. When you learn and master the skill of ‘putting yourself in the picture,’ you will have a fresh perspective on yourself with others.”¹⁸

The aloof and disconnected leader has the propensity to disconnect themselves from the people that can mean the most to them, in both family and organizational settings. The connection between what happens within the family and what happens in

¹⁸ Greg Smalley, Michael Smalley, and Robert S. Paul, *The DNA of Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 15.

the organization are not a lengthy “emotional distance.” Bill Hybels, when addressing the qualities of an emerging leader, said, “Lots of people with influence lack the character to use that influence constructively or Christianly. Once I spot someone with that influence, I try to discern where he or she has the honesty, the humility, the stability, the teachability, and the integrity to steward that influence well.”¹⁹

Dr. Robert Clinton, when teaching his class, *Focused Lives*, at Fuller Seminary, asked students to write their ten most explicit leadership values. From that exercise, the following value was presented, “I must remember that my family life will be the key component of my ministry.”²⁰ The family dynamics of biblical characters such as David, Eli, Noah, and others show this to be true. Care must be given that the senior leader’s character is able to sustain their gifting and their families. When a senior leader is focuses solely on their ability and talent, at the expense of their family, their tenure will not be long term.

Clinton went on to record the follow:

The way I lead my family will determine the way I lead in public ministry and will serve as evidence for my integrity as a leader. In fact, my family will be *the* key component of all that I do. Unless my family life (as far as it depends on me) is healthy, I have no business leading others. I must therefore prioritize my family over anything else I do in ministry, paying careful attention to my wife and children’s physical and spiritual well-being. I should also seek to encourage others to do likewise by both example and direct challenge.²¹

¹⁹ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 128.

²⁰ Clinton, 175.

²¹ Clinton, 175-176.

The family dynamic is not limited to the church community. Business institutions are also impacted by the relationships of the senior leader and their family. It is difficult, if not impossible, to divorce the two and the impact that they will have on the organization.

Barrier 6 – Plateauing

A contributing factor that can lead to plateauing is tenure. The power of influence that is generated can be relational to the length of time that the incumbent senior leader has served. Tenure is a two-edged sword. The positive side is that the organization knows what they have because of the length of involvement of their leader. The negative side to tenure is that many things are not easily adaptable and have been set in place for many years by the trusted incumbent and their team. This “set in place” can lead an organization and the leader to plateauing.

The concept of plateauing is facing the reality of shifting from the present reality of senior leader to something new and unique or it can be the finality of an era of ministry leading to retirement. As Russell and Bucher addressed this thought,

Our retirement from any occupation should not be regarded as a time of indulgence but a time of service. However, it is wise to acknowledge that there comes a time to pass the baton to younger men and women and move into another chapter of life. We don’t wait until a tire blows before buying new ones. We acknowledge that even the best of tires have a limited ‘shelf life’ and need to be replaced before they will eventually blow and perhaps cause a serious accident²².

The incumbent senior leader is faced with a myriad of personal and family challenges. The incumbent has a great deal of authority and influence that can be used appropriately or manipulated for the demise of the organization and the potential leader. The incumbent’s success can be perpetuated by their selflessness and desire to leave a

²² Russell and Bucher, 25.

legacy, instead of walking away with a financial nest egg and the hopeful demise of their replacement.

The incumbent leader is well aware that their visibility is going to subside and the role they have occupied will now be filled by someone that time will tell their influence and skill sets. It is the letting go that seems to plague the incumbent in many cases. It is as if the incumbent would like to become invisible for a while to just make sure.

Rabbi Kushner said it like this,

Someone once said that the measure of a person's moral seriousness is what that person would do if he were sure nobody could see him. In one of the early sections of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates recounts the myth of the Ring of Gyges, a magic ring that has the power to make its wearer invisible. He asks how would an honest man behave if he were to wear it, or a dishonest man. Socrates' conclusion: If a person truly understood his own self-interest, he would not take advantage of his invisibility to do anything wrong. There would be nothing he could gain that would be worth the loss of his integrity, his right to think of himself as a good person.²³

The choice is given to the incumbent to either exit in a manner that sustains a lasting legacy or to attempt to sabotage the successor. Whether they become invisible to the institution by choice or by "the Ring of Gyges," something will live on of who they were. The key is to make the choice well before the baton is passed.

Barrier 7 – Emotional and Psychological Wounding

The barrier of emotional and psychological wounding tends to challenge organizations as they are watching the exiting and anticipating the entrance of the new leader. This nebulous and difficult area has challenges in ascertaining the depth and scope

²³ Harold S. Kushner, *Living a Life that Matters* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knop, 2001), 55.

of the wounding. A resume, personality profile, background check, and references may not reveal the psyche of the senior leader.

This hidden element can mask itself in early interviews and first interactions. The emotional and psychological nemesis can be hidden by charisma and intellect very easily: these are two areas that leaders are given high marks on and that have great appeal to an organization. The two unseen dark areas manifest themselves with time and with stress.

The mental and emotional impact of succession can reveal the best and the worst of each player. The process of succession can unmask wounds that have been carefully hidden away, possibly for decades. The incumbent senior leader is facing their own mortality and shifting of what has played an important part of their life and livelihood. The organization is getting prepared to encounter an unknown that may propel or disintegrate their very existence. The potential leader is brought face to face with the reality of their skill sets and leadership capacity being enough.

Daniel Goleman describes the emotional ripple effect of a leader, “The emotional tone set by any leader ripples downward with remarkable precision. When successive levels from top to bottom of an organization are analyzed, the effect is very much like a set of Russian dolls, one stacked inside the other, with the leader containing all the rest.”²⁴

The church is not immune to these two debilitating wounds. The pressure and expectation of ministry today is quite draining. “Today, ministry is much more localized, customized, specialized, and complex. What works in Seattle may not work in Bloomington. The high-stress culture in which we all swim is not one in which many

²⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2000), 189.

people can survive a long period of tumult in their primary resource for emotional and spiritual stability. They move on to another congregation.”²⁵

The three players in the succession process need to intentionally guard and monitor the health, both emotional and physical, of all three players. Human nature can tend to dream and long for the next great leader of an organization and quickly move on from the incumbent that has given their lives to the organization. This simple act, whether nonintentional or intentional, can have a domino impact upon the three players.

While doing Field Research for this paper, I was able to interview and spend time with Dean Niewolny, CEO of Halftime Ministry in Dallas, Texas. Halftime is a Christian-based organization, not a church. This gave an insight to an organization outside the scope of just the local church.

Dean was in the process of stepping into the position of Halftime’s founder, Bob Buford. Buford’s presence and impact had been the catalyst for Halftime’s success on many levels from exposure to financial backing. Buford’s failing health prompted the succession of Niewolny.

Niewolny’s concern was how to fill the role of CEO and yet honor the founder who had created the organization. Buford’s book, *“Half Time: Moving from Success to Significance”*, highlighted the inception of the organization whose name was derived from the author’s book. Buford’s own words from his book could have haunted Niewolny as he entered this prestigious position. Buford said, “One the one hand, you might say I have been lucky, for indeed I have been given much with which to work. But

²⁵ Weese and Crabtree, 6.

if you believe, as I do, that ‘to whom much is given, much is also required,’ you will begin to see how daunting my epitaph is.”²⁶

This barrier needs exposure and transparency to illuminate the inception, cause, and path of action that a leader needs to pursue. As Steve Willis said in his book, *The Proverbs of Leadership*, “There are no shortcuts in the construction of character. Though the price for building it may seem expensive today, to correct its flaws tomorrow following a failure will cost even more.”²⁷ The investment made early in the succession process can be the impetus for wholeness and greatness in a leader.

²⁶ Bob Buford, *Half Time: Moving from Success to Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 26.

²⁷ Stevenson Willis, *The Proverbs of Leadership: Principles for Leading Your People to the Pinnacle of Greatness* (Nashville, TN: Pillar Press, 2002), 111.

CHAPTER 5:

PLAYER TWO - THE ORGANIZATION OR INSTITUTION

Player number two, the organization, is the one player that should not age out. The goal of the incumbent and the potential successor is that the organization will continue and thrive, even in their absence. The organization or institution is the one element that is necessary, or there is no need of a senior leader. Two components determine the response and longevity: Institutional Identity and Organizational Health.

Institutional Identity

Every organization has a particular culture, with similarities to other institutions. Immaterial of the vision, mission, purpose, and defined values, there will be an organizational culture that will permeate and impact how the incumbent leaves and the who that will become the successor.

Edgar Schein's, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, is considered one of the most influential books on an organization's culture. The term "culture" implies various thoughts and definitions. Schein's definition is:

Culture is both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior. When one brings culture to the level of the organization and even down to groups within the organization, one can see clearly how culture is created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated, and, at the same time, how culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the group members. These dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin.¹

¹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 1.

The culture helps dictate the type of candidate that the organization should be pursuing in the succession process. Kets de Vries uses the following rule of thumb, “The general rule in succession is that if you want *evolution*, you promote an insider; if you want *revolution*, you choose an outsider (preferably someone who’s well acquainted with the industry in which the company operates).”²

The organizational culture is the principles and patterns of operation that may not be fully printed or vocally expressed, but it determines how the three players will enter, exit, and continue to exist. Its nebulous nature is a sustained stream of principles and idealisms. The level of understanding and interaction with the organization’s culture will greatly impact the transition and sustainability of the organization.

A major key to the success of the successor is their ability to comprehend, read, and understand the original recipe, or DNA, of the organization. This key element is a catalyst to comprehend past accomplishments and failures, present institutional realities, and mile markers projected into the future of the institution. The original recipe consistently acts as either a driving force or an insurmountable obstacle.

Max Depree believes that leaders should methodically outline and understand the original recipe; not just for the sake of the assets of the institution, but for the people who they lead. Depree states, “Leaders need to be concerned with the institutional value system which, after all, leads to the principles and standards that guide the practices of the people in the institution. Leaders owe a clear statement of the values of the

² Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 218-219.

organization. These values should be broadly understood and shape our corporate and individual behavior.”³

Jim Collins, in his book, *Great by Choice*, uses SMaC. He describes SMaC as, “a set of durable operating practices that create a replicable and consistent success formula. The word ‘SMaC’ stands for Specific, Methodical, and Consistent.”⁴ SMaC helps define the original recipe by recognizing systematic principles that have forged the organization into its present condition. A business industry standard for SMaC (including the original recipe) is Kentucky Fried Chicken. Harlan Sanders, founder and developer of a brand, seasoning, and restaurant model that has been sustainable for over eighty years.

He acquired a service station in Corbin, Kentucky, in 1930 and began serving classic Southern dishes to travelers. The location became known for its food, and Sanders eventually got rid of the service station’s gas pump and converted the location to a full-fledged restaurant. His breakthrough came in 1939 when he found that frying his chicken and its signature ‘11 herbs and spices’ in a new device, a pressure cooker (different from the ones used today), resulted in the ideal consistency he had been looking for.⁵

Harlan’s unwavering ideal for a sustainable concept was greater than his desire for fame. “The real Col. Sanders was an entrepreneur who didn’t become a professional chef until he was 40, didn’t franchise Kentucky Fried Chicken until he was 62, and didn’t become an icon until after he sold his company at 75.”⁶

Kentucky Fried Chicken found success in its brand consistency, from Harlan Sanders look-alikes, to embracing of a single food source – chicken – to captivating its

³ Max Dupree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 11-12.

⁴ Collins, *Great by Choice*, 128.

⁵ Richard Feloni, “KFC Founder Colonel Sanders Didn’t Achieve His Remarkable Rise to Success Until His 60s,” *Business Insider*, June 25, 2015, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-kfc-founder-colonel-sanders-achieved-success-in-his-60s-2015-6>.

⁶ Ibid.

audience with the 11 secret herbs and spices. Neither time nor success dissuaded Sanders from his original purpose, with his original recipe. Sanders, consistent to his core values and SMaC, placed priority on the delivery of a certain type of food more than the acquisition of money.

Sander's motivation was adherence to the original recipe and purpose behind his restaurants instead of a financial motivation to garner more. The southern country gentlemen became an icon who did not have a substantial payoff till the end of his life. "Sanders may have lacked the motivation to become as wealthy as he could have been, but he's now known in 115 countries for his favorite fried chicken recipe, which was more than he ever hoped for when he hit the road at age 65 with a car full of supplies."⁷

Southwest Airlines embraced the SMaC recipe at a crucial time in their history. The year was 1979, "Howard Putnam, then CEO of Southwest Airlines, wrestled with a question: does the sweeping disruption of deregulation call for a revolution in how we run our company? The 1978 Airline Deregulation Act would unleash competition, throw carriers into pitched battles for market share, ignite price wars, force airlines to cut costs, and lead to bankruptcies."⁸ Southwest was a fledgling airline in 1979. Southwest's Media Page states, "Southwest Airlines was incorporated in Texas and commenced Customer Service on June 18, 1971, with three Boeing 737 aircraft serving three Texas cities—Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio—and grew to become a major airline in 1989 when it

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Collins, *Great by Choice*, 125-126.

exceeded the billion-dollar revenue mark.”⁹ Corporate transition was required by a federal mandate. Would Southwest leave its original recipe?

Southwest’s corporate culture was defined, and had been operational, for less than a decade. Southwest’s SMaC is a standard that organizations can learn from. Howard Putnam developed ten tenets that were clearly articulated at that 1979 crossroads:

1. Remain a short-haul carrier, under two-hour segments.
2. Utilize the 737 as our primary aircraft for ten to twelve years.
3. Continued high aircraft utilization and quick turns, ten minutes in most cases.
4. The passenger is our #1 product. Do not carry air freight or mail, only small packages which have high profitability and low handling costs.
5. Continued low fares and high frequency of service.
6. Stay out of food services.
7. No interlining...costs in ticketing, tariffs and computers and our unique airports do not lend themselves to interlining.
8. Retain Texas as our #1 priority and only go interstate if high-density short-haul markets are available to us.
9. Keep the family and people feeling in our service and a fun atmosphere aloft. We’re proud of our employees.
10. Keep it simple. Continue cash-register tickets, ten-minute cancellation of reservations at the gate in order to clear standbys, simplified computer systems, free drinks in Executive service, free coffee and donuts in the boarding area, no seat selection on board, tape-recorded manifest, bring airplanes and crews home to Dallas each night, only one domicile and maintenance facility.¹⁰

Putnam’s specificity in Southwest’s SMaC clearly defined who they were, what they would do, and how it would be accomplished. The framework for Southwest was articulated at a time of major transition in the entire airline industry. Southwest’s methodology was unique among their competitors.

Putnam’s mandate to Southwest fit the criteria for a SMaC. The challenge was to see if it would be sustainable and lead Southwest as they stepped into an unsure future.

⁹ Southwest Media Fact Sheet, accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.swamedia.com/pages/corporate-fact-sheet>.

¹⁰ Collins, *Great by Choice*, 126-127.

Amazingly, Putnam's "list *changed only about 20 percent in a quarter of a century*. Stop to think about that for a moment: only a 20 percent change, despite a series of disruptive events from fuel shocks to air-traffic-control strikes, massive industry mergers, the rise of the hub-and-spoke model, recessions, interest-rate spikes, the Internet, and 9/11."¹¹

A leading factor that requires and dictates the transition of the senior leader is the need for continuity of the organization's mission or brand, commonly referred to as the institutional identity of the organization. An institution can transition their senior leader through personality, age, and leadership differences. The one element that must be cohesive between the incumbent and the successor is the organizational integrity and continuity; also referred to as the DNA of the organization.

The organization and the senior leaders must ensure that the DNA has been identified and then secure the transition from the incumbent to the successor. A founding pastor and a pastor who has transitioned, Tom Mullins, believes "If you don't pass the baton to the DNA carrier, I guarantee that one of two things will happen: either the transition won't stick and the organization will be left scrambling to find a new leader, or the face of the organization will change dramatically."¹²

Once successful institutions and product lines can become unknown and irrelevant without proper transitioning. The name Zenith was a common household name that "was an innovative, profitable company. It produced the first portable radio, the first flat-screened television, pioneered HDTV almost 20 years before HD signals would become the standard in the United States. They were the first company to introduce the

¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹² Mullins, 87.

remote control (the ‘Space Commander’ was the first name given to that wonderful invention...) and to this day, men sitting on couches everywhere rejoice.”¹³ The chances of Zenith disappearing from the retail market seemed impossible. Zenith’s progressive innovation and market share indicated that they were unstoppable. However, Zenith’s founder, Eugene McDonald, failed to plan for the inevitable.

Zenith was founded by Eugene McDonald, a brilliant innovator and businessman who took the company from a small start-up to a household name. However, McDonald failed to think seriously about future leadership for the company. When he died, the Board of Directors appointed a 70-year-old successor, who lasted only two years. From that point on Zenith struggled to get its momentum back. A South Korean electronics giant, LG, bought Zenith’s name and trademark after Zenith declared bankruptcy in 1999. That’s not what Eugene McDonald wanted to leave as his legacy.¹⁴

Organizational Health

The second component, the health of the organization, must be assessed on a continual basis. Organizational health is another nebulous metric that organizations need to create specific standards to track or incorporate outside help to aid in the institution’s assessment. Patrick Lencioni, contemporary business author and expert says, “After two decades of working with CEO’s and their teams of senior executives, I’ve become more convinced that the seminal difference between successful companies and mediocre or unsuccessful ones has little, if anything, to do with what they know or how smart they are; it has everything to do with how healthy they are.”¹⁵

¹³ Russell and Bucher, 48.

¹⁴ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁵ Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2012), 9, accessed December 10, 2016, ProQuest eBook.

Brady Boyd, the transitioned senior leader (after the moral failure of mega-pastor Ted Haggard) of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, spoke at the Jimmy Evans Pastors School in Scottsdale, Arizona on November 15-17, 2016. One of his sessions was, “Leading Your Church Through Tough Times.” His predecessor’s firing in 2006 shook the Christian community worldwide. Less than two years later, on December 9, 2007, shots rang out on the New Life Church campus killing three and injured three others. In his session, Boyd recounted that after the shootings they reached out to professional counselors for help with their congregation. Boyd and New Life leadership realized their people were hurting, but did not realize that the church was also unhealthy. During the debriefs with the counselors the common theme asking for help was not just the shooting; it was the moral failure and exiting of their pastor of over two decades, Ted Haggard.¹⁶

The organization’s health is paramount to the receptivity of the potential senior leader and to the honor and respect that will be bestowed on the exiting incumbent senior leader. Kets de Vries gives an analysis of this factor, “The more unhappy people have been with the previous regime, the higher the expectations of the newcomer are.”¹⁷ The correlation of organizational health and success ratio in a transition is the determinant to long-term success and viability of the institution.

¹⁶ Brady Boyd, “Leading Your Church Through Tough Times,” lecture, Jimmy Evan Pastors School, Trinity Church, Scottsdale, AZ, November 16, 2016.

¹⁷ Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 220.

CHAPTER 6:

PLAYER THREE - THE POTENTIAL CANDIDATE, THE SUCCESSOR

The potential candidate – player three – is either the answer to the organization’s dilemma or the beginning of the demise of the organization and the incumbent’s legacy. This player is faced with challenges that include discerning organizational “health,” to engaging in an onboarding process that honors the incumbent senior leader and embraces the current leadership structure, to being a respected team player who will honor the culture of the organization. This player faces greater challenges than the other two players in the process.

Finding A Potential Candidate

The first question that arises in an organization facing succession is the question of where. Where will the successor be found? Who is the final answer, but prior to the determining who, the organization must assess options and determine where the pool of potential candidates will come from. This is the initial step in determining the direction and the future of the organization.

The potential candidate pool that an organization is considering exploring can become a redirection to a new path or restructuring of the present state of reality. Several factors can emerge that have a seismic shift. The reality of selecting a two to three-decade younger successor has implications of change just in the perception of the makeup of an individual and their age biases and influences. The potential successor may be from a different ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic strata which can shake the norm, especially when following in the path of a long tenured senior leader.

Within business and ecclesial organizations, the question is whether the search will begin outside of the organization, inside the organization, or within the family, if candidates are available. The research is mixed in both types of organizations. A 2016 Harvard Business Review article offers the following insight:

Increasingly, CEO vacancies are being filled by external candidates. In 2013, 20% to 30% of boards chose to replace an outgoing CEO with an external hire. In contrast, just 8% to 10% of newly appointed CEOs at S&P 500 companies were outsiders during the 1970s and 1980s. This trend toward external hires has been strongly criticized by some scholars, including Harvard Business School's Rakesh Khurana, who argues in his book *Searching for a Corporate Savior* that too often boards hire charismatic outsiders even when their experience and abilities are not right for companies' needs. He also blames high-priced executive search firms for driving up demand for external candidates and censures the business press and the investor community for helping fuel what he calls "the cult of the outsider."¹

The transition to senior leader for a potential candidate can be a mine field if a clear path is not delineated. The succession process is complex and without the proper principles, "...the lack of understanding of the nature of transition at the most senior level leads to three missteps: first, not organizing and interpreting the type of information most important to the incoming leader's success; second, not adequately preparing people inside the company for the roles they should play in the transition; and third, mishandling the onboarding process."²

Second to creating a clear path is the understanding of the culture of the organization and how it meshes with a candidate's personal style. "Most new leaders fail not because their financial or operational abilities are inadequate but because their style or political skills render them unprepared to manage the organization's culture. Helping

¹ Harrell, Succession Planning.

² Dan Ciampa and David L. Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top: What Organizations Must Do to Make Sure New Leaders Succeed* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 96, accessed December 11, 2016, ProQuest Ebrary.

new leaders understand that culture and improve their ‘soft skills’ to successfully navigate it may be the best way to increase their chances of success.”³

Another side to the dilemma of knowing which pool to draw from is based on this notion of the organization’s culture. For a potential successor to affirm the organization’s identity and culture by parroting of organizational vision and purpose statements without truly understanding what they mean is a potential for failure. This one area can narrow the pool but also help discern and determine if they are a potential fit.

Dan Ciampa, in his Harvard Business Review article, believes, “Whether coming in directly as CEO or into the number two spot expecting to move up, failing newcomers make these common mistakes:

- They don’t read the political situation well enough to build necessary relationships and coalitions.
- They don’t achieve the cultural changes their strategic and operational agendas require.
- They overestimate the willingness or the capacity of the people they inherit to abandon old habits and behaviors.”⁴

The expectations and pressure with the transition can be overwhelming to the new leader. To help balance this, is the obvious potential, promise, and persuasion that a new leader can bring that will spark growth with their gift mix and fresh eyes on the organization. If the potential successor embraces this new season with optimism, both the health of the organization and the transitioning leader will excel.

³ Dan Ciampa, “After the Handshake.”

⁴ Ibid.

Recognizing When the New Leader Has Transitioned

A substantial challenge for any new potential successor is the acknowledgement of the moment that they are truly the new senior leader. The fanfare, announcements, and name change on the corner office does not translate that the new leader is truly the leader.

Dan Ciampa, in Harvard Business Review, states:

The new leader cannot be considered truly embedded until he wins the loyalty of the organization's most influential managers. That is the culmination of succession, and it may not occur until months after the formal handoff of power. It is signified not by an event but by behavior. Former Xerox CEO Anne Mulcahy describes observing such a moment in a meeting after the title had passed to her chosen successor, Ursula Burns: Everyone was looking at her rather than me—the whole team's attention had just shifted, without a lot of drama. That's the way it should be. And that's one sign of a successfully executed transition process.⁵

The rite of passage to become the new senior leader can seem nebulous but all players need to initialize and be proactive about understanding and marking when it takes place.

The acknowledgement that the new senior leader is truly in charge, whether marked by an event or an organizational shift, is necessary for the succession to be completed. This moment of recognition involves the intentionality of all three players. For the incumbent, it may be as simple as being noticeably absent. For the organization, it can be through public acknowledgment and affirmation, set by a formal installation or visible and vocal honor for the new successor.

In a church setting, the moment of transition can be as simple as moving to the office once occupied by the incumbent to leading the Elder Board of board of governance. This gentle “dance” is necessary for all three players to be intentional with.

⁵ Ibid.

The incumbent may have transitioned to another position, other than senior leader, but the obvious and the optics need to present that there has been a succession.

In an article from the Association for Talent Development entitled, “*Seven Enemies of Success for Newly Promoted Leaders*”, Diane Egbers and Karen Schenck state:

The reason Donald Trump says, “You’re fired” on *The Apprentice* often is because the leader has not laid the critical groundwork for success by assimilating effectively with the team and the demands on the new role. Just like in the real world, this causes a leader to underperform...Startlingly, 40 percent of newly promoted leaders fail in new roles within 18 months. This takes a tremendous toll on human talent as well as business results.⁶

The three players have their distinct roles in the process and formation of the transition. The understanding of each player is only accentuated by the willingness of the three to interact within a framework that honors each of the them. Transitions require more than a two-thirds involvement of the three parties. If one of the players chooses not to play their part in the orchestra or operate as a single entity apart from the team, then the transition will suffer.

The potential candidate will ultimately need to explore their worth and value within the big picture of the organization; not how this succession plummets them to a higher height. Edwin Friedman uses a term that helps discern and guide value; differentiation. Friedman describes this as,

Differentiation is the lifelong process of striving to keep one’s being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of self-definition and self-regulation. It is a concept that can sometimes be difficult to focus on objectively, for *differentiation* means the capacity to become oneself out of one’s self, with minimum reactivity to the positions of reactivity of others. Differentiation is

⁶ Diane Egbers and Karen Schenck, “Seven Enemies of Success for Newly Promoted Leaders,” *Association of Talent Development – TD Magazine*, September 8, 2013, accessed on December 12, 2016, <https://www.td.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2013/09/7-Enemies-of-Success>.

charting one's own way by means of one's own internal guidance system, rather than perpetually eyeing the 'scope' to see where others are at.⁷

The distinctive of "when" cannot be overlooked in a succession. A lingering and over involved incumbent can cripple the organization and rob the successor of his potential. Careful planning must be placed on this moment and the impact that it has on all three players.

The Unprepared Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great could be considered one of the greatest leaders in history. He is admired for his courage, prowess, and ambition. His own lack of preparing for his transition ultimately brought the demise of his empire. "When Alexander ascended to the throne, he had no heir. Councilors advised caution: Take a wife, have children, guarantee a potential heir. However, Alexander felt that take action – invading Persia – was more important."⁸

The succession process, when tainted with the "immediate", can become plagued for the long term. Institutional success at the moment is not a guarantee for what will happen in the future. The lack of preparation, as Alexander the Great allowed, falls on the shoulders of both the incumbent senior leader and the organization. Both entities will need to acknowledge their term as being temporary, thus allowing the process to be initiated and embraced.

⁷ Friedman, 183.

⁸ Lance B. Kurke, *The Wisdom of Alexander the Great: Enduring Leadership Lessons from the Man Who Created an Empire* (New York, NY: Amacom, 2004), 49.

History has acknowledged the prowess and military genius of Alexander. His resume, if submitted to a search committee, would quickly rise to the top of the potential successors to be reviewed. Dr. Lance Kurke created a historical overview and resume of Alexander's life. Below is a sampling of that resume:

Alexander the Great

Significant Accomplishments

- Secured throne at age 20 on father's assassination (336 B.C.)
- Unified Greece in less than two years
- Invaded and conquered Asia Minor, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Middle East, the Persian Empire, Afghanistan, Sogdiana, Bactria; and invaded India
- Campaigned for ten consecutive years and covered 10,000 miles
- One of history's wealthiest people
- Founded dozens of cities
- Knew the names of 10,000 soldiers
- Wounded uncounted times, three times nearly fatally

Personal Notes

- Shared men's hardships; lived as a soldier
- Always fought visibly from the front
- Trained as a doctor and personally administered medical assistance to soldiers
- Always refused medical treatment (if conscious) before all others were treated, slept cold, ate sparingly⁹

This resume reveals aptitude, mental agility, and ambition; traits necessary for a successful leader. Alexander's thirty-two years of life may have been marked with great accomplishments, but there were several character qualities missing. It seems that his competency became handicapped by his character.

⁹ Ibid., xxii-xxiii.

Alexander was self-indulgent and self-absorbed. “He came to be known as Alexander the Great, not Alexander the Perfect or Saint Alexander. He did horrible things to people, he made terrible mistakes, but he changed the world irredeemably.”¹⁰ Kets de Vries tells Alexander’s story in this manner:

Another lesson that Alexander taught (and the second that he taught by omission) is the need for a viable succession plan. Alexander was so focused on his own role as king and aspiring deity that he could not bring himself to think of the future when he was gone. (Of course, it can be argued that his young age when he died played a role in this lack of planning.) As a result, political vultures tore his vast empire apart after his death. Power is an easily ignited explosive that must be transferred with care. Great leaders realize that they are taking care of an heirloom that should be left behind in better shape than it was received. To do so, they need to ensure competent succession. Alexander’s narcissistic disposition didn’t permit him to look beyond his own rule.¹¹

The “Alexander the Great”’s that step into the arena of succession, may be highly talented and qualified. As in the case of Alexander, the senior leader needs to see the long-range and larger picture for the organization that they lead. Their time in office may be marked with great successes and accomplishments, but the ability to step over and allow someone else to step in is a repeat of Alexander the Great.

The three players of succession and their ability, or inability, to engage in the distinct roles and rules of engagement will be the determinant of the success or failure of the organization, no matter their resumes. Some orchestras will continue to play on to the enjoyment of their engaged audience. Some professional sports team will continue to fill the stands with fans, admire the players, embrace the coaches, and bring out the best in their team of choice. Organizations will continue to transition, some successfully, while

¹⁰ Ibid., 150.

¹¹ Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, *Reflections on Character and Leadership: On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 209, Kindle.

others will fail. In the end, the three players of the organization will answer for their engagement.

CHAPTER 7:

PRINCIPLES FOR ADMINISTERING A SENIOR LEADER TRANSITION

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
— George Santayana, philosopher

The focus of this section is to look at the practical principles that foster the administration of a senior leader's transition. Encompassed in the organization and its required adherence to the organization's legal documents, polity, and process, there should be fundamental principles that can be implemented for significant progress and success with the succession. Overlooking these principles can derail the potential for a desired outcome.

These five principles are the result of this research and the historical successions of the author. By no means is this an exhaustive list for succession. The following are to be seen as principles and guidelines that have both a practical and logical approach to the transition process.

Principle One: Know When to Start the Discussion

Transition and succession are at best delicate discussions to all three players in the organization. The discussion can be catalytic of hope and at the same time can be the realization of an era that is coming to an end. The proactive senior leader and/or Board of Directors that can initiate the discussion helps to create a valuable path to successful succession.

The motive and methods of the transitioning incumbent senior leader have great impact on the success of the institution. The senior leader may have been the catalyst and

“brand” that resulted in the success of the institution. Their impending departure, though inevitable, will reveal the motive and methodology of the incumbent in a myriad of ways.

A certain amount of fear is prevalent in beginning the conversation. The authors of *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*, offer reasoning that needs to be addressed and overcome to begin healthy conversations on succession. They offer the following:

- If I talk about transition, I might put the idea in someone’s head and make it more likely to happen sooner than I’m ready.
- I will create a lame-duck situation in which effective ministry becomes impossible.
- My peers and colleagues won’t support me in doing it a different way, and I am not sure I want to be a pioneer on the road of better pastoral transitions if this means going it alone.
- A discussion about pastoral transition might have unintended consequences that I (and others at this church) do not know how to manage.
- I (and we) don’t have the resources to deal with transition planning and be successful.¹

No matter the circumstance that is precipitating the transition, the senior leader must ask and engage in questions that will be both introspective and revealing. Before the transition is ever begun, “he should have clarity on the reason he is making the transition. Is he running away from something? Is he running to something? Or is this a healthy transition into a new season of personal growth and development? If a pastor feels confused about the transition, then he might be transitioning during a season of emotional and spiritual burnout, which can be dangerous to his long-term vocational ministry.”²

¹ Weese and Crabtree, 14-15.

² Holly Tate, “8 Questions Must Ask Before Announcing Their Succession,” *Vanderbloemen Search Group Blog*, July 28, 2015, accessed May 5, 2016, <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/8-questions-pastors-must-ask-before-announcing-their-succession>.

Bob Russell, former senior pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky shares seven observations that address the motive and methodology:

1. God can bless a variety of transitions, but an intentional plan has the best chance for success.
2. The character of the persons involved in the transition is much more important than the timing or the strategy.
3. Two years of mentoring and transitioning seems an adequate amount of time.
4. The departing leader should be the initiator of the transition plan, and not the organization.
5. The organization should begin early to develop a generous compensation package.
6. The successor should share the same values, but not necessarily the same leadership style or temperament.
7. A wise successor will practice patience and restraint in implementing changes.³

Russell goes on to say that, “People are watching you also to see if your life is in your status or in your Savior. Retirement is a great opportunity to demonstrate that your self worth is found in your relationship with Jesus, not your self importance.”⁴ The challenging part of coming to grip with a new present state of reality can be the motivation that governs and guides the heart and motive of the impending succession of the senior leader.

The motive of the incumbent can be the fuel that propels to success or the accelerant that causes a destructive firestorm. It is impossible to predict the atmosphere that will impact on all concerned during the uncharted waters that are being traveled. The mounting myriad of emotions and anxieties can vary from concern, to a sense of relief, to fear that seizes the succession process.

³ Russell and Bucher, 57-67.

⁴ Ibid., 94.

The senior leader of a church is beginning a path away from an institution which they had invested in, cared for, and served. Their reactions will be different from the institution. The motives and methods of the pastor in succession will react to “the trauma of leaving a familiar place of work and life, the upsetting of family life, separation from people they care about, and making new connections. In spite of the challenge and excitement of the new position, clergy bring to it some nostalgia or even grief.”⁵ The end is near becomes the message for the transitioning senior leader. The institution is ecstatic and fearful with the hope of a new beginning looming in front of them.

One of the major causative agents that triggers the motives, ultimately defining the methods that the exiting senior leader will embrace, is identity. Transitioned leader and former football coach, Tom Mullins, wrote, “Lance Witt observed this in men in their mid-sixties who have been serving in ministry for thirty-five to forty years. He said, ‘They have wrapped their identity up so much in being a pastor of a church that the idea of moving beyond that is hard.’ These individuals often don’t want to leave, because they don’t know who they are outside their role as pastor.”⁶

The incumbent senior leader has to deal with issues that are both foreign and routine. The leader has watched the ebb and flow of constituents, clients, staff, volunteers, institutional victories, and defeats. Now their own impending mortality and personal ebb and flow is going to remove them; as they have watched others before them. In the past, it was someone else, now it is them.

⁵ Loren B. Mead, *A Change of Pastors...and How It Affects Change in the Congregation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 3.

⁶ Mullins, 40.

Protocols and boundaries need to be outlined for transition to maintain the proper motives and methods. “When you prepare for transition effectively, you stabilize your organization and give security to your people, which then positions you for a smooth and successful exchange. Without proper preparation, transitions can cause great turbulence for everyone.”⁷ So much is revealed of the motive and methods of all engaged parties, when the transition train begins to roll out of the station.

Jim Collins states that, “Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice.”⁸ The motives and methods that drive the decisions are a conscious choice, not a random happening that falls into place by accident.

Principle Two: Recognize That the Present Role Is “Acting Senior Leader”

The Senior Pastor/Lead Pastor and/or CEO can begin to think of themselves and their role as permanent. This common misplacement of judgement and positioning is detrimental to the organization and to the potential successor. At best, all senior leaders are acting leads for the allotted time that is given to them. No one assumes a title of permanent.

The natural tendency is to continue to do what you have always done. Sometimes, when a senior leader has been able to achieve a level of success, they want to continue in that role, regardless of the cycle of life and aging that is taking place around them. Senior leaders can be notorious for staying too long.

⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸ Collins, *Good to Great*, 26.

The concept of an acting leader is common in some organizations, often designated by the title interim. Someone with this title understands that their role is temporary while a replacement is being found. Twenty-nine-year founding, and lead pastor, Tim Celek uses the following sports analogy:

If you are a fan of professional basketball, in particular the Golden State Warriors, you would know that Mike Brown has been declared “acting” head coach due to recent health issues concerning the contracted head coach, Steve Kerr. During this election cycle, we have also heard regularly that “so and so” is the “acting” Secretary of “such and such.” Most of the people I know of who are in roles where they have the title “acting” give 110% to their position. They give wholehearted focus, energy and effort because they know they are under even more scrutiny. They want to do the best and be the best.⁹

The major detriment to an organization is the elongation of transition due to the senior leader having a sense of ownership to their position. The delicate discussion of tenure happens best when the senior leader has relinquished their rights and is determined to see the organization succeed, even if it means their own exit. This mentality mirrors that of John the Baptist’s understanding of his acting leader position in the Bible.

John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.” (John 3:27–28, 30 NLT) When a senior leader assumes this mentality, stepping aside for someone else to step up, succession is much easier.

The shift to the acting role brings with it the truth and temporariness that involves all leaders. It also emboldens a sense of urgency and strategy for the acting leader to

⁹ Tim Celek, “Acting Head Coach: 5 Succession Mantras for an Uncharted Journey,” *The Unstuck Group Blog*, May 30, 2017, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2017/05/successful-pastoral-succession/>.

prepare a path for his/her successor to run on while increasingly connecting to the organization to keep it vibrant and healthy. This simple shift of thinking can help remove the possessiveness that senior leaders can gravitate to, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Principle Three: There Is No Single Formula for Successful Successions

Quite freeing to the succession process, is the knowledge that there is not one single formula that will work in all organizations. In today's society, where the internet provides information on a world-wide basis and systems are valued at times higher than relationships, the succession process is not what it used to be. In today's economy, firms can be hired to assist in the succession process from inception, to implementation, and placement of the new senior leader.

The church world is running behind in their succession planning and processes. The church falls short in process and remains loyal to patterns of yesteryear. The thought of preplanning a departure can even seem prideful and self-indulgent in light of the fact that a senior leader's ministry began at the bequest of God and his will.

Unfortunately, we operate out of a paradigm that worked fifty years ago. In that era of high denominational loyalty, transitions were much more disorienting owing to off-the-shelf ministry approaches universally applied, simple programmatic paths to success (worship, Sunday school, youth group), an ample supply of ministers, and low mobility among church members. People tended to stay with a church through its transition, and the new pastor from Seattle used the same curriculum as the former pastor from Bloomington.¹⁰

The recognition and acknowledgement of the lack of a singular process should be freeing to the players involved in a succession.

¹⁰ Weese and Crabtree, 6.

The clear notion that there is more than one formula, answer, process, or system to succession, is the equivalent to the distinctive DNA and uniqueness within the human body. This uniqueness, is what drives the notion of only one pattern of succession far from reality. All organizations are unique in their makeup and polity thus creating a need for individual intervention during transitions. Just as a medical doctor has to discover the medical history for proper treatment, the same is true within an organization. There is more than one prescribed treatment to treat the succession process and all that have a part in it.

Principle Four: Emergencies and Factors That Require Succession

The concept of transition sounds ethereal and foreign in the ears of the senior leader. Transitions are what happen to all the “other” senior leaders. Even if a succession plan is in place, the idea of having to implement and engage in it seems to be a distant galaxy that will not be reached for light years.

Emergency situations do happen, even with the best of intentions. This was the case in the death of Dr. Jerry Falwell Sr.. Falwell’s son, Jonathan, “...wasn’t sure how he would face the church family where he had served as his dad’s executive pastor for several years. He didn’t know what he was going to say to bring them comfort or help them to see a hope for the future.”¹¹

¹¹ Mullins, 156.

The size, notoriety, and name recognition of an organization, are not synonymous with a defined plan and preparation for an emergency. Thomas Road Baptist Church was ranked as the twelfth largest church in America by Newsmax's October 2017 article.¹²

Jerry Falwell hadn't done much transition planning with Jonathan or the team at Thomas Road Baptist Church. There was no written plan, and nothing had been spoken about before his death, because, as Jonathan put it, 'He thought he'd live till he was a hundred.' So in the wake of his sudden death, Jonathan and the staff had no clear plan for who would take over. Dr. Falwell had been pastor of Thomas Road for more than fifty years. So the loss was devastating for everyone.¹³

The need for organizational integrity and continuity, in the face of emergencies, the unstoppable aging process, and impending health crisis that can follow due to the natural cycle of life, are imperative as precursors to the event. The lack of preparedness by both the institution and the incumbent senior leader, are major factors that drive succession. Today's economy evokes even more factors that require the senior leader to transition whether they had intended to or not. These are more complex and require a greater amount of insight than this paper will indulge.

Various crisis points can bring the realization that some form of change is needed, typically the following: loss (separation, divorce, missed promotion opportunity, or job loss); developmental imbalance (certain important life expectations remain unfulfilled); interpersonal conflict; symptomatology reflecting inner turmoil (eating or behavioral disorders, sexual dysfunction, and insomnia); work/life imbalance; and fundamental questions about the meaning of existence and actions.¹⁴

¹² Johnnie Moore, "Newsmax's Top 50 Megachurches in America," *Newsmax*, October 25, 2017, accessed October 25, 2017, <https://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/megachurches-top-united-states-newsmax/2015/11/11/id/701661/>.

¹³ Mullins, 156-157.

¹⁴ Kets de Vries and Engellau, 206.

The truth of the matter is that many institutions are ill prepared for the impending transition of their senior leader. Emily Douglas wrote in her blog, *Succession Planning 101*, “In a 2011 Society for Human Resource Management survey, only 22 percent of all non-profit respondents noted they had a succession plan, compared to 44 percent of publically-owned, for-profit organizations.”¹⁵

This author’s own father developed Alzheimer’s several years ago. He was able to maintain his position as others around him were able to cover for what could be deemed as simple forgetfulness. As the dreaded disease increased in magnitude, his ability to lead brought about a succession. Now with Stage Four Alzheimer’s, he has no cognitive ability to interact with anyone, let alone the new successor. The cycle of life deems it necessary to prepare for factors that can initiate or precipitate a succession.

Vanderbloemen and Bird reveal data on pastoral succession among Protestants in the United States that uncovers a blind spot and weakness in the future of the American church. Protestant churches embrace an infinite God who works through people but quickly have memory lapses to their own finiteness and tenure on earth and in ministry.

- The average senior pastor tenure per church is 8 years, a number has inched upward over the years.
- The average senior pastor career is 18 years, which suggests the typical pastor faces succession two or more times.
- Senior pastors state a wide variety of reasons for moving to another church, such as wanting to serve in a different community (27%) and moving to a higher position (20%). Long gone is the standard practice of pastoring one church for life until retirement.
- The average senior pastor plans to retire from full-time active ministry at age 65.
- Among senior pastors of megachurches (weekly worship attendance of 2,000 or more adults, youth, and children) according to Leadership Network research, 1 in

¹⁵ Emily Douglas, “Succession Planning 101,” *Education Weeks Blogs*, November 6, 2012, accessed May 4, 2016, http://blogs.edweek.org/topschooljobs/k-12_talent_manager/2012/11/succession_planning_101.html.

5 (22%) are founders and 4 in 5 (78%) are successors. Founders have served on average 19 years and are age 53; successors have served 14 years and are age 52.¹⁶

Transitions are not always cordial and anticipated. Whether it be to moral collapse or overwhelming stress from the high demand placed on the senior leader, transitions can be by force, not by choice. Research has shown that forced terminations are larger than most people would comprehend.

A painful number of succession cases take shape because of a forced departure. According to one study of thirty-nine denominations, 28% of US Protestant clergy experienced forced termination during their career. That's sobering: more than 1 out of every 4 pastors. The main reason for this statistic is conflict. The study also found that forced termination is also associated with high levels of depression, stress, and physical health problems, as well as low levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. American Protestant churches employ 1.2 million paid staff. Of those, roughly three hundred thousand are clergy. If those clergy each average forty years of ministry over their lifetimes (a very high estimate), that 28 percent numbers as many as two thousand pastors experiencing a forced termination in any given year.¹⁷

A difficult reason that motivates, and at times requires, succession is the decline in the ability and effectiveness of the senior leader. The challenge is the acknowledgement and proper action that is needed to rectify the situation. The revered by some, and possibly hated by others, incumbent has weathered many challenges and brought the organization through. The major challenge is when the organization is just going through but not progressing.

Kets de Vries outlines several characteristics that seem to signal the decline of the senior leader:

- Executive myopia and arrogance
- An assumption that momentum equals leadership
- A refusal to listen to new ideas

¹⁶ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., 140-141.

- An internal focus at the expense of outside constituencies
- A lack of challenge to existing paradigms
- A growing, centralizing bureaucracy
- A lack of urgency to get things done, to change things
- Repetitive reference to the overriding preoccupation
- Waning excitement
- Falling performance
- Increasing cash reserves¹⁸

The realization that these are symptomatic of decline is one thing. The greater question is how that they are brought to the attention of the senior leader, and by whom.

The cycle of life is a continuum that has no brakes. The cycles of an organization will at time precipitate the necessity of a leadership shift. The proverbial, and sometimes flippant usage of the phrase, “What if you get run over by a bus?” is not enough to warrant a methodical response. Whether the shift is an emergency or aging out, this principle is not to be overlooked as a viable piece of the succession puzzle.

Principle Five: Recognize and Rectify the Challenge of Next Generation Leaders

22 years – Age difference between the outgoing pastor and incoming successor in our sample of 100 famous-pastor successions.
— Research by Leadership Network

The once slim, efficient, articulate, thirty something with the athletic build has now become sixty years of age, over-weight, and struggling with some physical problems that have removed him from consistent involvement in leading. The one-time hero is now thought of as an appendage that is slowing the organization down. Whether it is the supposed and unstoppable Zenith corporation or the First Church of Anywhere, USA, the age and health of the senior leader are uncertain.

¹⁸ Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 222.

Transitioned pastor Bob Russell began to deal with the reality of his loss of energy, relevance, and imagination as age took a toll on his forty years of ministry.

Russell's transparency was revealed when he wrote,

While we may not feel older, those who are 20 or 30 years younger regard us as old and out-of-touch. That may not be true, but perception becomes reality. When I stand up to preach at 66 years of age, I am regarded as old by those in the 20-40 age bracket, and I have serious barriers to overcome. I can say the same words as a 30-year-old Minister, and still fail to capture the attention of a younger generation as much as someone closer to their age.¹⁹

Viability in an institution is not based in just today's performance. Every institution must embrace the factors that are inevitably going to be the causation for the senior leader to leave and allow their successor to step up. This concept is easily understood by the 2003-2004 New England Patriots.

The New England Patriots were a surprising success in the first half of the 2003-2004 NFL season. Despite using eight rookies to replace injured veterans, the Patriots led the AFC Eastern division with a 7-2 record. Part of their success was due to an unselfish mindset adopted by players and coaches alike. The vice president of player personnel, Scott Pioli, displays a sign in his office that summarizes his attitude. The sign reads: 'WE ARE BUILDING A TEAM – NOT COLLECTING TALENT'.²⁰

The concept of building a team is a precursor to institutional health, if embraced by the organization. The transitioning senior leader hopes that their team will overlook factors that are initiating their transition, and honor the current season. The incumbent's recognition that they are not only interim, but that they are aging, is a difficult reality in life.

¹⁹ Russell and Bucher, 43.

²⁰ Mark Crow, *Secrets of the Second Mile* (Sapulpa, OK: HonorNet, 2005), 152-153.

The age gap, and the development of style and standards developed by one's age, is an uncontrollable variable to assess and acknowledge. The very element that is the causation for the succession, the acknowledgement of one's age, is the same element that is going to magnify the differences between that incumbent and the next generation leader. The incumbent and the aging organization will need to accept this fact.

The third player, the successor, may be a commodity that will be in high demand. Though the population of the world is increasing, the turnover rate of senior leaders is escalating at an alarming rate. With the massive turnover and aging out, the resource pool of potential leaders, adequate for the task, may become a worldwide challenge.

The war for talent will become the war of knowledge, a resource battle that will heat up over the next ten years as the rate of retiring baby boomers accelerates –not just in the US, but in all developed nations. In 2006, the leading edge of the baby boomer generation reached 60 years of age across the globe. In the US in 2012, 80 million boomers will retire with an additional three to four million retiring every year through 2030.²¹

The leadership pool of executives (age 35 to 50), which grew 3 to 4 percent over the last four decades of the twentieth century, has declined by 2 to 3 percent in the first decade of this century. By 2020, estimates are that the *Fortune 500* will face a turnover of about half of its workforce with an even higher rate of turnover in senior management and board-level positions.²²

Finding a potential successor, and being able to keep them, may also be a challenge in the church world. Pastor James MacDonald, in his book *Vertical Church* states, “Here is just a sample of the current statistics on epic church failure in our day. Six thousand churches

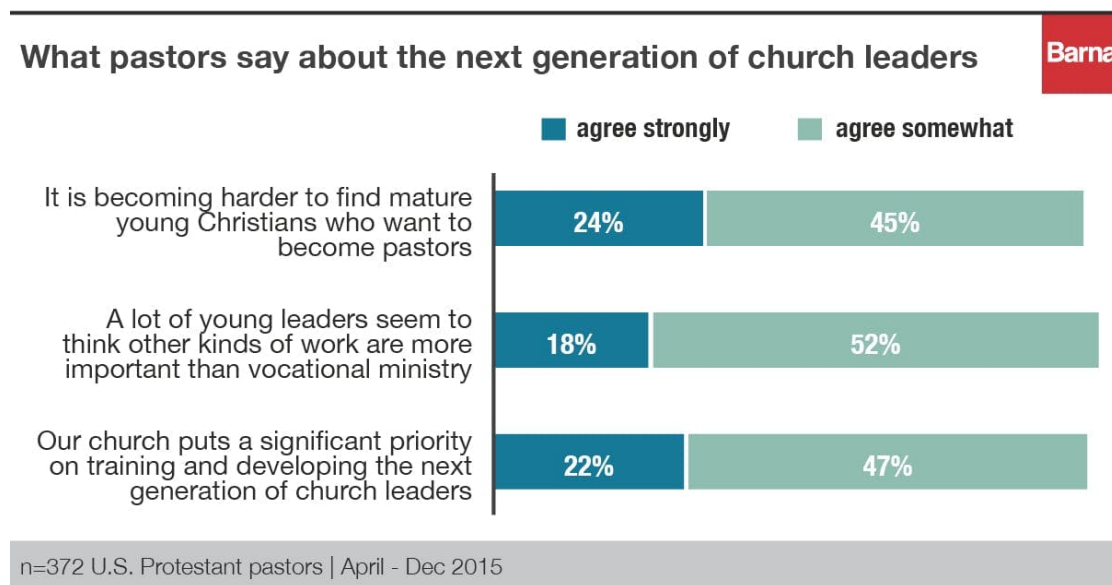
²¹ Saporito and Winum, 206.

²² Ibid.

close their doors every year. Thirty-five hundred Americans leave the church every day. Only one pastor in ten retires while still in ministry.”²³

Those statistics are the challenge to alluring young, talented senior leaders. The longevity of older pastors staying in their position, mixed with a shrinking potential pool of new leaders, is a milestone for churches facing the future. Concern also must be given to the role of older pastors seeking out and mentoring a shrinking pool of younger leaders.

Finding potential younger pastors is becoming more challenging as the potential pool is decreasing. “A majority of current pastors say even finding future leaders—much less mentoring them—is a challenge. Two out of three current pastors believe identifying suitable candidates is becoming more difficult (69%), even though a majority believes their church is doing what it takes (69%).”



*Figure 3: What Pastors Say About the Next Generation*²⁴

²³ James MacDonald, *Vertical Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 130.

²⁴ “The Aging of America’s Pastors.”

Christianity Today published some of the findings from the Barna Group's 2017 *State of Pastors Project*. The Barna project addressed the divide in age between current senior church leaders and the inability to engage the next generation. The results were a graying in the pulpit and absence of the next generation. The State of Pastors report listed nine overarching factors contributing to this generational disconnect:

Demographic: Not only are millennials the largest adult generation in terms of sheer numbers, they are also the most ethnically, culturally, and spiritually diverse (unlike many of our churches).

Social: Young people are generally going through the shaping experiences of adulthood at later ages than did previous generations—yet most of our churches are designed with families in mind.

Economic: The economic pressures on middle-class and working families are being passed on to local churches, and the financial and ministry implications are immense.

Vocational: The landscape of work is shifting toward a gig-oriented, multi-careering, freelance terrain, and there is profound need for a robust theology of vocational discipleship.

Institutional: People get the information they want, when they want, for the price they want to pay. “Disintermediated institutions”—including churches—are no longer the sole mediators of knowledge, and pastors no longer the chief authority.

- Legal:** Particularly when it comes to holding historically orthodox beliefs about human sexuality, Christian institutions are at increasing risk of running afoul of the law.
- Digital:** The “screen age” requires adaptive approaches to community and discipleship. “Digital Babylon” is an always-on, hyperlinked, immersive culture where Christians must learn to live and thrive as exiles.
- Moral:** Society’s moral center is shifting away from external sources of authority (the Bible, Christian tradition) to the self: You look inside yourself to find what’s best for you.
- Spiritual:** “Nones,” or the religiously unaffiliated, are the fastest growing religious group in the nation. Nominal, cultural Christianity is no longer the “default position” of Americans—and this reality is challenging the Church to reevaluate faith formation.²⁵

One way to quickly rectify the situation of next generation leaders is to be intentional about empowering them within the present organization. Onboarding next generation leaders in strategic ministry/job locations, by senior leaders, is placing a seal of approval on this to both the employee and the onlooker of the organization. This is not window dressing or hiring to make a statement.

²⁵ Kate Shellnut, *Only 1 in 7 Senior Pastors is Under 40*, January 2017, accessed October 9, 2017. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/only-1-in-7-senior-pastors-is-under-40-barna.html>.

CHAPTER 8:

A FRAMEWORK FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION AND DEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO END WELL

The inevitable succession of the senior leader does not come with guarantees of success. Nor, as has been explored, is there one single formula for succession that is the catch all for every organization. There does appear to be a framework of principles and potential patterns that can assist in this sometimes-arduous process.

This section addresses the framework of succession in light of passing a baton in a relay race. Careful attention is given to this sports analogy and how it mirrors in the succession process. The coveted win in a relay race is only a dream if implementation and understanding of the rules of engagement are not adhered to and embraced. The succession process embraces a similar construct and outcome when the desired destination is outlined with specific principles and adherence to those principles

Pass The Baton

The term “pass the baton” has become synonymous with leadership succession. The act of handing off a cylindrical tube from one runner to another has simplified a rather complex process that organizations will ultimately go through. As simple as it may sound to hand off the baton, there are strategies and principles that allow each runner to sequentially participate at an optimum and communicate in the process, thus increasing the chances of a victory.

The *Journal of Business Venturing*, published an article entitled, “Passing the Baton: The Importance of Sequence, Timing, Technique, and Communication in Executive Succession.” The abstract of the article stated:

The extensive literature on executive succession gives only scant attention to the actual process of succession. To better understand the dynamics of the succession process, the analogy of a relay race is suggested, where success is influenced by four factors: sequence, timing, baton-passing technique, and communication. These four factors are used as a framework for a longitudinal examination of a failed executive succession in a small, family-owned manufacturing firm. In-depth examination of the attempted succession showed that the four themes are helpful in working toward the development of a general theory of executive succession.¹

These four factors: sequence, timing, baton-passing techniques, and communication are not only keys to potential wins in a relay race, they are also keys to succession within an institution. A simple slip of the hand, an audible miscue, or overstepping of marked boundaries can cost a team the race.

Sequence

Sequence is ascertaining the skill sets of each of the runners, and then properly placing them into the race for optimal results. The succession parallel is assessing the three players and then developing the proper order for implementation of a set of guiding principles that encompass the big picture. For example, if the incumbent is ready to step down and place a new successor, but the organization has not been adequately prepared and instructed, a passing of the baton may not take place. Conversely, if the incumbent and the organization are in place but there has not been the proper placement of the potential

¹ Bruno Dyck, Michael Mauws, Frederick A. Starke, and Gary A. Mischke, “Passing the Baton: The Importance of Sequence, Time, Technique and Communication in Executive Succession,” *Journal of Business Venturing*, 17, no. 2 (March 2002): 143, accessed July 19, 2017, [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(00\)00056-2](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(00)00056-2).

successor, then the race is destined to failure without a runner for the last leg of the journey.

Sequence is best embraced when there has been intentional planning and preparation informing the various runners of the succession of the runners. One of the congregations that I did my Field Research with took one year to prepare the church for the succession process. The incumbent had made his decision to pass the baton, but knew that the sequence process was preparing the congregation for the impending transition that was in front of them.

In *Passing the Baton*, the analogy of sequence is outlined in terms of understanding the present reality of the organization. In a baton relay race, careful analysis is invoked as to the potential, stamina, and specialization in positioning the sequence of the runners. The following is offered from that article in regard to succession in an organization:

Parallel ideas are evident in the management literature. Perhaps best known is Greiner's (1972) work with respect to the "revolution and evolution" cycle that characterizes firm growth over time. He suggests that the first "runner" should have strong entrepreneurial start-up skills, while the second "runner" should have strong skills in the area of internal organizational administration. The parallels are even more pronounced in the work of Churchill and Lewis (1983), who make explicit the changing needs, both managerially and otherwise, as firms make transitions from one stage to another.²

The skills that brought success to the team with the first runner, the incumbent, may not necessarily be the skill set that a potential successor, nor the organization, needs at that time. To understand the sequence process, there needs to be a careful analysis and examination of the life cycle of the institution. The organization may have carefully

² Ibid.

placed the present senior leader, given their specific skill sets, in accordance to the life cycle of the institution.

Dr. Ichak Adizes, in his work, *The Pursuit of Prime*, sees ten stages of an organization that can help in understanding the sequence process and how it reflects the need of the organization and its leader. The comprehension of the life cycle helps to determine the type and style of leader that is needed at the helm of the institution at each stage. The parallel of the baton passing analogy is the acknowledgement and assessment of all three players, or in this case runners, and where they benefit the overall picture.

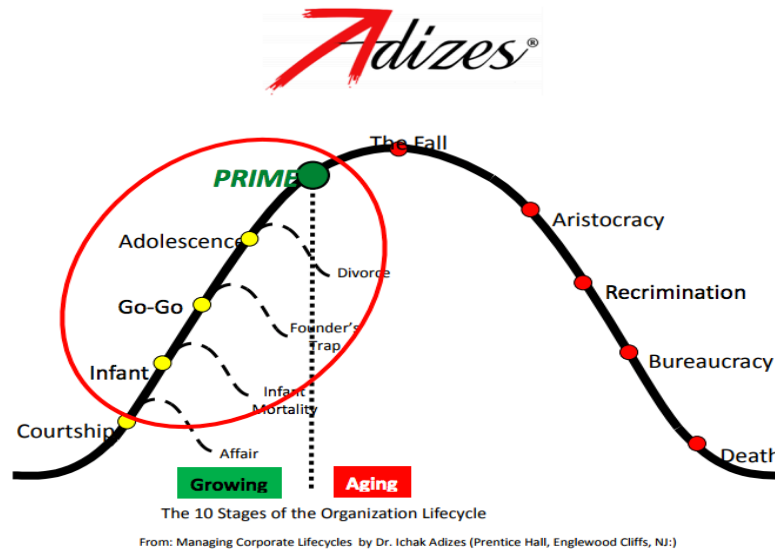
Adizes embraces the concept that, “All living creatures progress through stages of growth and decline in an arching curve that begins with birth and ends with death. Organizations, however, do not have to decline and age; it is not preordained that they have to do so. Businesses can remain at or near the high point of their vitality for a very long time, perhaps indefinitely. Organizations can even return to those peaks from stages of decline.”³ Each of these ten life cycles require a certain skill set to help procure the necessary leadership for the institution. When a succession is pending, assessment of the institution is imperative to clarify present reality and trends that are either boosting or challenging the institution.

Succession protocol and assessment for the incumbent and potential candidate are necessary to match the present cycle of the organization and the necessary leader that is needed for the success of the organization. This process can be accentuated with the use of a personality profile, leadership design assessments and characteristic traits of the two

³ Ichak Adizes, *The Pursuit of Prime: Maximize Your Company's Success with the Adizes Program* (Santa Barbara, CA: The Adizes Institute Publishing, 2005), ix.

leaders. This can be completed through a varying number of tools: DiSC personality profile, Strength Finders, Enneagram personality type, and others.

The following diagram highlights the ten stages with a demarcation between growing and aging. The choice of a potential leader, in light of determining the proper sequence of both who and when, can be ascertained by the present stage of the organization. Special attention is given to pitfalls that can offset the growing process.⁴



Understanding and Treating Growing Organizations

Figure 4: Understanding and Treating Growing Organizations

Adizes divides the ten life cycles into three stages: The Developing Stages, The Coming-of-Age Stages, and The Aging Stages.

⁴ Ibid.

The Developing Stages

Stage 1 – Courtship

This is the stage of dreaming and making a commitment to a dream. The would-be founder focuses on ideas and future possibilities, making and talking about ambitious plans either to change the market or to create a market niche. Courtship ends and Infancy begins when the founder assumes risk.

Stage 2 – Infancy

During this stage, the founder's attention shifts from ideas and possibilities to results. ... Because a small problem can escalate and turn into a major crisis overnight, the founder makes all decisions – big or small. Infancy ends and Go-Go starts when the organization's cash flow stabilizes and is predictable.

Stage 3 – Go-Go

This is rapid growth stage. Sales are still king or queen. The founders, seeing their companies flourish, believe they can do no wrong; their arrogance leaves their business vulnerable to flagrant mistakes...What was normal in Infancy is becoming abnormal in Go-Go. Go-Go ends and Adolescence begins when the Go-Go gets into serious trouble.

The Coming of Age Stages

Stage 4 – Adolescence

During this stage, the company experiences the problems of uncontrolled growth and takes new form. The founder hires a chief operating officer but finds it difficult to hand over the reins. ... If the company sails successfully through Adolescence and develops controls without losing flexibility, it enters Prime.

Stage 5 – Prime

This is the stage of life when everything comes together. Introducing and enforcing discipline without losing vision, the company in Prime establishes an even balance between control and flexibility. ... If the organization does not work on staying in Prime, it will age.

The Aging Stages**Stage 6 – Stability**

The organization is still strong, but without the eagerness of its earlier stages; is it starting to show the first signs of aging. Instead of getting what it wants, it wants what it gets. ... If this stage does not get treated, the coming will age further.

Stage 7 – Aristocracy

Not making waves becomes a way of life. Outward signs of respectability (dress, office decoration, and titles) take on enormous importance. ... The company appears to be stalling, and the organization's leaders rely on the past to carry them into the future. Inaction in a changing environment has a price. The time of Recrimination will arrive.

Stage 8 – Recrimination

In this stage of decay, the company conducts witch-hunts to find out who did something wrong rather than trying to discover what went wrong and how to fix it. Cost reductions take precedence over efforts to increase revenues.

Stage 9 – Bureaucracy

If the organization did not die during the previous stage, it becomes bureaucratized; it is politically protected or it survives in a regulated environment. The

critical factor for its survival is not how it satisfies its customers but how it satisfies those who grant its resources and control the predictability of its behavior.

Stage 10 – Death

This final stage may linger for years while the company slowly dies, or it may arrive suddenly with one massive blow. The organization crumbles when it cannot generate the cash it needs to cover its payables, when the outflow finally exhausts any inflow.⁵

Timing

Timing is the necessary component that is needed after the sequence of the runners is established. Once the sequence of runners is discovered, careful study of the stage of both individuals and the institution, the proper timing for the handoff is discovered and implemented. This timing technique can be the key to winning or losing in the succession process.

In relay races, runners must make optimal use of the “acceleration zone,” that portion of the track where the outgoing runner starts running before receiving the baton. Sometimes, a “go” marker is placed on the track; when it is passed by the incoming runner, this signals to the outgoing runner to start running. This ensures that runners will be the optimal distance apart when the baton is passed. A slower pace during transference decreases the likelihood that the baton will be dropped, but it also increases the likelihood of losing the race. Great emphasis is therefore placed on the expeditious transference of the baton, particularly in races where competition is strong.⁶

One weakness of a baton relay race is expediting the transfer too soon. Speed is what ultimately wins a relay race but the necessary time to carefully pass the baton from

⁵ Ibid., 9-14.

⁶ Dyck, 143-162.

runner to runner can determine the race's outcome. The timing aspect of succession is determining the pace and transfer time for each portion of the race.

Timing involves several milestones. First and foremost is the timing of the incumbent and their departure from being the senior leader. Second, the organization's acceptance of the need for a new leader. Third, the process and placement of the potential candidate.

The timing element was one of the challenges in the succession process that I lived through in Nashville. The date of the baton passing was kept nebulous which created the unknown shift of leadership for myself and the congregation. The topic of creating a date was asked for before assuming the role, but never determined. The lack of definition created a vacuum in the leadership team that did not properly allow the shift to becoming the senior leader.

Nicolette Mok addressed the process and precision needed for correct timing in the baton pass in her article, *How to Pass a Baton in a Sprint Relay*.

Firstly, ensure that all members of your relay team are aware of the specific positions that they are supposed to move off from. The baton, however, does not change hands at the exact spot where the receiver is waiting. Instead, the receiver should begin jogging forward as he or she sees the passer approaching with the baton. When the passer is ready to hand the baton over, he or she will give an audible cue – usually a call of “up” – and the receiver will raise his or her arm in preparation. The receiver's arm should be outstretched and high, positioned at the back of the body. The palm should be facing the passer. The passer will then place the baton in the receiver's hand while both are running; the receiver will grip it between his or her thumb and forefinger.⁷

The succession of an incumbent can be both a difficult and defining timing issue. The juxtaposition that a handoff is imminent is also admitting an era has ended and there is a

⁷ Nicolette Mok, “How to Pass a Baton in a Sprint Relay,” ActiveSG Blog, accessed May 5, 2017, <https://www.myactivesg.com/sports/athletics/features/how-to-pass-a-baton-in-a-sprint-relay>.

changing of hands that is forecasted. As Mok outlined, “the receiver should begin jogging forward as he or she sees the passer approaching with the baton.” The ability to run in tandem is indicating to both parties that this exchange is imminent and that this truly is happening.

In church life, the timing and actions accompanying succession can be perceived as a death. The senior leader that married, buried, baptized, and dedicated your children is no longer going to be running in front. The perception by some senior leaders in churches is that they can run forever. Their initial call by God to engage in ministry can be perceived as until death do us part. The selfless pursuit of what is best for the organization seems to soften the blow of succession, yet not diminishing the emotional challenges of passing the baton.

Timing invites all the players to heed and acknowledge the need for an audible cue and the necessary physical action when the receiver will raise his or her arm in the preparation. These outward expressions correlate with the proper time for the potential successor to begin jogging and for the incumbent to let go. Ignoring or purposefully holding to the baton can remove all players from the race.

The business aspect of timing, is defined by both audible and physical signs too. The business community lack of timing can challenge the corporate bottom line and market share.

In the management context, it is clear that the leadership baton is less likely to be dropped if the principals take the care and time needed to securely pass it. Indeed, an effective succession process has been described as a “dance that is a slow and subtle process.” Just as relay teams facing relatively weak competition may permit themselves to slow down the baton-passing process, so also mature, stable firms with accumulated slack resources, or firms in a munificent environment, may not feel a great need for a particularly speedy succession. But expeditious baton passing may be critical in growing new ventures, whose operational nature

is shifting monthly, if not weekly. For firms such as these, wasting even a single month on a botched succession could result in a significant strain on cash flow and make the firm insolvent. Whatever the context, the succession should be concluded in a timely fashion so that a competent successor is in place and the incumbent has meaningfully passed on the authority and responsibility that is required for the successor to do the job.⁸

Techniques for Passing the Baton

The process and technique for passing a baton involves a procedure that needs to be embraced by both the initial runner and the receiver. If one of the participants refuses to operate methodically and on cue, the team can encounter a loss. The good intentions and hope for victory can be circumvented by not engaging in the needed technique.

The succession process of senior leaders mirrors this technique. Good intentions and platitudes of hope are inadequate to the needed techniques for succession. The incumbent who eagerly desires to finish their portion of the race and the successor who is taking the baton, must both engage in the precise mannerisms to ensure that the baton has been passed.

The receiver should take the baton in the hand opposite of the one that the passer is holding it in. For instance, if the passer is holding the baton in his or her right hand, the receiver should run slightly towards the right of the lane and receive the baton in his or her left hand. The receiver is free to switch hands after receiving the baton if he or she feels more comfortable doing so – as long as the next runner is aware of which hand to receive the baton from.⁹

This detailed technique shows that there is a fluidity to the technique. The runner and the receiver are both heading the same direction with the same goal in mind. The balancing act is in reading the signals from each other so that the baton is not dropped.

⁸ Dyck, 143-162.

⁹ Ibid.



Figure 5: Hand Off Between Runner and Receiver

Photo: SportSG

A seasoned incumbent, with baton in hand, understands that they are the initiator of the pass. Careful attention to timing and communication are given to the zone where the pass will take place to the succeeding runner. The job of the succeeding runner is to receive the baton firmly while running at the same time. Once the pass is complete, the initial runner must exit the area and not hinder or interfere with the successor.

The exiting process, in a senior leader succession, is important for the incumbent and the successor. The mannerisms, persona, and communication during the process send signals to the other players in the succession. Each incumbent has a style that reflects who they are and how they react when their season and time is to exit.

Russ Crosson, who transitioned to CEO from the man whose name is on the company that Crosson now leads, Ronald Blue & Company, summarized six styles of exiting leaders. His information was from Ernesto Poza, *Family Business*. Crosson synthesized the six styles as follows:

Six Styles of Exiting Leaders

- Monarch:** This person doesn't leave until forced out and thinks no one can replace him or her. Unfortunately, far too many leaders fit in this category and, as a result, their entities struggle.
- Inventor:** This person leaves the leadership position and moves back into more vocational work, usually in another company but sometimes in the company they had been leading.
- General:** The person leaves reluctantly. He or she plots a return and is hopeful the successor fails. This way the Board of the person who removed them is proved wrong. The general believes he or she is irreplaceable. Generals are decisive and in no way look to help successors succeed.
- Governor:** This leader ensures the successor is trained and ready before moving on. ... Once the successor is trained, the governor might move to a "transition czar" position.
- Transition Czar:** This role provides active leadership during the overlap period when the company's reigns are being handed off.
- Ambassador:** Depending on the desires of the successor and the needs of the company, this leader might serve as a representative for the company for some time. Ambassadors remain involved to help others learn about the business, and they weigh in on how to manage the business.¹⁰

When careful attention is given to the incumbent, and his or her style of exiting, the involvement of the institution and the well-being of the potential successor are better

¹⁰ Crosson, 129-130.

understood. In the church world, it is the responsibility of the incumbent and the organization to make this assessment versus relying on a good feeling or kindred spirit. This one exercise has the ability to shift the succession to success. The lack of assessment can lead to misunderstandings and a standoff from the incumbent in the process.

Once the exiting style has been assessed, the necessary communication and principles can be put in motion to help monitor how the process is progressing. The pitfall for not assessing is to ignore the exiting style of the senior leader and seek to find someone to blame for the challenges. This is counterproductive because it causes a tightening grip on the baton and slows down the necessary and pending handoff.

These six exiting styles mirror the work of Jeffrey Sonnenfeld who, "...surveyed two hundred and fifty chief executives, officers and recently retired CEOs. From these interviews, he discovered four distinct styles of exiting behavior: monarchs, generals, ambassadors and governors."¹¹

Sonnenfeld not only looked at how a leader transitions, he also looked at the responsibilities of the board:

¹¹ George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 307.

HOW HEROES EXIT THE ORGANIZATION¹²

Monarchs 12%	Generals 21%	Ambassadors 38%	Governors 29%
Deeply attached to executive position	Love heroic stature of executive position	Identity not tied to executive position	Little attachment to executive position
Long term in role	Short term in role	Long term in role	Short term in role
Resist succession “I’m not done yet”	Reluctantly accept succession “I’m the best”	Enjoy succession process Content with accomplishment	Accept succession Move on to new challenges
Chose weak successors Undermine the successor	Chose strong successors “I’m even better”	Mentor strong successors Commit to their success	Unconcerned with successor “I’m out of here”
Leave bitter and hurt Feel he was forced out	Plot and fight to return to power Leaves the office in pain	Provide continuity and counsel Believe ministry can succeed without them	Break all ties Move on

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD

¹² Ibid.

Press for realistic succession plan	Insist on leadership depth on team	Clearly define his responsibility and terms on Board	Encourage to remain in contact for brief Board term
Oversee the time frame, candidates, development process	Key Board and successor involved in succession plan	Break old patterns with former staff and successor	Support for successor comes from the board

Communication and Teamwork

The last component in the framework has nothing to do with charisma, strength, knowledge of the environment, or endurance. The communication and teamwork are not measured by intrinsic and non-tangible means, it is a condition that is inherent within a successful leader based on motives and intentionality. These two elements are the inspiration to keep the succession moving forward, even when detractors and conditions say otherwise.

In a relay race these two elements have the ability to raise to success a team that may be waning in speed and agility. Teams that focus their organization on the talents and skills of a single individual, are at the mercy and desire of a single point of failure, the one person. A team that embraces the interaction of all players, energizes the potential of the whole organization, not just a single individual.

There must be communication and “harmonious cooperation” to facilitate the exchange of the baton in a relay race (i.e., the four fastest runners do not always constitute the best relay team). In short-distance track and field events, where runners do not look at each other, an oral utterance occurs at the point of exchange. Long-distance runners typically use a visual signal, with the outgoing runner taking (rather than accepting) the baton in order to account for the fatigue factor of the incoming runner.¹³

The baton pass occurs with intentional engagement in communicating and developing a team mindset between the incumbent and the potential candidate. This

¹³ Dyck, 143-162.

interaction is especially important when a senior leader in a church is methodically communicating the process and assessing the progress. “As a pastor or ministry leader develops and equips their successor, a transfer of responsibility must occur. These four phases allow the pastor to gradually relinquish authority and fully prepare and equip the new leader to step into the role.”¹⁴



Figure 6: Collaborative Leadership

Adkins' Collaborative Leadership chart (above), diagrams the process of giving away the responsibility of ministry.¹⁵

This methodical transference of responsibility is empowering to the new leader and rewarding to the incumbent. It keeps a collective check on both of their intentions and the collective integration of releasing and empowering for next steps in the succession process. This methodology is counterintuitive to the wait and see mentality.

¹⁴ Todd Adkins, *Succession at Every Level* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Leadership, 2017), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Adkins went on to say, “You see, succession is not about replacement. Succession is about reproduction. In far too many cases, we have allowed our thinking to shift into leadership placement over leadership development.”¹⁶ Reproduction versus placement is relevant when the succession is built on relationships and interactive communication, not just the financial bottom line and moving people out and up. In the article, *Passing the Baton*, the following parallel is drawn:

In executive succession, a parallel is again apparent: effective communication between incumbent and successor is critical, particularly in cases of strategic succession. If the relationship between the incumbent and the successor is characterized by a lack of trust, poor communication, conflict over strategy and process, or lack of a shared vision for the organization, succession is likely to be problematic (Barnes and Hershon, 1976; Davis and Tagiuri, 1989; Handler, 1990, 1992; Morris et al., 1997). Recognizing the importance of communication and good interpersonal relations draws attention to understanding succession as a process.¹⁷

When succession is viewed in light of teamwork, tenure and timing take second place to the selfless interaction of all three players. The desired outcome is focused on sustainability of the institution, as the players work together in harmony as a team. The teamwork and communication between all the players becomes the gold standard for progress and sustainability of the organization.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Dyck, 143-162.

Parallels Between a Relay Race and Organizational Handoff¹⁸

Relay race factors	Organizational parallels
(1) Sequence	(1) Sequencing and internal organizational context/design
- order of relay race team members	- selection process and criteria for new leader
- physical and emotional attributes of runners	- company's stage in the organizational life cycle determines the kind of CEO that is needed
(2) Timing	(2) Impact of the environment on the timing of executive succession
- the stronger the competition, the greater the need to minimize baton handoff time	- passing of the leadership baton can be slower and more deliberate if the environment is munificent or if the firm is mature and has slack resources; in these situations, overlap of tenure of the Incumbent and Successor may facilitate transition
- the acceleration zone defines the "window" within which the outgoing runner must start and receive the baton - when the incoming runner arrives at the "go" marker, this signals the outgoing runner to start accelerating	- passing of the leadership baton expeditiously is important in a hostile environment, or if the firm is a new venture or has few slack resources; in these situations, extended overlap of tenure of the Incumbent and Successor may increase the likelihood of organizational failure
(3) Baton-passing technique	(3) Baton passing and leadership style
- how to hand off baton (incoming runner)	- Incumbent may have difficulty letting go of the leadership baton
- how to receive baton (outgoing runner)	- Successor may have difficulty taking over the leadership baton
	- need for agreement on what is being given by the Incumbent (authority and ownership) and being accepted by the Successor (responsibility and commitment)
(4) Communication/teamwork	(4) Communication and interpersonal relations
- harmonious cooperation and trust necessary	- trust between Incumbent and Successor increases likelihood of effective succession
- clear visual and oral communication required for effective handoff	- clarity of communication between Incumbent and Successor increases likelihood of effective succession
	- conflict between Incumbent and Successor over goals, strategy, and process reduces likelihood of effective succession

¹⁸ Dyck, 143-162.

Sustainability of All Three Players

Sustainability has a variety of ways that it manifests itself in the three players. Sustainability can manifest itself in financial security, emotional capital, relational sustainability, or one's purpose for existence. This framework focuses on mutual respect and the endurance of all three players as the adjustment of succession is brought into each of their lives.

The raw concept of a senior leader succession is the ousting or the outing of an individual with new vistas of grandeur and greatness in the eyes of the organization and the incoming new senior leader, the potential of the future. This subliminal thought process can initially alienate the incumbent and cause them to feel as if life is over as they once knew it. This type of action can envelope a rigorous harvest for the two other players and their sustainability.

What once was vogue and cutting edge can quickly be obsolete and unwanted. The genius and notoriety of one of history's great entrepreneurs, Henry Ford, is a case study in sustainability.

The first Henry Ford's slogan, 'Any color as long as it is black.' Was initially downright visionary: it created the assembly line and made for cheap, mass-produced cars. But times changed; consumer tastes became more sophisticated. As they did, Ford's focus on one model and on the utilization of mass-production concepts, initially brilliant, became his Achilles' heel. While Ford, unwilling to adapt to changing circumstances, stuck with a single formula, he lost two-thirds of his market share to General Motors. He couldn't accept the fact that customers were going elsewhere any more than he could accept the need for change.¹⁹ As is true in agriculture, the same is true Biblically of how we "sow" into others.

The sustainability factor is true for all three players. "Don't be misled—you cannot mock

¹⁹ Kets de Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 125-126.

the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.” (Galatians 6:7 NLT)

Succession and the interconnectivity of all three players is not exempt from this.

The sowing and reaping is not the single motivator for sustainability. But it does form a framework at how an organization should view the outgoing senior leader and the incoming potential candidate. Succession is not synonymous with abandonment and dereliction of respect.

The blurred lines of leadership, that take place in succession and the passing of the baton, can be ameliorated with intentional actions of holistically sustaining all involved. The gambit of emotions will run rampant with all parties. The embracing of a premediated and calculated response to this need will be invaluable.

Value

The unquantifiable worth of an individual or organization can be referenced with a single word; value. This portion of the framework can be easily overlooked if one has never navigated through a transition. The tangible plaque or severance package cannot replace the intangible of an individual or an organization’s value.

Having personally traversed through this process, from both sides as an incumbent and as a potential successor, the exchange of worth or merit is priceless during a succession. All three players are affected by the exchange or the lack of exchange. The lack of expression of value may not be intentional, but the intentionality of acknowledging value is quite important.

The incumbent’s emotional blow and impending life-change, from stepping aside, can be softened by placing value on the character, leadership, and accomplishments that took place during their tenure. The process for showing value is not found in a prescribed

pattern or methodology. Value is the assessment of multiple factors of the incumbent and then the careful and precise acknowledgment of the discovery.

Value can be shown by gifts, financial packages, retirement parties, and other tangible items. True value is best expressed when it is sustainable and has longevity. The pen, watch, and party balloons will become obsolete. The sense of living a life and leading an organization that expresses its value to their prior senior leader is invaluable.

The organization's sense of value can range from its existence in the past and for the hopeful potential of a bright future. To undermine the past and to downplay a potential future can reduce the perceived usefulness and benefit of the organization. The conundrum for organizational value is that it represents a group of people, not a single individual. Value relates to the institutional identity (Chapter Five) and how it is being reflected and articulated to the organization.

An organization's value can be placed in jeopardy by both the incumbent and the potential successor. The incumbent can relish the good ole days and reflect that the organization has seen and accomplished its best already and that the future is bleak and lacks promise. The potential successor can articulate and act in a manner that portrays the organization as lacking and irresponsible for where they have been. The potential successor can inject a messiah complex: that they are the answer and all that has been has waned in light of their potential and where they will take the organization.

The dance of value and honor for all three players is tenuous. An organization wants to believe there is a future but not at the expense of degrading the value that the incumbent senior leader brought to them. The successor wants to embrace belief that

brings a sense of value to the organization and that their investment will be appreciated and respected.

One way to captivate, if value and honor have been bestowed, is by a post-succession debriefing. Invite the three players to evaluate how well the process flowed and what could have been navigated better. This debrief could assess the new reality that the organization is living in and identify what steps can be made to keep the three players in synchronization in maintaining the institutional identity, mission, and vision.

This debrief can be scheduled with greater frequency for the first year of the succession. Subsequent years could move to quarterly and possibly to annually. This interaction can also keep the next succession at the forefront of the institution and how to prepare and implement a healthy framework for success.

As mentioned earlier, there is not a single way to show value. There are principles that a leader can embrace that will support all concerned. Senior leaders in church settings can follow the advice of Robert and Richard Clinton as they addressed six characteristics that can aid in the succession process. These characteristics can be embraced by both ecclesial and business organizations because they reflect an individual's character. The six characteristics are:

1. Maintains a **personal vibrant relationship** with God right up to the end;
2. Maintain a **learning posture** and learns from various kinds of sources – but especially from life;
3. Gives evidence of **Christlikeness in character** through the fruit of the Spirit in their life;
4. Lives out truth in life such that convictions and the **promises** of God are seen to be real;
5. Leaves behind one or more **ultimate contributions** – that is, a lasting legacy;
6. Walks with growing awareness of a sense of destiny and sees some or all of it fulfilled.²⁰

²⁰ Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, 152.

Start Now, Your Legacy Is Waiting

Both business and Christian senior leaders leave a mark on an organization that can range from a picture on a wall, to a legacy that impacts the world in one fashion or another. Choosing to end well is part of the legacy continuum that the three players choose to engage in. The cause and the need for the transition may seem vague, unpredictable, and uncertain. The drive to leave a legacy that will supersede the transitioning leader is contingent on several clear factors that will dictate the how and the when. In the end so much falls on the shoulders of the transitioning leader as they pass the greatest test of their leadership.

Transitioned senior leader, Tom Mullins, says it best, “Your legacy is fulfilled when you humbly and obediently hand off the baton when it’s your time to do so. When God asks you to step away or step into something new, be ready; because when you do so with grace and humility, fully surrendered to His call, you leave a legacy worth following. Transition is not only the greatest test of your leadership: it is your legacy.”²¹

Leadership isn’t a mysterious art practiced by only a select few. It is the daily response of every man and woman who wishes to make a positive difference in the world and make it a little better place as a result of their efforts. In my experience, the marks in life we leave – our legacy – are most often left not in stone and steel, in history and politics, or poetry and literature, but in the lives of other people.²²

For senior leaders in churches, the concept of legacy should have an eternal component to it. Committed and focused church leaders should ultimately desire that the institution is more than just maintained but that it continues on at a higher level of

²¹ Mullins, 201.

²² Mark Sanborn, *You Don’t Need a Title to be a Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2006), 104.

influence. The challenge can be the perception of loyalty and life-guide role that a senior leader plays in the lives of their followers. “One of the long-term needs that human beings have is to leave a legacy. It is a small comfort for a pastor to look back over a lifetime of service and see three or four seasons of dynamic ministry punctuated by decline and retrenchment after his or her departure because inadequate attention was given to a transition plan.”²³

The long-term senior leader of a church has traversed a myriad of emotional, physical, and spiritual moments. These moments can be likened to a tsunami that you learn to ride and lead through. The role of a pastor endears you to people in some of the most intimate and personal times of their lives. Vanderbloemen and Bird addressed this issue well:

Perhaps no career ties identity to a job more than the pastorate. What other job coincides with more key parts of life? Who else performs their daughter’s wedding at work? Who else buries longtime friends as part of their job? What other career ties personal spiritual formation to career performance? The same thing that makes the pastorate the best job on the planet can also make it the hardest type of work to leave. That’s why focusing on legacy questions from day one matters so much.²⁴

The motive will become quite telling as the incumbent is brought face to face with their new successor and the impending transitions. The motivation to write a legacy or the survival of the incumbent leader’s influence and impact will be revealed quickly. John Maxwell wrote in his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, “Achievement comes to someone when he is able to do great things for himself. Success comes when he empowers his followers to do great things with him. Significance comes when he

²³ Weese and Crabtree, 15.

²⁴ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 41.

develops a leader to do great things for him. But a legacy is created only when a person puts his organization into the position to do great things without him.”²⁵

Achievement is desired because the individual will benefit from their investments. Success is a shared venture when others can engage with you and both can benefit. Significance is the thread that can be intoxicating as others are promoting the achievement and success of the senior leader. When the senior leader can truly remove themselves, and allow the organization to do greater things, they have achieved and created a legacy that is bigger than them.

Actuarial tables are subtle reminders that our present life and position in life are not eternal; they have a shelf life. The intimidating part is that no matters of success can thwart the inevitable. Tom Mullins, a transitioned leader wrote, “Though you were created for eternity, your leadership privileges are only for a season. You have to be ready to hand off the baton when the timing is right. Legacy depends on you having an expectant, willing heart to toward the transition process. When you are open to constructive conversations about making room for someone else to step in, God will guide you to the right timing and the right person, for his glory.”²⁶

Good, or even great, intentions are not enough to sustain or propagate a legacy. Ethereal mantras and cute slogans are not enough to create longevity that will sustain the desired legacy. Tsun-yan Hsieh and Stephan Bear wrote in *Managing CEO Transitions*:

We have found that an effective way of thinking about legacy includes: the prevailing focus of its people; what the leader personally stood for; and the organizational climate that grew out of the leader’s style and actions. Thus defined, a legacy goes well beyond the aspirations for financial and market

²⁵ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws*, 260-261.

²⁶ Mullins, 199.

position. It deals, as well, with perceptions in the minds of the leader's many and varied constituencies. And like all perceptions, it deals with things that are more black-and-white than reality.²⁷

The desire to see an institutional legacy be scalable beyond the transitioning senior leader is noble, admirable, and a true test to the leader's ability. Hsieh and Bear said, "A fair test of legacy-related aspirations is to ask, 'What would be my number one regret if I had to leave without achieving it?' Due diligence, however, requires asking as well, 'What is the number one thing that could derail what I hope to achieve?'"²⁸ This dance of wanting to end well personally is complicated by the institution that will be left behind with the transitioning leader's departure.

This is something that I experienced in a failed transition of a mega church in Nashville, Tennessee. The senior leader desired for the legacy of nearly six decades of his ministry to continue and prosper. He had acknowledged the various changes that needed to be made for the culmination of his term and the successful propagating of the new senior pastor to follow. The challenge was to embrace, as Mullins had said, "to be ready to hand off the baton when the timing is right."

The infrastructure and leaders that had evolved in sixty years of ministry were now old wine skins that would not accommodate new wine. The resulting burst was not honoring to the long-term senior leader nor the desired legacy that he had longed for. I transitioned to another pastorate before the burst transpired. My observations from a distance were quite sobering as several thousand people's lives were impacted and eventually scattered.

²⁷ Tsun-yan Hsieh and Stephan Bear, "Managing CEO Transitions," *The McKinsey Quarterly*, No. 2 (1994): 49, accessed April 22, 2017, EBSCOhost Business Source Complete.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

Michael Hyatt and Daniel Harkavy, in their book, *Living Forward: A Proven Plan to Stop Drifting and Get the Life You Want*, describes leaving a legacy,

Our legacy comprises the spiritual, intellectual, relational, vocational, and social capital we pass on. It's the sum total of the beliefs you embrace, the values you live by, the love you express, and the service you render to others. It's the you-shaped stamp you leave when you go. Truth is, everyone is in the process of creating – and leaving – a legacy. The question is not 'Will you leave a legacy?' but 'What kind of legacy will you leave?' The sooner you come to grips with this reality, the sooner you can start creating it. Like it or not, your life now shapes your legacy then.²⁹

The concept of legacy is bigger than the senior leader, even though they may have been one of the great sources of the institution's success. Embracing a long-term legacy is contingent on the sacrifice of the incumbent leader to be willing to desire and allow the baton to be passed and the next runner to supersede the prior run. Legacy building and embracing may be the leader's greatest accomplishment.

The motivation of leaving a legacy is the most selfless and successful key a leader can incorporate into their biography. As generations come and go in the organization, the "prior" senior leaders will disappear and possibly be forgotten. Legacy is the one component that has the potential to live on far past an individual.

Eternal Properties

Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die
even the undertaker will be sorry.
— Mark Twain

"Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." (Psalm 90:12 NLT) Eternity has a way of bringing us to grips with what truly counts in this life.

²⁹ Michael Hyatt and Daniel Harkavy, *Living Forward: A Proven Plan to Stop Drifting and Get the Life You Want* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 61.

Steve Jobs, successful entrepreneur and creator, faced this reality in his own life as cancer threatened his existence. Jobs said, “All external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure – these things fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is important.”³⁰

Rabbi Harold Kushner, reflecting on his mortality and the impending transition in his own life, stated the following:

I would often recall the words of my teacher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, ‘When I was young, I admired clever people. As I grow old, I came to admire kind people.’ Looking back at my life, I realize that I was commuting between these two worlds in an effort to meet two basic human needs, the need to feel successful and important and the need to think of myself as a good person, someone who deserved the approval of other good people.³¹

There is no immunity from the impending transition of all senior leaders. It is a cyclical reality that is imminent and necessary for any institution to continue. The unknown in this equation is the why. The why that will be the senior leader’s curtain call, can be intentional and rewarding if a prescribed plan is initiated and followed through with both the senior leader and the institution.

The cause and need of the transition will require participation by the incumbent, the successor, and the institution. Recognizing the primary factors that require the transition is prudent for timing and initiation of the prescribed plan. Careful examination of the motives and methods of the incumbent will lead to a healthy baton handoff that will honor the exit and the entrance of the senior leaders. This process is to be admired and embraced. But is there a higher calling?

³⁰ Hyatt and Harkavy, 57.

³¹ Kushner, 5.

Money, fame, and prestige can be made and earned and lost. These three are not the epitome of a senior leader's life well lived. Somewhere in the milieu and sphere of life there should be a compelling vision that has an eternal property to it. It is that realization that you are finite and that there is someone who is infinite. In my humble opinion that is the Creator of all things, the Almighty God.

Psalm 100 brings us to a deeper understanding of not just our acknowledgment of God, but of the role of people. "Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." (Psalm 100:3 (NLT)) Leadership has its distinctive in a Creator God that gave us life and gave us the potential to live with certain talents and callings.

These callings can be for selfish purposes or they can be for eternal properties. Those eternal properties are the realization of who God is and how we interact with his people. That is the call of a senior leader as long as they have the propensity and desire to lead, they lead with an eternal focus that steers their life in the direction for greatness and success.

Conclusion

The challenge of research is the tsunami of information that begins to unfold as the topic is explored and unearthed. What was once a great concept has now taken a path that has uncovered more unknowns than was in the original concept. My own succession journey could have hindered the process and tainted my research. Instead it propelled me to know that there are principles that can shape a successful succession. It may not be a guarantee of success, but it does bring a framework to be considered with hope.

Time was not given to major challenges and concepts of succession, that need to be addressed, such as the succession from a founder, women in succession in a man's world, family successions, examination of the Asian process of succession and honor, technologies impact with succession, the challenge of social media and succession in a global community. Each one of these is a dissertation in and of themselves. Our changing world is launching new challenges with the succession process continually.

We must conclude that there are eternal principles that are not hindered by time that can be a part of this impending and inevitable process. The future is right in front of all of us. Our succession to there is going to take place. Let us choose to embrace the principles that will enable a successful succession.

I close with an analogy from Marshall Goldsmith:

Imagine that you are 95 years old and ready to die. Before taking your last breath, you're given a great gift: The ability to travel back in time – the ability to talk to the person who is reading this page, the ability to help this person be a better professional and lead a better life. The 95-year-old you understands what was really important and what wasn't, what mattered and what didn't. What advice would this wise "old you" have for the "you" who is reading this page? Take your time and answer the question on two levels: personal advice and professional advice. Jot down a few words that capture what the old you would be saying to the younger you. Once you've written these words down, the rest is simple: Just do whatever you wrote down. Make it your resolution for the rest of the current year, and the next. You have just defined your "there."³²

³² Goldsmith, 221.

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