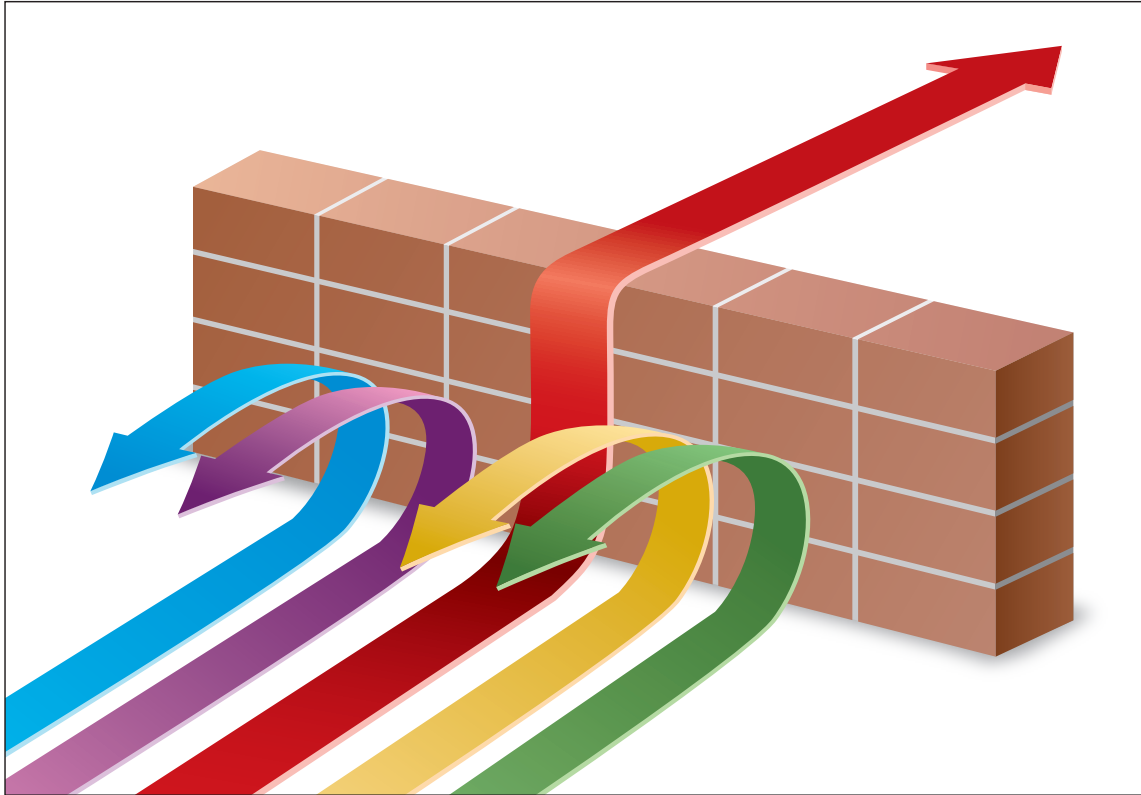**Influence**
MAGAZINE

AN EIGHT-WEEK STUDY FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

LEADERSHIP GROWTH:

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING
THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

STEPHEN BLANDINO

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Study **1**

Unclear Vision

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank the clarity of your church's or ministry's vision?

Insights and Ideas

Vision is essential to progress in any church or ministry. Without it, decisions are made, money is spent, and strategies are developed that thrust the church in opposing directions. Without vision, you'll wander to your next destination ... it just won't be a *preferred* destination.

The first inhibitor to making progress is unclear vision. You can't get "there" when you don't know what "there" looks like. And if you do know what it looks like, you won't reach it without casting a clear vision to the teams who can make it happen. Signs of unclear vision typically show up in three forms.

__Borrowed vision.__ This happens when a leader steals someone else's vision to make it his or her own. Something about the vision resonates with the leader's heart, or the vision just looks cool. This is an easy way to capture a vision, but when the going gets tough, the leader is likely to abandon the vision for the path of least resistance.

__Self-imposed vision.__ This comes into play when a leader dreams up his or her own vision without seeking God for *His* vision. This often happens when the leader is impatient, under pressure or in a season of transition.

__Fuzzy vision.__ This is the result of leaders not taking enough time to see the vision clearly. They might get a brief glimpse, but the vision lacks detail. The unintended consequence is that leaders jump sporadically from one vision to the next.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction."

To begin making progress, and to focus the energies of your team, vision must come into focus. This process always requires a season of prayer and reflective thinking.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What is our vision as a church?
2. Do any of the three signs of unclear vision describe our church's vision?
3. What steps do we need take to gain clarity of our vision in the next 30 days?

Apply

Progress can only happen when the vision is clear. If the vision for your church, or ministry, is unclear, take three steps.

__First, set aside concentrated time to pray.__ You're not searching for a self-imposed vision, but rather a God-inspired vision.

__Second, ask questions that will reveal the greatest needs in your community.__ God has placed you where you are for a reason. Gaining awareness of the city or community God has called you to serve may actually give you glimpses of God's vision for your church.

__Third, hone your insights into a clear and compelling vision statement.__ Depending on your situation, this process may need to happen with a variety of key staff members or leaders.

During this vision formation process, resist the temptation to view future vision through the lens of current programs. And if you lead a department of the church, let the church's vision guide your area of responsibility. Alignment is critical for the church to gain forward momentum.

Study **1**

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Unclear Vision

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank the clarity of your church's or ministry's vision?

Without vision, you'll wander to your next destination … it just won't be a preferred destination.

Three signs of unclear vision:

1. _____ **vision.** This form of vision appears when a leader steals someone else's vision to make it his or her own.

2. _____ **vision.** This form of vision comes into play when a leader dreams up his own vision without seeking God for *His* vision.

3. _____ **vision.** This final form of vision is the result of leaders not taking enough time to see the vision clearly.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction."

Apply

Progress can only happen when the vision is clear. If the vision for your church, or ministry, is unclear, take three steps.

1. Set aside concentrated time to pray.
2. Ask questions that will reveal the greatest needs in your community.
3. Hone your insights into a clear and compelling vision statement.

Irrelevant Strategies

Team Review: What progress have you made to clarify your church's or ministry's vision? What needs to happen to finalize this process?

Assess: What is one strategy that is helping you clearly achieve your church's vision?

Insights and Ideas

S ometimes a leader can have a clear vision but lack the strategies to achieve the vision. Other times, strategies do exist, but they are severely outdated or ineffective.

Irrelevant strategies is the second inhibitor to progress. These strategies were probably relevant at some point in your church's history, and likely carry some emotional attachment. The best step you can take is to conduct an audit to determine the overall effectiveness of each strategy. Four questions are critical in this process.

1. Is the strategy's original purpose being fulfilled? We usually start a strategy or program to meet a specific need. Unfortunately, we rarely evaluate the strategy against its intended purpose. If people show up, we consider it a success. But if the strategy isn't accomplishing its intended purpose, it may be doing nothing more than duplicating efforts or draining resources.

2. Does the strategy work with its intended audience? We live in a rapidly changing culture, which means what worked 10, five or even two years ago may no longer work. The real test is whether the strategy is relevant to the audience you are trying to reach today. Understanding your audience (not just who you're keeping, but who you're trying to reach) is imperative in this process.

3. Is the strategy sustainable in its current design? Some strategies require a great deal of time, energy, money or volunteers. This may work in a smaller environment, but as a church grows, these strategies may not be sustainable.

Simply put: You may be able to accomplish better results with less time, energy and money — and fewer people. Don't be afraid to overhaul or completely eliminate unsustainable strategies.

4. Does the strategy scale? Some strategies work great when your church has 100 people, but they no longer work (or work far less effectively) when your church grows to several hundred, or several thousand. There's nothing wrong with retiring strategies when your church outgrows them. That's actually a good thing. Embrace it.

Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Strategy evaluation needs to happen with the people who can provide the most insightful perspectives. Welcome their counsel and advice.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What are all of the strategies, ministries or programs your church currently offers?
2. With each of your strategies, can you answer an emphatic "yes" to the four questions above?
3. What changes could improve the effectiveness of each of your strategies?

Apply

Answering the four questions above for each of your strategies could take a considerable amount of time. Rather than tackling every strategy or program, start with three.

Once you identify the weaknesses with each strategy, develop a plan to make necessary changes and improvements. Be sure each strategy aligns with your vision and passes each of the four strategy questions.

Irrelevant Strategies

Assess: What is one strategy that is helping you clearly achieve your church's vision?

Sometimes a leader can have a clear vision but lack the strategies to achieve the vision. Other times, strategies do exist, but they are severely outdated or ineffective.

Four questions to evaluate strategies:

1. Is the strategy's original _____ being fulfilled?

2. Does the strategy work with its intended _____ ?

3. Is the strategy _____ in its current design?

4. Does the strategy _____ ?

Apply

Answering the four questions above for each of your strategies could take a considerable amount of time. Rather than tackling every strategy or program, start with three.

Once you identify the weaknesses with each strategy, develop a plan to make necessary changes and improvements. Be sure each strategy aligns with your vision and passes each of the four strategy questions.

Study

3

Ineffective Execution

Team Review: What changes to our strategies have we made, or are we making, to improve effectiveness and ensure alignment with our vision?

Assess: What is our biggest challenge when acting on new ideas?

Insights and Ideas

Taking action is critical to forward progress. You can have the most inspiring vision, a rock-solid plan, and an excited team, but if you can't execute, it's like having a party without anything to celebrate.

Execution is essential if you want to move beyond your current reality. Dealing with ineffective execution — the third inhibitor to progress — is imperative if you want to turn ideas and strategies into tangible results.

Throughout his letter, James continually emphasized the importance of taking action. James said, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (1:22). He further exhorted Christians with these words: "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (2:17), and "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (4:17).

Action is critical to our faith. In the same way, action is paramount to turning God-given vision into reality.

The key to effective execution is to move your strategies forward with a simple execution question: _Who_ will do _what_ by _when_?

The _who_ is responsible for driving the strategy to completion. Without a clear who, everybody's job becomes nobody's job. Somebody has to own it. The assigned owner should have the ability, resources and time to complete the task.

The _what_ is the specific goal you're trying to reach. It might be described as a strategy, action step, task or game plan. The _what_ tells the _who_ what to do. The what should be described as a S.M.A.R.T. goal: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

The _when_ provides a deadline for the _who_ to complete the _what_. The when brings accountability to the execution of a strategy. Without accountability, action is delayed, and excuses become the norm.

When you ask, "Who will do what by when?" you provide an actionable framework to deliver results. You move from talking to actually getting things done. And if somebody drops the ball, you have a way to identify performance gaps and ensure accountability for each member of the team.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why is execution so difficult for so many teams today?
2. Which of the three ingredients in the execution question (who, what, when) is most often missing when you're trying to make progress?
3. What would it look like to implement the execution question in your ministry?

Apply

Use the execution question — "Who will do what by when?" — to begin implementing action steps for your goals, strategies or ministry tasks. Begin with a single goal or strategy. State it clearly, and determine who is responsible for each step in the process. Assign a deadline for each step, and then monitor progress every seven days. This process will ensure continued forward movement, and when you encounter delays or setbacks, it will help you stay focused.

Study

3

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Ineffective Execution

Assess: What is our biggest challenge when acting on new ideas?

Execution is essential if you want to move beyond your current reality. Dealing with ineffective execution is imperative if you want to turn ideas and strategies into tangible results.

The key to effective execution is to move your strategies forward with a simple execution question:

_____ will do _____ by _____ ?

The _____ is responsible for driving the strategy to completion.

The _____ is the specific goal you're trying to reach.

The _____ provides a deadline for the _____ to complete the _____ .

Apply

Use the execution question — "Who will do what by when?" — to begin implementing action steps for your goals, strategies or ministry tasks. Begin with a single goal or strategy. State it clearly, and determine who is responsible for each step in the process. Assign a deadline for each step, and then monitor progress every seven days. This process will ensure continued forward movement, and when you encounter delays or setbacks, it will help you stay focused.

Study

4

Broken Systems

Team Review: What steps have you taken to implement the execution question: "Who will do what by when?"

Assess: What systems in your church are most important? Why?

Insights and Ideas

E very church has certain systems to help them deliver effective ministry and produce a healthier culture. You might have a system for visitor follow-up, hiring staff, preparing sermons, communicating to teams, planning events or a hundred other tasks.

When these systems are broken, everything feels harder, less efficient and more frustrating. Broken systems, the fourth inhibitor to progress, create organizational drag.

Healthy systems, on the other hand, relieve pressure and provide a smoother process that delivers consistent results. Author and pastor Nelson Searcy offers this memorable definition of a good SYSTEM: Saves You Stress, Time, Energy and Money.

No one wants to take on more stress, squander precious time, or invest more energy and money in cumbersome activities with marginal results. A good system will help you get there. Systems have a broad impact in your church, from staff, to volunteers, to guests. How?

Leaders create systems. Systems shape team member behaviors. Team member behaviors shape guest experiences. Guest experiences impact the growth of your church.

For example, let's say you create a visitor follow-up system. If the system includes lots of tedious steps, unnecessary paperwork or overbearing expectations, that system will negatively impact your team — both the staff and volunteers. When your team has to work in an inefficient or ineffective system, it will undoubtedly affect their attitudes. Poor attitudes will then produce poor guest experiences, which will impact the growth of the church. To develop a good system, ask yourself these systems-improving questions:

- What are we trying to accomplish, and what system is missing or broken that we need to accomplish this goal?
- Who should participate in this discussion?
- What are the most effective steps (from start to end) we need to include in the system to accomplish the task?
- How can we deliver these steps more efficiently and with the least amount of frustration (for the staff, volunteers and guests)?
- Who will create and implement each step in the system?
- How and when will we evaluate the new system to ensure it is saving us stress, time, energy and money?

Systems can sound boring and unspiritual, but they are critical if a church is to effectively steward its resources to accomplish its mission.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What systems are broken in our church, and which system should we address first?
2. What stress, frustrations or inefficiencies is this broken system causing for our staff, volunteers or guests?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how efficient is this system in its use of time, energy and money?

Apply

Identify a system in your church that needs immediate attention. Then, answer the six systems-improving questions so that the system can operate with a high level of effectiveness and efficiency. While it may take several weeks, or even months, continue this process until you've addressed every broken system in your church.

Study

4

Broken Systems

Assess: What systems in your church are most important? Why?

Every church has certain systems to help them deliver effective ministry and produce a healthier culture. When these systems are broken, everything feels harder, less efficient and more frustrating.

A good SYSTEM will:

S _____

Y _____

S _____

T _____

E _____

M _____

To develop a good system, ask these systems-improving questions:
- What are we trying to _____, and what system is _____ or _____ that we need to accomplish this goal?
- Who should _____ in this discussion?
- What are the most effective _____ (from start to end) we need to include in the system to accomplish the task?
- How can we deliver these steps more _____ and with the least amount of frustration (for the staff, volunteers, and guests)?
- Who will _____ and _____ each step in the system?
- _____ and _____ will we evaluate the new system to ensure it is saving us stress, time, energy and money?

Apply

Identify a system in your church that needs immediate attention. Then, answer the six systems-improving questions so that the system can operate with a high level of effectiveness and efficiency. While it may take several weeks, or even months, continue this process until you've addressed every broken system in your church.

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Stifled Innovation

Team Review: Which system are you working on to improve its effectiveness and efficiency? What next step do you need to take in this process?

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how welcome is innovative thinking in your church?

Insights and Ideas

Sir Ken Robinson, an international leader in the development of education, creativity and innovation, once said, "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original."

Interestingly, there are two opposing forces at work in this statement: a desire for originality and an assurance that we won't fail. In other words, we want safe innovation.

Innovation means doing something new, creative or original, which implies that innovation comes with risk. Therefore, safe innovation doesn't exist. To innovate requires a willingness to change and a posture that's OK with getting it wrong. That's where churches stumble. If we're scared of failure, we won't make changes. If we don't make changes, we'll never innovate the future.

Stifled innovation is the fifth inhibitor to progress. It keeps churches from moving forward with the mission God entrusts. There are two primary ways churches stifle innovation.

The first is valuing methods over mission. If leaders aren't careful, they'll fall in love with a method more than the mission. When you love a method, ministry or strategy, you tend to keep doing more of it, even when it no longer works. But if you never update the ministry, or you never improve the strategy, or you never innovate new methodologies, eventually you'll stop fulfilling your mission.

The second is silencing innovative people. Some people are naturally wired to dream and create. Others are naturally wired to manage and administrate. Churches need both.

The managers and administrators help the church implement systems (which we discussed in our last lesson). Dreamers and creators help the church stay relevant and forward-focused. When the managers silence the dreamers, the dreamers find a new place to dream. Churches must develop a healthy tension between systems in the present and innovation for the future.

God is the Creator, and He created us in His image. He created us to create. When we stifle innovation in our churches, we inhibit not only the forward mission of the Church, but we inhibit the creative image God imprinted on each one of us.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How prone is your church to gravitating toward "safe innovation"?
2. Is your church more inclined to value its methods or its mission? Why?
3. What needs more attention at this season in the life of your church: systems or innovation? How can you keep these in balance in the future?

Apply

Have an open and honest conversation among your team about how to cultivate a healthier culture of innovation.

Start with three questions: 1. What's our most common response to new ideas, and why? 2. What ground rules should we establish to ensure new ideas gain a fair hearing? 3. How should we reward innovation?

Next, identify one area of the church that needs fresh innovation, and begin dreaming as a team about the possibilities.

Study **5**

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Stifled Innovation

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how welcome is innovative thinking in your church?

Innovation means doing something new, creative or original, which implies that innovation comes with risk.

Two primary ways churches stifle innovation:

1. Valuing _____ over _____ .

2. Silencing innovative _____ .

The managers and administrators help the church _____

_____ . Dreamers and creators help the church stay _____

and _____ .

Apply

Have an open and honest conversation among your team about how to cultivate a healthier culture of innovation.

Start with three questions: 1. What's our most common response to new ideas, and why? 2. What ground rules should we establish to ensure new ideas gain a fair hearing? 3. How should we reward innovation?

Next, identify one area of the church that needs fresh innovation, and begin dreaming as a team about the possibilities.

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS
Disengaged Teams

Team Review: What changes have you made to cultivate a more innovative culture within your team?

Assess: What do you think it would look like for your team to fully engage?

Insights and Ideas

B uilding a fully engaged team is essential to the long-term health of the church, and it's critical to progress.

In his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, author and consultant Patrick Lencioni describes this dynamic. The five dysfunctions include:

Absence of _trust_. When trust is missing, major cracks exist in the foundation of team relationships and engagement. Building and restoring trust will require considerable face-to-face time, dialogue and understanding one another's strengths and weaknesses.

Fear of _conflict_. When we fear conflict, we don't voice our ideas or insights, ultimately leading to little buy-in to the church's direction. Teams must be willing, and have permission, to engage in healthy conflict by challenging ideas and seeking the best solutions. This process requires an understanding of conflict styles as well as clear ground rules for engaging in conflict.

Lack of _commitment_. When teams can engage in healthy conflict, they will eventually identify and commit to a specific strategy. The entire team must adopt a disagree-and-commit mentality. This allows team members to have initial disagreements in the process of healthy conflict, but then commit to align fully regardless of those initial disagreements.

Avoidance of _accountability_. People don't want to be held accountable to strategies they don't believe in. That's why it's important for teams to engage in healthy conflict, so they can ultimately achieve broad-based commitment to the church's direction. Once a team commits to a strategy, it will provide a clear goal to which it can hold everyone accountable. It's important to communicate the goal, next steps, deadlines and expected behaviors.

Inattention to _results_. When team members can avoid accountability, the natural outcome is inattention to results. However, with buy-in and commitment, accountability is the natural next step, thus providing a way to measure results and progress with each team member. Reward team members based on the team's goals and overall success.

Each dysfunction builds on another. When team members are void of trust — lacking vulnerability with one another — they will fear conflict. This fear of conflict keeps the team from engaging in the healthy debate of ideas. As a result, because no one voices (or hears) opinions, team members lack commitment to proposed ideas or solutions. This lack of buy-in causes the team to avoid accountability. In the end, there's an inattention to results. In other words, nothing gets done because the team has disengaged.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How would you describe the trust level within your team right now? Has trust been violated in any way? If so, what needs to happen to restore trust?
2. Which of the five dysfunctions does your team struggle with the most? Why?
3. What steps should your team take to improve health and cultivate greater engagement?

Apply

Develop a plan to overcome the five dysfunctions of a team. You might choose to read Lencioni's book together, and then discuss healthy next steps. You can have the greatest strategies in the world, but with a disengaged team, you'll never realize the progress that is possible.

Study **6**

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Disengaged Teams

Assess: What do you think it would look like for your team to fully engage?

Building a fully engaged team is essential to the long-term health of the church, and it's critical to progress. In his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,* author and consultant Patrick Lencioni describes this dynamic.

The five dysfunctions include:

1. **Absence of** _____ .

2. **Fear of** _____ .

3. **Lack of** _____ .

4. **Avoidance of** _____ .

5. **Inattention to** _____ .

Apply

Develop a plan to overcome the five dysfunctions of a team. You might choose to read Lencioni's book together, and then discuss healthy next steps. You can have the greatest strategies in the world, but with a disengaged team, you'll never realize the progress that is possible.

Unnecessary Bureaucracy

Team Review: What practical steps are you taking to improve the engagement level of your team?

Assess: What comes to mind when you hear the word "bureaucracy"?

Insights and Ideas

E very program, service or strategy begins as a solution to a problem. But, over time, it's easy to let the preservation of the program circumvent the reason the program started in the first place. When this happens, bureaucracy hijacks the keys to progress.

Management legend Peter Drucker made an astute observation about this deadly temptation in nonprofits. He writes: "Nonprofits are prone to become inward-looking. People are so convinced that they are doing the right thing, and are so committed to their cause, that they see the institution as an end in itself. But that's a bureaucracy. Soon people in the organization no longer ask: Does it service our mission? They ask: Does it fit our rules? And that not only inhibits performance, it destroys vision and dedication."

So, how do you keep bureaucracy and self-preservation from derailing your church and inhibiting progress? Here are three steps to consider.

Keep the <u>rulebook</u> slim, and let <u>trust</u> win the day. Some people love policies more than they love people. Learn to deal with the person who messed up rather than penalizing everybody else with policies that act like a set of handcuffs. When you insist on integrity and willingly trust people, you can keep the rulebook slim.

Make processes <u>simple</u>. When processes are cumbersome and complicated, frustration quickly builds. Learn to simplify your process by reducing paperwork, changing idea-killing cultures and eliminating steps that don't reflect common sense. Systems, processes and policies should serve people, not the other way around. Bureaucracy will grow roots in your church when people are bound to progress-inhibiting policies.

Don't <u>over-manage</u> your team. This is tough if you're a perfectionist. But, if you constantly over-manage the people you lead, you'll drive your best talent out of the organization. Hire competent staff, provide them with coaching and training, release them to be self-directed learners, set clear expectations, and equip and empower them with the tools, resources and authority they need to succeed.

Bureaucracy is almost always a sign of impending <u>decline</u> or even <u>death</u>. Work hard to develop a <u>flexible</u>, <u>empowering</u> and <u>life-giving</u> culture.

Reflect and Discuss

1. In what ways are we allowing bureaucracy to creep into our culture?
2. In what areas have we overcomplicated processes, systems or policies?
3. What would it look like to create a more empowering culture?

Apply

Identify the areas of your church where bureaucracy has a license to rule.

To improve that area of ministry, ask yourself three questions: 1. Which systems, processes or policies in this ministry should we streamline or change? 2. How can we introduce the concept of healthy conflict to discover new ideas and bring needed improvement? 3. What can we do to empower more people to lead and serve?

Churches will naturally gravitate toward bureaucracy. As leaders, it's critical that we create and cultivate a healthy culture that doesn't inhibit progress.

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS
Unnecessary Bureaucracy

Assess: What comes to mind when you hear the word "bureaucracy"?

How do you keep bureaucracy and self-preservation from derailing your church and inhibiting progress? Here are three steps to consider.

1. Keep the _____ slim and let _____ win the day.

2. Make processes _____ .

3. Don't _____ your team.

Bureaucracy is almost always a sign of impending _____ or even _____. Work hard to develop a _____, _____ and _____ culture.

Apply

Identify the areas of your church where bureaucracy has a license to rule.

To improve that area of ministry, ask yourself three questions: 1. Which systems, processes or policies in this ministry should we streamline or change? 2. How can we introduce the concept of healthy conflict to discover new ideas and bring needed improvement? 3. What can we do to empower more people to lead and serve?

Churches will naturally gravitate toward bureaucracy. As leaders, it's critical that we create and cultivate a healthy culture that doesn't inhibit progress.

Widespread Disunity

Team Review: What steps have you taken to eliminate any signs of bureaucracy in your church?

Assess: Why is disunity so destructive in a church or on a team?

Insights and Ideas

N othing will inhibit progress like disunity. In fact, if left unchecked, disunity will completely destroy families, teams and even an entire church.

The apostle Paul exhorted the church in Ephesus with these words: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2–3).

Leaders carry the greatest responsibility for protecting unity in the church. Leaders set the tone, model the behavior, and establish the systems and norms that define what is and is not acceptable. Protecting unity in the church begins by identifying the most common causes of disunity.

Unclear vision. When the vision isn't clear, people create their own. Churches can't move in six different directions. There must be one unifying vision that aligns people, energy and resources for maximum impact.

Leading change unwisely. Sometimes we are so anxious to run toward the vision that we make abrupt, disruptive and unwise changes. We don't take the necessary time to listen, welcome input and cultivate buy-in. Other times, we present change in a demanding tone that leaves people feeling ignored, disrespected or downright angry. When this happens, our change efforts turn into disruptive disunity.

Gossip. Proverbs 16:28 says, "A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends."

Leaders are the greatest influence in any culture; therefore, leaders must model trustworthy behavior that is void of gossip, slander or any kind of divisive talk. Furthermore, leaders must address gossip, especially when it's dividing the church.

Poor communication. Proverbs 18:2 says, "Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions."

Good communication is a two-way street. When communication is lopsided or unclear, people feel confused and unheard. The inevitable result is disunity.

Disloyalty. Pastor Andy Stanley once said, "Loyalty publicly earns leverage privately."

In other words, when team members are loyal to their leaders in public settings, their leaders are more likely to listen to their ideas and differences of opinion. It's OK to have a different point of view, but it's not OK to let those differences drive a wedge between leaders, team members or the congregation.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Where is our church most vulnerable to disunity?
2. How can our church leaders better model a spirit of unity and protect the unity of the church?
3. Which of the five common causes of disunity is our team's or church's biggest challenge? What steps can you take to change this?

Apply

One of the greatest ways to cultivate unity as a team is to pray together. Spend some time praying with each other and for each other. Then, spend time in a relaxed environment, building closer friendships. Commit to one another, not to gossip. Instead, exhibit behavior that unifies the team and the church.

8 KEYS TO DEFEATING THE INHIBITORS TO PROGRESS

Widespread Disunity

Assess: Why is disunity so destructive in a church or on a team?

Nothing will inhibit progress like disunity. If left unchecked, disunity will completely destroy _____ , _____ and even an entire _____ .

The apostle Paul exhorted the church in Ephesus with these words: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2–3).

Protecting unity in the church begins by identifying the most common causes of it.

  1. Unclear _____ .

  2. Leading _____ unwisely.

  3. _____ .

  4. Poor _____ .

  5. _____ .

Andy Stanley said, "Loyalty publicly earns leverage privately." In other words, when team members are loyal to their leaders in public settings, their leaders are more likely to listen to their ideas and differences of opinion.

Apply

One of the greatest ways to cultivate unity as a team is to pray together. Spend some time praying with each other and for each other. Then, spend time in a relaxed environment, building closer friendships. Commit to one another, not to gossip. Instead, exhibit behavior that unifies the team and the church.