

# Voices: Four rules for a better leadership transition

September 20, 2023

We live in a time of great uncertainty. The church faces many significant societal issues. One of those issues is the generational change of leadership.

Today, numerous books and dissertations are available on the idea of succession planning and what is needed to succeed as a new leader of any organization, from churches to businesses. This is an essential and prevalent conversation today.

Over the last three years, I have been a part of four significant shifts in organizational leadership, including two with myself as the leader. I want to share some of the experiences I have learned in my leadership journey.

## Four rules

There are four rules any new leader should implement when they come into a new organization, whether from an outside organization or a lateral move inside an organization.

1. **Do not make assumptions** about what is happening in the organization before talking to those involved in the day-to-day operations.

Too often, new leaders look at data instead of looking at individuals to gain an understanding of the situation. Instead of jumping to conclusions, take the time to talk to the people doing the work on the ground. It lets them know you care and want to work with them.

2. Every new leader has the right to bring their people into the

organization. However, these leaders must ensure they **do not create an “us-vs.-them”** leadership approach.

Too often, the new leader is quick to put greater trust and responsibility in the people they know instead of working with those already in the organization. While this is natural, at times it can undermine the people already in the positions.

But as the Bible says, “Where there is no guidance, a people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14).

This leads to No. 3, which relates significantly to No. 1.

### **3. Do your homework.**

One of the most common failures of leaders is they do not do their homework when it comes to assignments or challenges. This especially is true for organizations governed by policies and procedures.

As every Baptist church can attest, many communities have a say in what goes on in the church, and all of them must be heard. Therefore, the leader must do their homework before approaching a topic. If nothing else, it gives those under a new supervisor the sense the person cares enough to learn the systems in place.

**4. Do not move too fast.** If the organization is failing and quick changes need to be made, this might not be possible.

However, one thing I have learned in leadership positions is when those fast changes need to be made, it is essential to talk to all the stakeholders involved in the decision. This can be cumbersome, but it is essential to ensure everyone feels heard.

Additionally, there is a chance the stakeholders might have a better understanding of the issues than you do.

Most people involved in an organization can tell when a change needs to be made and have spent time thinking about the issue. A good leader will consider those ideas when creating a new direction for the organization. This is one area where I struggle. However, I also have learned it is essential for any idea to be successful.

## **Counsel to Christian leaders**

Every organization is going to have new leaders at some point. From my experiences as a leader and a follower, I've learned these four rules will go a long way to softening the impact on the organization.

More than anything, all new leaders in the church and outside of it need to remember the words found in 1 Peter 5:2-3: "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

*Joshua Longmire is assistant professor in leadership at Dallas Baptist University. The views expressed are those of the author.*