

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

By Dr. Tom Cheyney



Founder & Directional Leader
The Renovate Group

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

The work of revitalization and renewal is a task that requires an extreme focus and determination. Church Revitalizer's must be willing to invest large sums of prayer and individual time to the effort of revitalization. Realistically, some ministers feel they are only called to preach sermons and everything else is someone's job besides theirs. It is true that the scriptures state that our work is to prepare people for the work of the ministry, yet it is errant to declare that as the church revitalizer we are not required to do other things. Others feel that they are too close to retirement so they simply desire to close out their ministry with keeping things the way they are while trying not to stir up any conflict. Many pastors who are thrown into the middle of revitalization efforts speak of the resistance they experience. Resistance can come simply as a mere pushback of an idea, a significant number of church participants not buying in to the new direction of renewal, open criticism of you as the church revitalizer, rebellion towards the majority who seek renewal, or even members intentionally trying to overtly sabotage your efforts towards revitalization. In reflection, many pastors will simply decline from becoming the change agent for a rapidly declining or plateaued church because they feel it is not worth it to experience such challenges. It is easier to allow life to go on and just show up for the things they can influence rather than seek to bring a new structure and new vision to a group of stiff neck petty people who want to live in a form of ministry which is often twenty years out dated and one hundred miles away from being on point for the needs of the community.

Some pastors are so wrapped up in their individual need for approval that they cannot face the strain and frustration that often accompanies the dealing with those who are resistant to a new day and a new way of doing things that it scares them to even think of the challenge. There will be times when you find yourself frustrated as the one who is leading

the revitalization efforts for your church. Do not let those who are vocal negatively derail you from your goal of revitalizing the church. Remember that those who are outspoken care for the church probably just as much as you do and it is your job to try to win them over to the good things that are happening in the renewal efforts. While you might have an incredible revitalization plan, to believe it is not in need of revision and outside thinking is a mistake. Those who are often not in the center of the effort might be your best chance of seeing the difficulties and drawbacks of your revitalization strategy. Just because God never changes does not mean that your church should never consider its need for change. Successful revitalized churches stay firm in their mission to reach the lost and the glorious message of salvation in Christ Jesus, yet they do review their methodologies and seek to keep them cutting edge so they can impact their community for Jesus' sake. If the community is deaf to your message it is perhaps because such a message is focused on a past population which no longer resides in the churches target area. The message must be heard and remaining focused on those who could come to your church is critical. Vitality in ones message to the community is enables the church to get out and go into its surroundings with a fresh and renewed voice compelling them to come and see. Let's consider some reasons why most pastors will decline becoming changes agents for the revitalization of their church:

Apprehensions About Ones Proficiency and Expertise

Many pastors are overwhelmed in the work of ministry and that can easily lead

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

to apprehensions about their work as a pastor. For those individuals there is a lingering fear that they have proficiency issues and that there is a growing populous within the church that deem their work as inferior. Others within such a church fear that they do not have the required expertise in the field of church revitalization and are hesitant to follow along until they see a series of successes. Many a pastor has declined in leading a revitalization effort because of the skepticism they face and weather the ideas they offer will bring about an improvement in the church. Challenges inwardly such as depleting skill sets and the failure to remain current in the ministry realm cause many to fear becoming obsolete. This type of pastoral leader is one, which requires constant reassurance, which after awhile the membership grows, tired in doing. As a church revitalizer consider this little tidbit: The only thing that changes when you become unwilling to change as the revitalizer is that the difficulties and issues gets worse and grow bigger and bigger.

The Same Issues Surface in a Never-Ending Pattern

There will be those who just simply want to keep the church derailed and off the track. Many a pastor has declined in leading a revitalization effort because of every time an idea towards renewal surfaces there will be those who just simply will not let go of previous issues. Where I serve there is still a few who are pouting and mopping around about a piece of property my predecessor sold some seven years ago. Month after month he had to listen to it. When I arrived it was still an issue but how I dealt with it was different. I face the facts that we have moved on and that they must do so as well. Forward focus is much more preferred over a yesterday and yesteryear rehashing of things they did not like. It is as if they are living in their own individual version

of the movie Groundhog Day. Many revitalizing pastors feel that way and they do not want to continually fight the same old issues so they operate in a non-threatening way hoping it will go away. Guess what? It does not go away unless you deal with it! Those who decline in leading a revitalization effort will usually face resurfacing issues if they are not handled and laid to rest. Stop doing nothing about the elephants in the room. Take action and stop stalling. Be the leader and step up and handle it.

It is Easier to Remain Mired in Misery

Many a pastor has declined in leading a revitalization effort because they have allowed a deep sense of sorrow to set in. Such stuckness causes followers to eventually give up following your leadership. You got to get out of the mud and get the church moving forward. When pastors perceive resistance as a threat, they may become competitive, defensive, or uncommunicative with the larger body of believers and such a practice of leaving them in the dark is unwise. It is a defense mechanism certainly to avoid any more feelings of hurt and abandonment. There is always uncertainty in church revitalization. But you got to go and if you take a moment to think about it you already know it. Seek the face of God. Get out of your safety zone. Set your vision and get to work.

Attachment to the Past Glories Surpasses the Hunger for Future Ones

While I would be the first to recognize you must honor the past in order to move into the future, those who are always looking back find it hard to lead a church into the future. There are pastors who think about yesterday

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

more than they do concerning tomorrow. Keep your focus on the present and future. Honor the past but live in the present and future. Stay current and abreast of the new things God is doing. Seek to connect with future generation and not focus on past ones. Church Revitalizer's can help people preserve dignity by celebrating those elements of the past that are worth honoring while still making it clear that the world has changed and the church must as well.

Not Wanting to Embrace More Work

If you have learned anything in this book I hope that you have begun to acknowledge that if you are going to revitalize a church it will take more of you and that means more work. Many a pastor will decline in becoming a change agent because it will require much more of you and you are uneasy with the continual feeling over being overloaded. I realize we all feel overwhelmed at times. Yet the change leader will be tested, tried, and tempted to do less and less. We just cannot run from everything that is difficult. Some are not willing to place the added burden and sacrifices on ones family it requires to be the church revitalizer who brings about lasting change. They clearly see they must run far and run fast and some will decline when that opportunity presents itself. If revitalization was always easy, and we seldom had to reach for our faith, we would never reach our full potential as a church revitalizer. So when times get tough, instead of getting all downcast or disheartened, you need to view the complications as occasions to mature as the renewal leader. These are your opportunities to advance and yet if you respond to these incor-

rectly it will only prolong the anguish you are feeling.

Tired of the Squawking

Many a pastor has declined in leading a revitalization effort because they continually feel like they are taking three steps forward and then two steps back and there becomes a growing resentment towards those who simply will not align themselves towards future vision. These members constant squawking and protesting towards anything which could mean an advancement for the church towards renewal wears the minister down. No matter how good an idea may be there are those within any church who have set themselves up as the saboteurs towards advancement. Often a pastor just gets tired of it and selects to do nothing.

We Have Never Done it That Way Before Pastor

Many a pastor declines because of the continual ripples across the church pond. Like tossing a pebble into a pond, change often produces a ripple effect that grows into an ever-widening sphere. Such ripples have to be handled and their effects extinguished. These ripple effects cause members to push back on the pastor and various degrees of rebellion could surface. It is amazing how many people are for something until it invades their space and their likes and comfort. We have never tried this before is an often used pebble that causes a leader to decline moving forward.

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

Yesterday's Ghost Lie in Wait to Haunt the Future

Many a pastor declines becoming a change agent because ones church members are still gripping about the last series of changes the church went through. These crabby church critics lie in wait seeking to destroy anything which speaks of a new day. There past resentments about what changed a few years ago has surfaced bitter resentment towards future changes. Yesterday's ghosts surface to destroy new actions and new ideas because old wounds surface and the historical past are remembered. You discern that you are leading church members who refuse to change when are still harboring the historic past not matter how long ago it was. Even the challenging and difficult church member can provide valued contribution when you treat their ideas with esteem and you are prepared to reconsider some aspects of the church change you are introducing. Can you stay faithful and focused when those times of discouragement come?

There is No Newness Within the Fellowship

Fresh participants make revitalization efforts more feasible and some pastor's decline becoming the change agent because there are no new people to build a nucleus around. As a pastor you have stopped inviting people to your church because you are afraid existing ones will mistreat them. Even your lay leaders have stopped inviting others to church. You have declined because you have stopped praying for your city, have no desire to hang out with the lost, your sense of mission has become foggy, and see nothing but the bad about your present situation.

A Shift in the Strategic Plan for Revitalization

Big shifts often can stall the church and unless the revitalizer is committed to seeing it through many will decline in becoming agents of change for the local church. Shifting from past strategies and structures takes work and some church leaders are not up to it. They fear such loss of face that departure from the past could raise.

It Limits My Choices

Many a church revitalizer has declined becoming a change agent because it limits their choices for future prospects of employment. You are either successful or you are out of the ministry many mistakenly feel. Such fear of a loss of control challenges their fortitude to see the church revitalized. Because revitalization of a church often interferes with the status quo, pastors often think that politically it would not be in their best interest to begin the journey.

I Do Not Want to Look Bad to My Membership

Let's face it most pastors will decline in becoming the change agent for renewal within ones church because they are afraid of looking bad to their membership. They have set themselves up as one who is always correct and have basically demonstrated a my way or the highway persona. They are so concerned with being right that they lose sight of their original

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

goals for renewal. It becomes a sense of not wanting to look bad and appear ineffective to ones membership. The result then becomes stubbornly pushing ideas and programs through before taking the time to understand the nature of the resistance that might be experienced. The outcome is often a failure to understand the resistance they are facing and the eventual outcome of sacrificing goodwill within the fellowship. When church revitalizers do this they put the very relationships in jeopardy they are called to lead towards renewal. Then the skeptic's surface in a true us versus them fashion and speak of the self-serving nature of the church revitalizer. It takes a strong church revitalizer to continually engage when a renewal change effort meets with pushback. If you as the one who is brining about change can simply gain perspective by giving consideration to, understanding, and learning from others behaviors you feel as intimidating, you will eventually produce healthier outcomes for ones church.

Overcoming Adversity as a Church Revitalizer

It is important to talk about being resolutely focused on fulfilling your God given vocation as a church revitalizer! Every year when we lead the Renovate National Church Revitalization Conference there are those who say this ought to be something that is offered as a special pre-conference intensive. By the conclusion of the annual national church revitalization there are those who come up and thank us for talking about and having real life church revitalizers as our conference speaking team. They speak of being better prepared to handle the adversity as a church revitalizer because they participated in this conference. While I must admit these days at the Renovate National Church Revitalization Conference is like drinking from a fire hose at full impact, it is a tremendous resource to pastors who

are leading turn around efforts of revitalization and renewal for their churches. If you are interested in overcoming the adversity which often surrounds church revitalization efforts, then prayerfully consider how to use such adversity for successful church renewal:

Ask for a three-year commitment of the committed towards the renewal effort.

Begin by asking of your key leaders and faithful followers to join you in the effort to revitalize the church and to stick with this commitment for at least three years. It takes time to revitalize a church so it is critical to develop a group of faithful members who will pray hard, work hard, and be faithful to the efforts of renewal.

Dig down deep within and give your career best to the work of ministry.

As the single solitary leader of the church revitalization effort you must seek the face of God and ask for Him to bring out the very best that you have for the work of the ministry. You must dig down deep within and give you absolute career best to the work of this revitalization effort.

Voice what is happening often and to everyone.

Church renewal is an all in effort and it is important that you keep the entire church up to speed about the things which are happening in the renewal effort. Many church renewal efforts are stalled or stopped because the leader assumes everyone knows what is

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

going on when in reality they do not. Keep your membership informed and do not be stingy with the communication that is needed to keep everyone moving forward and remaining focused on the effort.

Empower others who join the renewal effort.

You just cannot do the work of revitalization alone. It is vital that you empower other church members who have joined the effort. Put them to work and give them the authority to accomplish their individual piece of the renewal strategy plan.

Rise above the mundane criticisms which often surface around the renewal leader.

There will be those who criticize you and will criticize the efforts of church renewal. You must rise above those who seek to criticize any effort towards renewal. As the renewal leader expect such criticism to surface and rise above the mundane and keep moving forward.

Stay singularly focused on the church revitalization effort.

You must be unrelenting in your effort of renewal. It requires a focus which is laser targeted so that you will not become side tracked by those who want to divert the effort and plans. This is not going to be one of the things you do for the next three years in your church, it will be the very thing you do in your church.

Imagine what can be done in a thousand days over a single day.

It takes time to turn around a church which is in decline so realize you are investing a large portion of your life and time to the effort. Settle in to the task and try not to conquer the world in a single day but walk strategically towards what could be accomplished in a minimal investment of one thousand days.

Tell the renewal story early and often as God begins to turn around the church.

Nothing helps the work of revitalization more than telling the success stories you are seeing take place in your church. Begin with the tiny serendipitous moments and move on to the even bigger blessings as God provides. The more you tell church members and potential prospects what God is doing the easier it is for them to see that the Lord is indeed turning around the church.

You must be unrelenting in your pursuits of church renewal.

Keep on keeping on in your pursuits of church renewal. Find a place each month where you can be trained and coached in the renewal effort. Once you have been trained go back to your church and train the key leaders in the things you are learning. Church revitalization requires a journey mentality so take others along on this glorious journey.

God has an abundant design and purpose for every church revitalizer. But that design is not going to come to pass without seasons of adversity. You will have those who oppose you. How you walk through and navigate those challenging times will either break you or make you

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

as the Church Revitalizer! These challenges can plunge us onward and cause us to grow or they can defeat us. Too many church revitalization pastors today, when things do not go their way, they just get all negative and sour. They end up settling for mediocrity rather than reaching for the best the church could be for the community it serves. All of us need to understand, that sometimes God will allow certain things to happen to us in order for us to stretch as the church revitalizer and grow.

What will you do as a church revitalizer when you hit the wall of discouragement and it seems so large that you are unable to see your way pass it? Many a pastor and many a church revitalizer has spun on his heels and run away at the precise point in time that the Lord was beginning to perform His greatest blessing in your church revitalization ministry. Jumping ship prematurely and running for the comfort of another easier ministry assignment might not be God's plan or his blessing. Which of the many promises of God will you hold close during those times of adversity as a church revitalizer? David said "God you have enlarged me in my times of distress." I like the way the psalmist put it in The Message translation: "When I call, give me answers. God take my side! Once in a tight place, you gave me room; now I'm in trouble again; grace me! Hear me! ...Complain if you must, but don't lash out. Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart do the talking. Build your case before God and wait for his verdict." The very thing that Satan used to defeat him was the exact item God used to encourage him. Every difficulty has the potential for the church revitalizer to take you closer to the very thing the Lord has planned for your life. God will not let a challenge

come into ones life unless He has a purpose and a plan for that trial to grow you.

When Joshua faced an impassible barrier of the floodwaters of the Jordan River, remember they receded only after the leaders stepped into the rushing current in obedience and faith. Obedience often is the key which unlocks God's power. God waits for you to act first as the church revitalizer so stop waiting to feel some great sense of confidence just move ahead. Though your legs might feel limp and your resolve might be shaken move ahead in your feebleness doing the right thing in spite of those fears and feelings. It is the struggle that gives you strength. Ones difficulties often refines the church revitalizer's passion and this passion energies your vision for renewal. You cannot develop your spiritual fortitude without some kind of resistance. So when times get rough you must have a singular focus on the renewing of the church and remain resolute. We serve a God which specializes in doing things that impossible. It has been stated, "If you want to launch big ships, go where the water is deep!" So dream big as the one who is called to revitalize the church, and then lead your church to be what God desires as it is being renewed.

I love most of the time young David in the Old Testament. Even though the giant Goliath was twice his size, he looked him straight in the eyes and said, "Look. I know you may be big, but the God in me is much, much bigger." He said "This very day I will defeat you and feed your head to the birds of the air." That is the kind of boldness we need

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

as the one leading the renewal efforts for the church. Stop being a weak, wimpy, revitalizer and pray hard and walk boldly. When you face your Goliaths in life, you need to look it right in the eyes, and say, “I will defeat you. I’m not going to give up. I know this struggle is leading me that much closer to what you have in store for my ministry.

The revitalization of the church is born out of a struggle and out of difficulties. The hour usually seems the darkest just before the Lord does his most miraculous deed for the declining church. Do not get bitter but allow the Lord to use what is going on in your church as a stepping stone to something better. Instead of getting all negative and running away from God, run to God and allow Him to usher you into a whole new era of ministry as a revitalizer. What the enemy means for evil God can turn it around into your blessing.

Stop thinking that your ministry is a reflection of your own worthiness to the Lord. Remember the promise of Matthew 16:18. “God will build His church”. Our self worth must come from God and God alone. Get over it when not everyone shares your excitement and vision for the renewal of the church you lead. In my assessment, most church revitalizers have higher highs and lower lows than other types of ministers. That is because people will let you down in the work of revitalization. You may discover that the stronger leaders have moved away from your church because they realized the church was not going to work towards renewal right ay and they did not want to languish away waiting for the select to get with the program. Stop allowing that to eat your lunch so much. I have learned as a church revitalizer that comparison and appraisal of other churches in relation to yours is the thief of joy. Understand the truth from

Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13:3 that no two church planters have the same soil condition. God could have kept Joseph out of jail , kept Daniel out of the lions den , kept Jeremiah from being tossed into a slimy pit , kept Paul from being shipwrecked multiple times , and kept the three Hebrew young men from being thrown into the blazing furnace , but He did not. You will never know that God is all you need until God is all you got. Delivering faith is when God instantly turns something around. And we’ve all seen that happen. That’s great. But I believe it takes a greater faith and a deeper walk with God to have that sustaining faith. God desires warriors not whiners! We need to live out Romans 8:31 which says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” We need church revitalizers who stand confident with the Apostle Paul and confess “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

I heard a story about a farmer, and he had this old mule. One day, unfortunately, this mule fell into an empty well. It was about forty or fifty feet deep, and this farmer was so disappointed. He loved this old mule. But after studying the situation, and analyzing it all, he realized it was going to be virtually impossible to rescue that mule. The well was just so deep and too narrow. And he was just crammed down at the bottom. And as much as he didn’t want to, he figured that the mule nor the well was really worth saving. So he was just going to fill it up with the dirt right then and there and put him out of

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

his misery. So he called some of his friends over to help him out. One shovel full at a time they begin to shovel that dirt into the empty well. When that old mule felt that dirt hit his back, and he realized what they were trying to do to him, he threw a fit. He screamed and hollered and I'm sure he thought "Poor old me. I've fallen into a well and nobody is even going to help me out." But as he just sat there having a pity party with the dirt getting heavier and heavier on his back, all the sudden a brilliant thought hit his mule wind mind. He decided when he felt that dirt hit his back, instead of letting it bury him he was just going to shake it off and step up. Shake it off and step up. And so, blow by blow, time after time, he would shake it off, and step up. No matter how he felt, no matter how tired he got, he just kept shaking it off and stepping up. You know after he did that for 3 or 4 hours that old mule was able to step triumphantly over the wall of that well and walk out to freedom. What's interesting is that the very dirt that tried to bury him, actually saved his life. All because of the way he responded to his obstacles and difficulties. Dirt will be shoveled upon you at times but you have a choice to make. Will you be full of pity and allow your challenges to bury you or will you shake it off and step up and out?

While I was growing up my pastor and friend was Dr. Freddie Smith, who pastored First Baptist Church of Naples, Florida at the time. I was allowed to park my sailboat at Brother Freddie's home since the parsonage was on the water and he did not mind. One of his dear, dear friends was Dr. Vance Havner, a really a great evangelist and minister. I would hang out as a young preacher boy with Brother Freddie and this superb preacher and prophet of God. I was in college studying for the ministry before I ever realized just how lucky I was to have had time to ask both Dr. Smith and Dr.

Havner my ministry questions. I think back about how patient they both were at answering what now seems to be some really stupid questions. One time Dr. Havner had a terrible thing happen and I'll never forget what he said. People asked him if the tragedy would devastate him and he replied, "No, There's no use looking back. Just shake it off and keep moving for God." Mourning over what you have lost is not going to change anything. You've got to learn how to shake it off and step up.

I think about Joseph. Nobody had more unfair things happen to him. He had to just keep shaking it off and stepping up. His brothers were so jealous of him they threw him into a deep pit. They were going to leave him there to die. They finally decided to sell him as a slave in Egypt. He ended up working for a man by the name of Potiphar. It was very unfair for Joseph. He had been much mistreated. But Joseph did not go around complaining. He did not go around with a bad attitude. He just shook it off and stepped up. Potiphar liked him so much; he put him in charge of his whole household. Everything was going great until Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. And Joseph was thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit. Eventually, he was put in charge of that whole prison. The Bible says in Psalms as he sat there in that prison, in those chains of iron, "his soul entered into that iron." He developed strength and a perseverance that made his soul as strong as that iron. God was getting him prepared. When you go through tough times as a church revitalizer, you may think nothing good is happening. Stay the course and keep your focus. Never quit but keep at it and going forward with the Lord's guidance.

And some of you as church revitalizers are a lot like Joseph. Life and ministry has not gone

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

your way. Stop allowing the stuff of ministry defeat you. Start shaking it off and stepping up. When you are rejected shake it off. When you are mocked shake it off. When you are criticized shake it off. When you are betrayed shake it off. Keep shaking it off and stop declining to be the change agent God has called you to be. Do not give the enemy a foothold in your work. Just like Joseph. Just like David. You may not be able to see it right now. You may be in a bunch of trials and turmoil. Your church might be a big old mess and your life may look like a mess. Learn to be like Joseph and say, “God, I do not understand why this is all happening to me, but God I do know that you’re a good God. You said you would take the evil and use it to my advantage. You said you would develop me when I am in misery. So I thank you Lord that these difficulties are leading me one step closer to what your plan is for my life and ministry. Corrie ten Boom, who suffered in a Nazi death camp, explained the power of focus: “If you look at the world, you will be distressed. If you look within, you will be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you will be at rest.” Do not give in to short-term thinking. Stay focused dear church revitalizer on the end result.

Sometimes he will allow a little pressure to push you, to stretch you, to get you out of that comfort zone. Stand strong and fight that good fight of faith. Be courageous. Live under the wisdom of Isaiah 43:1 which says, “*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.*” As church revitalizers let us stop declining to become the change agent God has called us to be and do something above what we ever could imagine.

www.RenovateConference.org

RENOVATE

National Church Revitalization Conference

Helping Today's Churches Succeed Tomorrow!



For additional resources for the revitalization and renewal of ones church, go to:

www.RenovateConference.org/resources. Check out The Church Revitalizer magazine which is the only national magazine available on church revitalization. Check out Dr. Cheyney's weekly podcats on church revitalization by going to Itunes and Download the Renovate Conference podcast. Our weekly blog can be found at Renovate Central. This Just-In-Time Resource is made available to you through the Renovate Group.

Why Most Pastors Will Decline Becoming Change Agents

Used By Permission of the Authoor