

Different kinds of pastors for different kinds of churches

by Rick Warren

Before you can grow your church to the next level, you've got to fully understand where you are at now. This week we're going to look at three kinds of churches and the roles of the pastors who lead them.

Structurally, there are basically three kinds of churches: single-cell, multiple-cell, and multiple congregation churches.

In the single-cell church, there is just one single cell, one group of people who make up the church. Generally this church has less than 200 people.

Multiple-cell churches have between 200 and 300 people. In this church, you have several cells, such as Sunday school classes, women's groups, men's groups, and so forth.

In multiple congregation churches, you have congregations within congregations within congregations with cells inside all of them. For example, in our church, women's ministry is a congregation within itself. So is our men's ministry. Our children's ministry is larger than most churches. Multiple congregation churches have 400 people or more.

In each of these levels of growth, your role as a pastor (or leader) has to change.

In a single-cell church, the pastor is the owner/operator. He does a lot himself: he prints the bulletin, locks and unlocks the church, sweeps up, etc. He's the entrepreneur.

In order to grow to the next level – a multiple cell church - the pastor must be willing to change from owner/operator to manager/supervisor. At this level, you add staff members. Your role becomes managing and supervising people under you.

When the church grows beyond 400 people, the pastor must take on the role of executive. This is not a hands-on management like the manager/supervisor. You know you've reached this stage when you have beneath you an administrative or executive pastor, someone who handles details for you.

An executive evaluates, makes decisions, and preaches. He leads and feeds, and lets others handle the smaller details. The key role of the pastor at this stage is vision-setter. He sets the tone and the theme of the church by his own speaking – what he tells, what he talks about, and what he shares.

It is very rare to find a person who is able to be skilled at all three of these levels. Generally, you'll be good at one. Either you're a total hands-on leader, or you like managing others and supporting them as they do the work, or you excel at having a vision for the church and delegating decisions.

Every level requires different skills. Frankly, I'm a terrible supervisor, so our church got stuck at the middle stage. I've discovered that I work best either doing all the work myself or being completely out of the picture and letting someone more skilled handle the work.

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When we were in the early stage, things were going great. I did it all! I personally set up and took down the church. For a while, I kept the stuff in my garage. I borrowed a pick-up truck every week and used it to take all our stuff to where we were having church, and then I set it all up, preached, took it all down and took it back home (And I know many of you are still in that stage, and I want to encourage you to stick to the vision God has placed in your heart).

Now that I am at the executive level, I know very little of what's going on in the church, in terms of detail. How do I keep in control? I don't – I'm not trying to control it! The executive pastor handles all the details, and I'm the leader of the church.

My point: there are changes to be made at every level in order to grow.

The key to growth in the single-celled church is the addition of new cells. If you have a church of 87 people, you probably have eight cells of approximately ten people each -- children, nursery, women's class, men's class, youth class, etc. The key is the addition of new cells. You begin to expand and expand. Add more services, more cells, more classes any way you can to begin to grow.

One of the key issues at the multiple-cell level is that the worship service must improve. In the single-cell church, people will put up with a lot of flack in the worship service. The singer doesn't have to sing on key, or a child can run down the aisle. We put up with a lot of things because it's "just family," that is, just us.

But once you start getting about 300 people in your church, you'll find that not everyone is coming to the church for the same reason. Most likely, people came to your church when it was smaller because of bonding.

But 300 is too many people to bond with – so suddenly the reasons that people come to your church, as you grow bigger, are different from the reasons they came when you only had 100 regular attenders. Before, they came because of friendships. Now they're coming to check you out: Is the worship good? Is the preaching good?

Which is why, at this stage, you need to consciously improve your worship service. It's got to be sharp, and it's got to be culturally relevant to the kind of people you aiming to reach.

At the third level, once you get above 400 and you're growing bigger and bigger, then the key issue becomes staff management. You need an assistant who is gifted in administration, so you can be free to focus on preaching. The larger the church gets, the more powerful the pulpit becomes for setting the direction of the church.

In order for your church to grow from single-cell to multiple-cell, or from multiple-cell to multiple-congregation, you must be willing to respond to the changing needs of your church by changing your own role.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rick".