

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Pastoral Succession Real Talk

Episode 92

The Incoming & Outgoing Lead Pastors at The Crossing in Costa Mesa, CA Share Their Story

In this episode, we're sharing the story of the recent leadership transition at The Crossing in Costa Mesa, California—a 30-year-old church that is still healthy and growing. Tony is joined by founding pastor Tim Celek and current lead pastor Andrew Brownback to learn how they journeyed through the succession process and some of the key learnings they had along the way.

Starting the Succession Conversation

- Tim shared that as the lead pastor, he had to personally have the realization that he was the temporary leader, even though he founded the church. Before his early forties, he says it never really occurred to him.
- He read a few books (*Next* by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, and *Transition Plan* by Bob Russell) and gave excerpts of those books to the board.
- "Once you make the decision to take the step in transitioning your leadership position to somebody else, you need to throw everything you have into the process." -- Bob Russell
- They talked with a coach, who ultimately told them it was a little early for fully jumping into a succession planning exercise. However, the whole pursuit got the team on the same page and led to the creation of an emergency plan ("What if Tim gets hit by a bus?"), which they now realized they were lacking.

A few years later, they had a solid foundation to begin the search for Tim's successor.

Finding a Successor

- The Crossing hired Vanderbloemen Search Group to help them find their next lead pastor several years before ideal timing for succession.
- Andrew quickly rose to the top of their list. When they hired Andrew, they made it clear from the get-go that he was the next lead pastor. There was no "dangling a carrot." His initial title was "senior associate pastor."

- In the beginning, Andrew's role included teaching once per month, overseeing small groups and care ministry, and lead their strategic planning process.

Healthy Handoff

- "There's replacement planning and succession planning. One is a subset of the other. Finding my replacement was just one of many things I organized on a chart of what we needed to think through before I departed."
- A season of overlap in Tim and Andrew's leadership was crucial: It allowed them to build trust with each other, gave Andrew time to familiarize himself with the organization and the people, as well as a chance to be coached.
- When considering timing for the actual handoff, take into consideration where *your church* is in its story, not just the age you are. Tim originally thought he'd pass the baton at age 60, but their church hit a major milestone (its 30-year anniversary) the year before, and they recognized the value of making the transition at that time.
- Think through the concentric rings of communication. One year out from the target transition date, The Crossing communicated with staff, board members and their spouses that Andrew would be the lead pastor. Next they talked with key givers and volunteers, and they progressively widened the circle to the whole church.
- On how it feels to be the exiting pastor: "It really feels like you're conducting a wedding and performing a funeral at the same time. There's this exhilaration that you get to trumpet the mission and vision of the church—a celebration for all that God has done in our church up to this point. But now you're telling people that you're leaving and the new person is going to do even more. There's an excitement, but you'd see people walking out and that processing, as well. It was a gripping thing for a lot of people emotionally."
- "Academic literature tends to ignore the fact that CEOs and their successors are human beings. Very little of what is written deals with the soft personal issues like relationships, self interest, ego or God forbid feelings." -- Marshall Goldsmith
- Succession is personal long before it's tactical.

Next Steps

- **The Unstuck Group helps churches plan for the future.**
Start a conversation at theunstuckgroup.com/start.
- [*Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*](#) by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird
- [*Transition Plan: 7 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Know*](#) by Bob Russell

Listen to the episode on iTunes or at theunstuckgroup.com/episode92.