

How to Replace a Hero: Successful Pastoral and Leadership Transitions

Leadership transitions are crucial points of vulnerability in every organization, including ministries and churches. Come learn the foundational principles and strategies for successful transitions, so the Gospel continues to advance for generations to come. In this session, Philip Miller, who has assumed the leadership of two churches previously led by incredibly influential leaders with long track records, will share from his unique experience and expertise.

Philip Miller is the 17th senior Pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago. Philip holds a B.A. in Pre-Seminary Bible from Cedarville University ('04) and a Th.M. in Pastoral Leadership and New Testament Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary ('10). His wife, Krista, also holds a B.A. from Cedarville University and a Th.M. degree from DTS. They have four children: Claire, Violet, Cora, and Jude. Philip enjoys cycling, Garrett's Caramel Crisp popcorn, Lou Malnati's deep dish pizza, and craft root beer.

A Tale of Two Transitions

Why Transitions Matter

- We're all interim leaders.

- True success requires a successor.

- The Kingdom is greater than our castle.

- Transitions are crucial points of vulnerability.
 - Stability
 - Identity
 - Strategy
 - Trajectory

Four Succession Models

1. Intentional Overlap

2. Seamless Handoff

3. Unplanned Interim

4. Strategic Interim

Key Question: How much change needs to be accomplished in this transition?

Organizational Health

- History – story, precedent, patterns
- Governance – bylaws, policies, board
- Finances – trends, debt, generosity
- Facilities – relevance, sites, deferred maintenance
- Programs – effectiveness, stalled, scalable
- Teams – structure, vacancies, problems
- Culture – beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors

Organizational Life Cycle

- Planting
- Accelerating
- Sustaining
- Realignment
- Turnaround
- Crisis

The Objective: Match the Successor and Strategy to the Situation.

Navigating the Vulnerability Window

- Entry of New Leadership
- Exit of Former Leadership

- Equity Tipping Points
- Expect Sabotage

Key Principles

- ***Takeaways for Outgoing Leaders***
 - Initiate the conversation with your board five years out.
 - Seek the Lord as to where you'll invest your future energy.
 - Entrust your ministry to the Lord and to the board.
 - Release control, expectations, and ownership.
 - Speak blessing over your successor always.
 - Concerns are directed only to the board.
 - If it is a struggle, voluntarily vacate.
- ***Takeaways for Incoming Leaders***
 - Honor the past.
 - Steward the DNA.
 - Guard against comparisons.
 - Build trust through relationships.
 - You need allies.
 - Make sure you and the board stay in sync.
 - Be patient.
 - Know how much equity you have.
 - Become an expert on grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance.
 - Enjoy the honeymoon, knowing it won't last.
 - Expect sabotage and plan to outlast it.
- ***Takeaways for Board Members***
 - Do your organizational homework.
 - Choose your transitional model carefully.
 - Don't be afraid to go slow and work the plan.
 - Lead the congregation through a grieving process.
 - Set the stage for how change will trigger grief.
 - Take care of the hard changes before bringing in the new leader.
 - Set clear expectations and boundaries if there is an overlap.
 - Don't let the honeymoon fool you.
 - Manage change carefully, especially in the first three years.
 - Be ready to support the new leader through the sabotage.
- ***Takeaways for Congregations***
 - Pray, Support, Encourage and Follow the new leader.
 - Expect change and frustration.
 - Learn to recognize your own grief.

- No gossip.
- Release control and expectations.
- Honor the past and embrace the future.
- Eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Some Helpful Resources

Vanderbloemen, William and Warren Bird. *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020.

Heath, Will. *Embracing Succession: Helping Ministry Leaders Confront the Personal Side of Transition*. Rapid City, SD: Crosslink Publishing, 2021.

Weese, Carolyn. *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020.