

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Succession Planning - Episode 91

When to Start, Best Practices & Creating Options for Life After Pastoring

In a recent study, Barna Research found that half of the senior pastors in America are 55 or older, and that the number of pastors older than 65 has tripled in the last 25 years. This week on the podcast, Tony sits down with William Vanderbloemen for a conversation on pastoral succession, how to prepare, and why you should start now.

When should we begin talking about succession?

- There are very few cardinal rules in succession planning, but when it comes to *when to start*, the answer William gives is always the same: Yesterday.
- The quicker pastors can orient to the idea that all are *interim* pastors, the easier it is to start talking about what happens *next*.
- The earlier you can start planning, the more effective you'll be at recognizing the right time and being financially prepared to have good options for the future.

Why are churches reticent to start the conversation?

- People—both staff and congregation—are often unwilling to even talk about it. It's different than in the marketplace, where it's common for CEOs to have this conversation. In churches, the conversation tends to strike a familial note and can get unhealthy, with people feeling more like, "*Dad is thinking about leaving us.*"
- There are only three possible endings to a pastor's tenure: 1) He or she is the pastor when Jesus returns, 2) the pastor that runs the church into the ground and closes it, or 3) the pastor that effectively transitions leadership to another person. If we can help our teams understand that, we can create a more healthy dialogue.

Best Practices for a Healthy Transition

1. Create options for your later years.

Think about the options you'll need. What are the potential roadblocks? If you can remove those roadblocks, then you have options. The number one roadblock to a good succession for pastors is *money*.

If you're a leader at the church, make sure you're doing things for the pastor to create venues for them to be able to walk away financially. Here's one William recommends: Put a \$3,000-4,000 noncash benefit in the pastor's compensation package as a credit towards hiring a certified financial planner. Not a credit to go meet with *the church's* certified financial planner—Encourage them to see somebody outside the church, and the church just pays the bill.

2. Get a life (outside the church).

It sounds rude but, but the church will swallow your entire identity if you let it, so much so that when you walk away you don't have anything to do. Playing golf gets old after a while. What application can you be developing right now? What life outside your pastoral call can you be developing? It's on you, pastor, to identify the things God's wired you up for outside of this pastoral call. What would you want to do when it's over?

William shared a few more best practices in the interview related to the most common roadblocks to a healthy succession. Which did he say was the *most* common? Money. By far and large, most pastors are not financially ready to pass off the baton.

Next Steps

- Read [Next: Pastoral Succession That Works](#) by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird
- Discuss: When do we anticipate a pastoral succession process needing to begin? Are we prepared today? What from this conversation between William and Tony do we need to consider implementing?

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