

Many churches would like to have structured leadership training programs. Here are some recommendations from LEADERSHIP readers on how to get started.

TRAINING VOLUNTEERS:

A LEADERSHIP SURVEY

TERRY C. MUCK

Church members really don't know how to be good church members. They gripe when they should pray. They criticize when they should learn. They nit-pick everything to death. I wish someone would write a training manual on how to be a good church member."

So wrote one of the 172 respondents to a LEADERSHIP reader survey on training lay leadership. Many expressed similar frustrations. Almost 70 percent said they see a need for a structured training program but don't have one because they don't have the time, feel unqualified to train, or simply don't know how to go about it.

The frustration is particularly acute, because many expressed admiration for training programs run by other churches or secular organizations. One pastor wrote: "I know good training works. A cable television company conducted an eight-week course for some of our members on how to operate television equipment and script a program. Most of the people trained are still producing programs. And they learned it all by meeting once a week for two hours."

Many respondents sounded this note. Most envied the 30 percent who said they had structured training in their churches. "I wish churches with good training programs would tell us how to do it," said a southern Ohio pastor.

In answer to that request, here are the six most frequent recommendations from church leaders who are successfully training or being trained. They won't solve your training problem overnight, or even in a year. But they may spark your thinking and get you on the right track.

Recognize that Training Is Hard Work

Those who do have training programs don't sugar-coat what's required: plenty of time, hard work, and patience.

When asked, "What is the single most difficult obstacle you've encountered in your training program?" the most frequent response was "not enough time."

Successful trainers recognize that fully training

people takes many hours spread over a long period. Robert Coleman, professor of evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary and author of *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, noted in a recent interview that "life-changing relationships don't take place in the classroom, though they may begin there. To get next to someone, I have to find a more relaxed setting."

A survey respondent agreed: "Small groups have had a good effect on my life, but I've found no real leadership training takes place in them. It's great fun to get close to other group members, but the impartation of vision takes one-on-one contact."

The prospect of many hours of one-on-one time with trainees makes many trainers reluctant even to begin. A solution to that, say our readers, is to go into the training process expecting a long haul:

"For three years before my coming, this congregation had 'grown' from 250 to 110. The leaders of the congregation had escaped to better churches. Those few leaders who remained had tucked into a tight camp of circled wagons. It has taken two long, hard years of loving and affirming to gain an elementary level of trust with them. But slowly and surely, good things are starting to emerge."

"Slowly and surely" could be the theme song of leadership training. It's reminiscent of an old Peanuts cartoon strip that shows Woodstock and Snoopy on the top of his doghouse. Snoopy is saying, "What are you doing here? You're supposed to be out somewhere sitting on a branch chirping. That's your job. People expect to hear birds chirping when they wake up in the morning."

So Woodstock goes off to the top of a shrub and belts out one lonely "Chirp!" Then he comes back.

Snoopy responds: "You only chirped once. You can't brighten someone's day with one chirp!" So Woodstock heads back to the shrub and belts out about six more "Chirps!"

When Woodstock returns, Snoopy smiles and says, "There, now! Didn't that give you a feeling of real satisfaction? The bad news is you're supposed to do that every morning for the rest of your life!" At which Woodstock faints and falls off the doghouse.

It takes time to impart a vision that is really a part

of yourself. There's no short cut to implanting within another person the message that now is the time to do the work of the kingdom. In the end, people are not attracted by a system but by a teacher who personifies a cause and is willing to sacrifice his self-interest.

Be Sensitive to Training Resistance

The second most frequently voiced obstacle mentioned in our survey was lack of volunteer motivation.

However, is that the real trouble? Sometimes what appears to be resistance is nothing more than the trainees' inability to express themselves.

Management researcher Craig Rice has found that creative people often present their ideas poorly, assuming that their intrinsic merit will be instantly recognized. The problem is exacerbated when the trainer of a group is himself a good communicator and takes those skills for granted. When pastors are trainers, they often assume quiet or verbally immature trainees aren't trying, when in fact they may be among the most creative in the group.

Overcoming this problem takes patient probing. People bottle up their creativity for many reasons. In a recent address, University of Chicago professor Martin Marty suggested these: guilt, unconfessed sin, doubt, fear, pride, and not knowing God's will. The pastoral response is to work through these roadblocks and free people to be creative producers.

Many lay leaders do resist training, however. One survey respondent noted his biggest problem was "the deacons' unwillingness to be teachable. My deacons would rather fight with each other than learn to work together. They would rather hide behind a façade of spirituality."

Many others resist training because the work required seems undemanding or because they think common sense, maturity, and life experience are all a volunteer needs. One pastor wrote that his elders "look upon training as an 'Are you kidding?' proposition. Filling the position is the important thing."

Our respondents made it pretty clear that giving up is not the proper response to training resistance. One recommended re-evaluating teaching style, tak-

ing to heart the old adage that "to know how to suggest is the art of teaching."

Another suggested that tracing the root of resistance helps deal with it: "I always ask four questions of those in my training group:

"Why are you willing to serve the church in this way?" The answer indicates the trainee's purity of motive.

"What improvement would you have made in the last job you did for the church?" This answer will indicate creativity.

"What did you like most about the last job you did for the church and why?" The reasons are more important than the answer.

"Describe the best person who worked for or with you." This will show ability to understand and relate to people.

"After getting the answers to these questions, I have a better idea of how and why this person will resist training programs."

Also keep in mind that we'll never overcome some resistance. In that case, we must be willing to work with many trainees and trust the percentages to produce a few very good ones. One pastor wrote, "The biggest problem is finding people who are excited about learning leadership and getting them to desire the necessary training. The only way it's worked for me is to continually try to do it, and when you hit on someone who is committed, go with it."

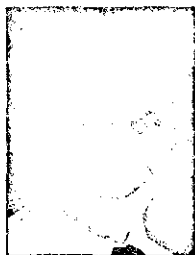
Finally, persistence pays off. "Many of our men expressed hesitation about a written test over material we covered in our deacons' training class. One of the most reluctant was a seventy-two-year-old, still very alert and energetic but who had not taken a written test since college days. I spent ten or twelve hours with him privately reviewing the material. He did well on the test and has since said he is a better servant of the Lord because of the experience. Most of the other men said similar things."

Understand Lay Inferiority

One of the biggest hurdles in training lay leaders is an ingrained feeling of inferiority among laymen. An Oregon pastor writes, "Laymen have lived for years under the teaching that the real work of the church is done by the professional clergy; they do the ministry while the laity sits and watches. There's a terrible lay inferiority complex."

This feeling has created a mystique around church work so that laymen accomplished in other areas of life are sometimes reluctant to transfer those skills to the church setting. Douglas Johnson in his book, *The Care and Feeding of Volunteers*, makes this observation:

"Volunteers often feel inadequate to deal with church situations. Even though they may be experienced teachers, business persons, or technicians in



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the non-church world, they know that in the church things are done differently. How differently and why are two unknown quantities for most volunteers. They need all the support and briefing about

church work in general and a particular assignment as available."

To cope with these reluctant feelings, our respondents recommended majoring on in-service training,

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LAY LEADERSHIP TRAINING RESOURCES, METHODS, AND PROBLEMS

On our survey to LEADERSHIP readers we asked, "Would you please list resource books, other than the Bible, you have used in your training?" Of forty-eight different books, the following were mentioned most frequently:

1. Getz, Gene. *The Measure of a Man*. Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1974.
2. Coleman, Robert. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1978.
3. Ortiz, Juan Carlos. *Disciple*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation, 1975.
4. Dresselhaus, Richard. *The Deacon and His Ministry*. Springfield, Mo.: Gospel, 1977.
5. Dayton, Ed, and Ted Engstrom. *Strategy for Living*. Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1976.
6. Perry, Floyd. *Getting the Church on Target*. Chicago: Moody, 1977.
7. Swindoll, Charles. *Hand Me Another Brick*. Nashville: Nelson, 1978.
8. Stedman, Ray. *Authentic Christianity*. Waco, Texas: Word, 1975.
9. Richards, Lawrence, and Clyde Hoeldtke. *A*

Theology of Church Leadership. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980.

We also asked, "What format have you used in your training programs?"

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|---------------------|-----|
| 1. Discussion | 97% |
| 2. Lecture | 80% |
| 3. Bible study | 78% |
| 4. Cassettes | 53% |
| 5. Assigned reading | 44% |
| 6. Retreat | 44% |
| 7. Video | 33% |

In response to the question "What obstacles have you encountered in establishing training programs?" the five most common difficulties were:

1. Time
2. Lay motivation
3. Lack of good training materials
4. Leader's lack of training skill
5. Frequent leadership turnover

easing workers into positions of responsibility:

"At our church, lay leader training is primarily in-service training. My particular benefit from lay leader training has been the development of confidence and sense of self-worth."

A pastor says: "I find more and more that once laymen reach an elementary level of spiritual maturity, the best training is doing the ministry. They need to be given courage and confidence they can do it."

Turning a segment of ministry over to laymen, however, takes a certain amount of pastoral security. It unleashes a tremendous force in the church, and a pastor's initial reaction might be to feel threatened. As one reader observed, "A neighboring pastor who got his lay people really activated in positions of leadership found that they used their new power to run him out."

An unusual occurrence, but it does point up a danger. Spiritually immature Christians may take advantage of a pastor willing to share his weaknesses. But we're called not to serve our self-interested leadership but a God who commands us to prepare men and women to do ministry.

Tailor Training Programs

One message came through loud and clear in the surveys: training programs must be tailored to fit the unique needs of each church:

- "In twelve years of ministry, I've found that very few written training materials fit perfectly in any situation. Each local church must modify the material to fit its needs—or develop its own style of leadership training."

- "'Canned' programs save time but rarely meet the unique needs of each congregation."

Volunteers come to training sessions with their own qualities and attitudes. Like snowflakes, no two are the same. And they may change as the training program progresses. Robert Coleman suggests they're like a family: "There are basic things children need to learn, but the sequence has to be geared to the individuality of each person."

Each church has its personality also, and pastors were quick to point out these differences on their surveys:

- "Much recent training material assumes that lay

leaders are readers and react well to the written word. Few lay leaders in our church do. However, they do respond well to workshops and hands-on experiences. So that's what we do."

- "My congregation is a business-executive group who face international business problems daily. If I don't challenge them, they'll lose interest very quickly."

- "Materials I've seen assume that your church has members who exercise leadership in secular fields. I'm in a black church where that's not necessarily true. I need materials based on nonhierarchical leadership models."

There's no hard-and-fast content to a training program. It can include private study or group lectures. It can be long or short. It can take place at home, in the parsonage, or at church. The secret is to fit the program to the people.

Our readers suggested three ways to tailor training:

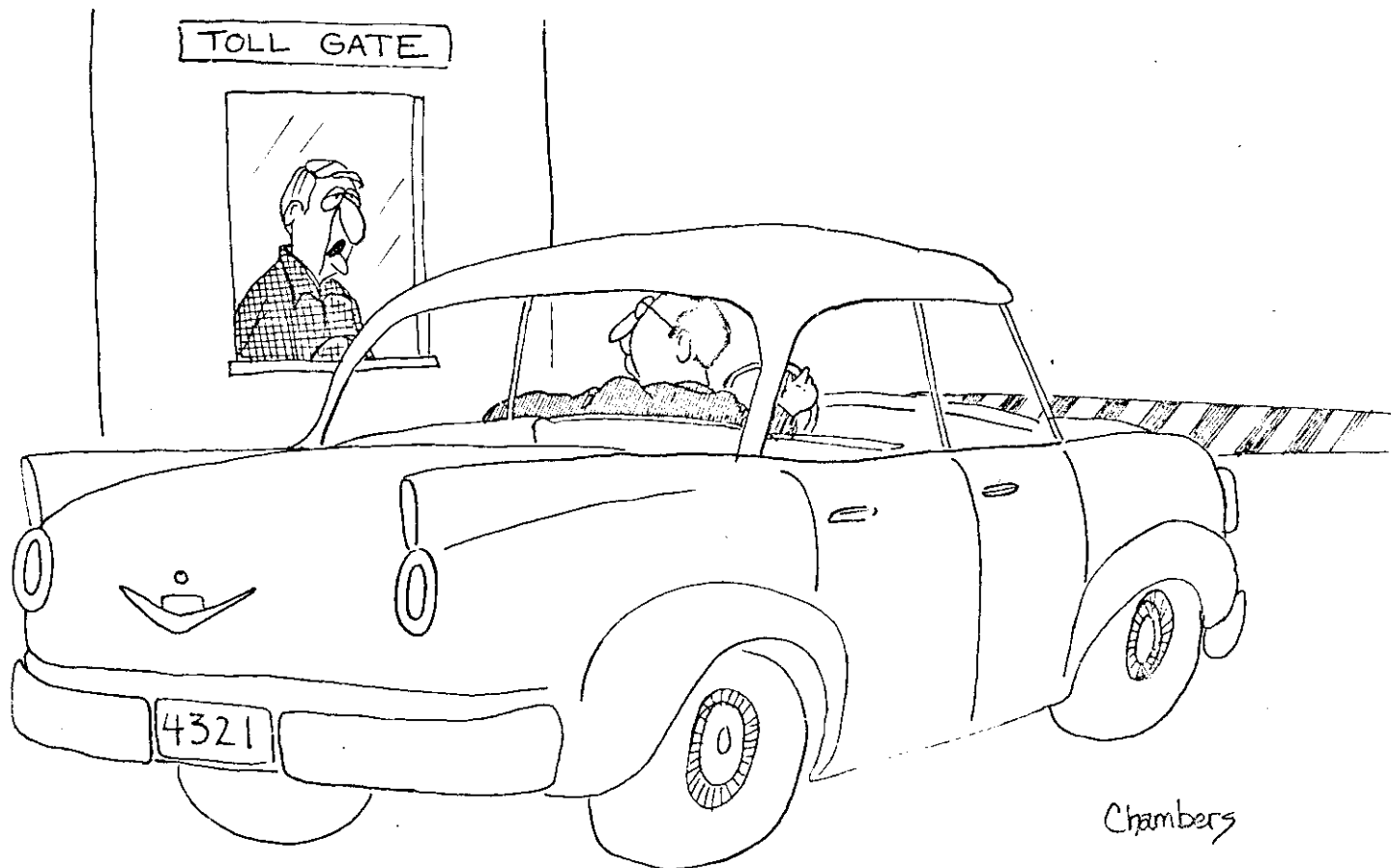
1. *Know your ultimate purpose before starting training.*

"'Canned' programs save time but rarely meet the unique needs of each congregation."

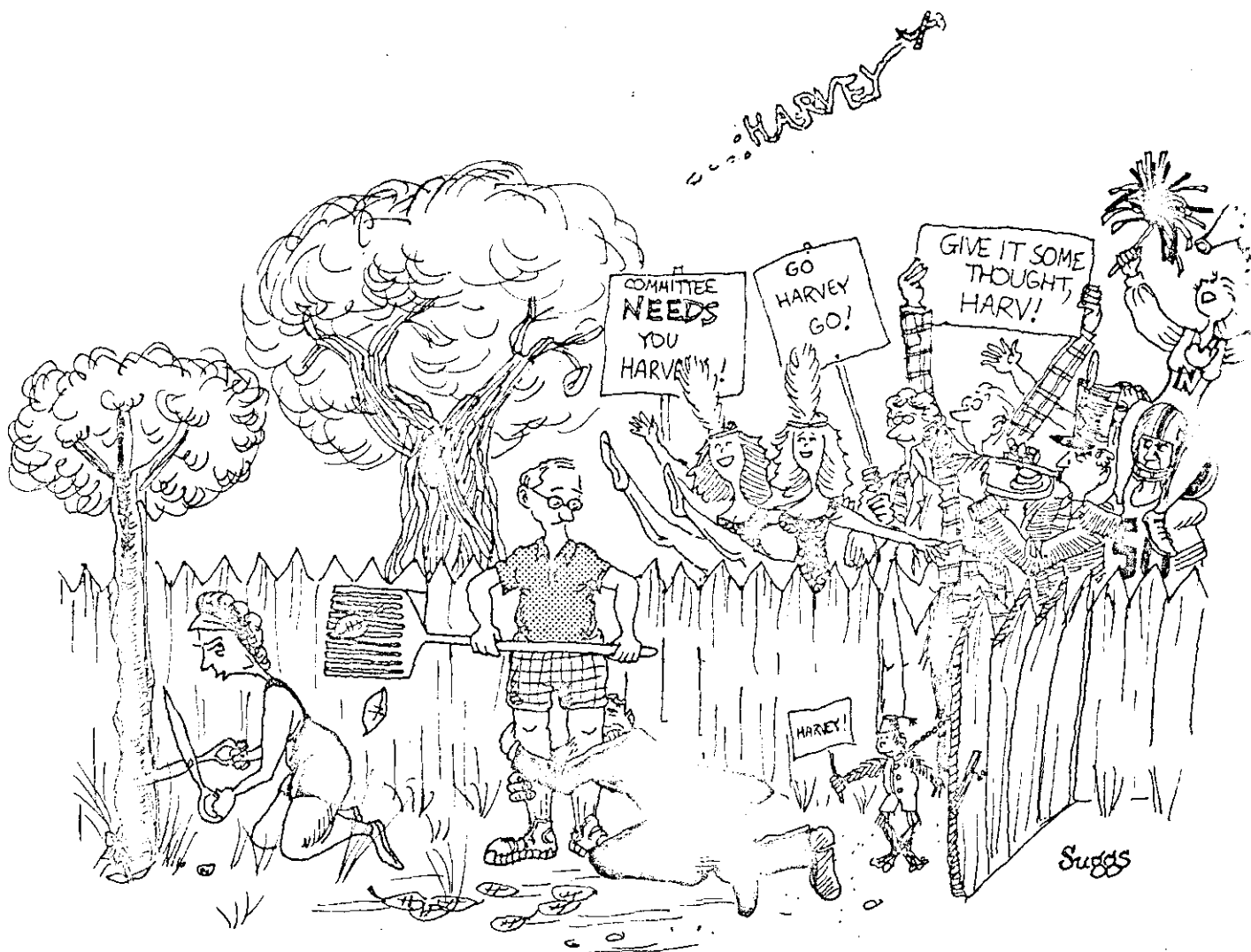
Don't tell everyone entering the program that they will become department heads. Screen trainees carefully, trying to anticipate where they'll fit in best. "My fear is that a person passing through a formal training program will assume it qualifies him for leadership. Not all volunteer training is leadership training."

2. *Determine the right time for training.* Nothing is quite as self-defeating as getting a group of volunteers trained and excited . . . and then not using them. And in other situations, little training is needed: "Most of our men are already highly qualified and self-starters. Therefore formal training is not a great priority right now."

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"I'm sorry, Reverend, but we do not give clergy discounts on the Indiana Toll Road."



"For goodness sake, Harvey, are they still after you to join that committee?"

* *

3. *Find the right pace.* Don't lock yourself into firm deadlines for completion. Make a natural transition from training classes to on-the-job training. Be willing to slow down and go more deeply into material of particular interest. Rushing trainees creates anxiety.

Challenge Volunteers

People who decide to give their time are not happy

wasting it once they arrive. In fact, fully challenging those who volunteer leads to an increase in the number of volunteers, not a decrease.

In our survey, the most frequently suggested way to challenge volunteers was to make sure they saw their task as part of the larger ministry of the church.

One person quoted an article he had read recently: "There is a great difference between being a cutter of stones and a builder of cathedrals, but it is only in vision and perspective. We must instill the larger vi-

sion of the church in our volunteers."

Another noted, "I feel the main problem faced by many churches is that lay leaders are not taught the real purpose of their position."

Another need strongly communicated by readers was observance of simple management practice: describe the job in detail, outline what's expected of each volunteer, and then hold each one accountable for completing the task. This last step in itself makes volunteers view their tasks as important.

Finally, challenging volunteers doesn't mean obfuscating the task. The job should be described in simple and manageable terms. One survey respondent related the following story:

Rufus Jones, for many years a professor of philosophy at Haverford College, and a man of deep spiritual commitment, returned home after studying in Europe and attended the local Quaker meeting. When he felt moved by the Spirit to speak, Jones shared what was a very erudite discourse. When he finished, there was a silence, and then an elderly lady commented, "I know in the Bible Jesus tells us to feed his sheep. He even tells us to feed his lambs." She paused, "But nowhere can I recall that he tells us to feed his giraffes."

An occasional sin of the clergy is to talk at a level only a seminary graduate can understand. Some

things require technical or scholarly language, but infatuation with our own words and ideas confuses and frustrates volunteers.

Recognize the Limitations of Training

Even the most successful and optimistic of the survey respondents warned against hoping for too much. A Chinese proverb warns: "Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself."

When we asked for a description of a particularly outstanding training experience, one man wrote, "I can't say we've had any outstanding sessions—nor any real duds." Probably that's a fairly common experience with training. It happens without much drama.

It may even be that training in your church is not necessary at this time. One realistic pastor wrote: "In proposing training of our office bearers, I find it difficult to push simply because I do not have a good program that I am convinced will prove of value to them. It's hard to ask them to give up another evening away from their families for something that may not be beneficial."

Motivation on the part of potential trainees is often a limitation. Many of the best potential church leaders become so involved with nonchurch careers they

BELAYING—A MODEL FOR MINISTRY

Ten of us, all beginners, were climbing White Gap Mountain in North Carolina. We were using ropes in a system called belaying. I served as belayer, which means that I controlled the safety rope for the person climbing the mountain. My job was to take up slack as each person climbed up to me and to hold the rope if he or she should fall on the way. It was very hard work.

One climber was somewhat overweight and fell several times. Each time, I was able to break her fall, but it caused great pain; the belaying rope cut into my waist with the tension of her weight on it. The whole procedure became for me a parable of my ministry.

I wasn't climbing the mountain, she was. I was there to support her, and I was thoroughly bound to her, but it was she who had to do the climbing. Each time she reached a difficult spot, I knew she would fall, and I also knew her fall would cause me pain. I was tempted at times to grab the rope and pull her

over the difficult parts. It would have been a lot easier on me.

But I realized—thanks to the Holy Spirit—that if I pulled her over the difficult part each time, it would really have hurt her. She would have missed learning what it means to climb the mountain. Sure, I would have been her savior—but only for this time. There are other mountains she will have to climb, and I will not always be there to pull her over the rough spots. She had to do it mainly on her own. Well, after much pain and struggle, she made it to the top. When she reached me, she said, "I made it—I didn't think I'd ever get here."

That was a great moment for both of us; for me because I knew that she had climbed the mountain *on her own*. I had done a good job of belaying for her. I had encouraged her and kept her from getting hurt. That was my job. But *she* had climbed the mountain.

—as told to Kenneth McGuire, associate director,
Paulist Institute for Religious Research

God can use even failure to accomplish his purposes.

don't prioritize for church involvement. Often those who do have time don't have the skills.

The secret to handling this, though, is perception. God can use even failure to accomplish his purposes.

J. Richard Peck, in an article "A Little Failure Goes a Long Way," tells this story:

"Cecil Lampert was my inspiration. He was the poorest runner on the cross-country team. But he always kept me going. Cecil consisted of some wired-together skin and bones, and he huffed along as if each step would be his last. But he never quit.

"As I suffered along the miles, it wasn't the opposition ahead nor the team members beside me that kept my legs moving. It was an occasional backward glance at Cecil, who kept plodding on.

"He always sounded exhausted, and by contrast I felt fairly zippy. What's more, my ego just wouldn't permit me to finish behind generally-last-place Cecil.

"I never thanked my skinny friend for his inspiration, but in truth I would have quit several races if it had not been for his dogging presence."

What we need in the ministry is a few more Cecils to keep us going. We too seldom hear about pastors who fail but keep huffing along.

Jesus certainly recognized this principle. He selected ordinary men to be his disciples. And they made plenty of mistakes. But they ended up spreading the gospel of Christ across the breadth of the known world. ■

What Does "No" Mean?

One of the most common frustrations encountered by the person seeking to enlist volunteers is to receive what appears to be a categorical "No!" in response to a request for help. There are at least five productive responses to that two-letter word.

First, the person really may be saying, "No, not now." Therefore, one response is to affirm the negative response and the individual's right to say no and to come back another time.

Second, some people really mean "Who? Me? I could never do that!" Therefore a useful response may be to offer a confidence-building alternative role such as assistant teacher or vice-chairperson or some other introductory beginning point.

Third, some people are not interested in long-term or open-ended commitments; therefore, renegotiate the original request by building in a specific terminal date.

Fourth, many people are far more willing to volunteer as part of a team than to accept total responsibility. Therefore, consider enlisting two or three or four persons to team-teach that high school Sunday school class or two persons to serve as co-presidents of that organization or seven or eight adults to serve as a team of counselors with that youth group.

Finally, many positions, tasks, and responsibilities appear to be far more complicated and demanding to the potential volunteer than they do to the person seeking volunteers.

Therefore it often is wise to recruit several persons for a training experience or a workshop or a series of instructional classes. Later, from among those persons who completed the training programs, the volunteers can be found for that particular program.

This is an especially useful approach in those congregations that are seeking volunteers from that huge number of energetic, committed, highly educated, enthusiastic, inexperienced, eager, active and creative adults born during the late 1940s and the 1950s. Many of these young adults are accustomed to some type of formal training experience before taking on a new responsibility.

—Lyle Schaller
The Parish Paper