

The Journey:

helping networks of churches experience missional transformation

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You have a vision for living out the kingdom of God today in a way that makes Jesus visible. Some days the picture in your mind is so clear. You can envision networks of churches that are alive, vibrant and growing. Their people are living lives of love, talking with their neighbors about the Gospel, bringing meals to the sick, visiting those in prison, tutoring kids, challenging injustice, extending grace, demonstrating their love of God and others in many tangible ways. Others in the communities where these churches have a presence take notice of the Spirit at work—and they start asking questions. Barriers between the churches and the neighborhoods crumble. Dialogues begin and those who don't know Jesus are invited to taste and see.



Leaders are raised up from new converts and begin multiplying themselves. Systems of leadership development are growing at the very grassroots of the movement. People are being helped toward growth in discipleship and maturity. Soon the congregations begin

branching out to form more congregations. The whole region of churches is revitalized and growing. You can see the kingdom of God expanding here on earth.

This is missional transformation.

You want this. You can see it. You know it's possible. You have faith that God can do immeasurably more beyond all we can ask or imagine. And yet that's not what you're experiencing. There are pockets here and there of exciting things going on, but it's not nearly at the level it could be. And that's frustrating, because you've been trying for such a long time to move that picture from your heart to the world around you. You try and try but it just isn't happening. People aren't catching the vision or they aren't following through. What will it take to just get on with what Jesus asked us to do? You can see the vision. And you've been trying. So what's not working? Why isn't the vision becoming reality? Where is the train coming off the tracks? The bottom line is this: What you've been doing isn't working. And you know it. If another seminar or book could do it, you'd already have the problem solved. Something needs to change.

What's holding you back?

While there are many possibilities of things that aren't working or are holding us back, from our experience these are some of the most common barriers that hinder our progress toward missional transformation:

Corporate ADD

Sometimes as organizations we are afflicted by corporate ADD—attention deficit disorder. We engage in a pattern of starting something, losing focus, starting something different, and so on. When we behave this way repeatedly, we are essentially training our people not to take us seriously. They know that if they simply wait and do nothing, the plan will be changed or abandoned anyway and something new will be coming down the road. There's no need to pay attention, there's no need to take action—if they just wait a while, the problem will go away.

In this way, a cycle is created. We've trained our people not to listen. So when something is announced from headquarters, automatic resistance is generated. It's like foreign tissue rejection—the rest of the system simply won't accept something imported from outside. It doesn't much matter whether the program itself is good or bad. And the problem is compounded during times of leadership change within an organization. New leaders tend to dismantle their predecessors' work and insert their own new ideas, contributing to the cycle of corporate ADD.

So what's the remedy? A tenacious focus: we are not letting go until Jesus comes. Long-term commitment to missional transformation is the best remedy for corporate ADD. With long-term commitment we can also make our approach less programmatic. Generally, programmatic approaches don't work because there is a standard method or

program that everyone is supposed to be run through. Rather, the approach must be principle-based and connected to our long-term goals. People need to see how it applies to their own context and to know we are sticking with it.

Convoy mentality

As denominations or networks, we tend to believe that for organizational change to take place, we must first get everyone on the same page, ready to move along in the same direction. We will all go together. Until everyone is ready to move, no one moves. While it would be nice to have everyone move forward together, it's simply not realistic. Not everyone is ready to move forward and not everyone is willing to move forward. If we try to force the issue, we often run into significant resistance or we end up watering down what we want to accomplish for the sake of consensus.

Often in denominations we use the language of family to describe our relationships with each other. And that description can be helpful in some ways. However in other ways a group of churches that is really moving forward is functioning more as a team than as a family. Each member counts the cost before joining, and participation is voluntary. Team members then commit to encouraging each other and spurring one another on toward our common goal. If someone isn't fulfilling their commitments, they can resign or be asked to leave. The vision and the goals are what is holding that team together. With no shared goal, they no longer have a reason to exist and the team disbands.

By using family language in some contexts and team language in others, we can both keep the peace and keep the family together, while still creating some additional environments that aren't pre-committed, but opt-in. These environments are where we'll begin to see results, causing more and more buy-in from others over time. Gideon

didn't need a large army for victory in battle, just a few who believed in the mission and were willing. The others were sent home.

Education beyond obedience

A common breakdown occurs when we try to cram everything someone could possibly someday need to know into their orientation or training. We overload them with information, and their practice doesn't have a chance to catch up. Essentially, we are educating people beyond their obedience. We teach them to pre-think everything before they act at all. Instead, we need to give them just enough to get started-- bite-sized pieces. That approach allows them to learn experientially as they go, providing the needed content a little at a time as it's needed.

Instead of thinking our way into a new way of acting, we need to act ourselves into a new way of thinking. People learn best through the crucible of experience. It's like learning to ski; we can't do it in a classroom. There may be certain elements that could be described in a classroom, but any self-respecting ski instructor is going to take you out on the slopes first thing. You start at the lowest level on the easiest run and see what you can do. From there, the instructor can see how to challenge you and in what ways so that the challenge is sufficient but not overwhelming. You try it, you assess and reflect on what just happened, then you decide on the next step. It takes skill and discipline, as well as knowledge. And even the knowledge piece is learned best if it's based on an experienced need. That will mean some mistakes along the way, but as the ski instructors say, "If you're not falling, you're not learning." We can't be afraid to fail; that's how the learning comes. It comes as we act ourselves into a new way of thinking.

Event-focused

How many notebooks do you have on your shelf from seminars that you've attended and then not done anything about? If seminars could do it, we'd be done by now. We don't need another event. What we need is the follow-up that takes us the rest of the way through the process.

One major mistake we make is thinking that events by themselves will accomplish our goals. We believe that we can gather people in groups, train them, and then report how many people attended. Providing a good orientation is helpful, but it only takes us partway. We also need to think through what kind of support and follow through people will need along the rest of the road.

Imagine a parenting class. The instructor starts out talking about early infancy, and all of the pregnant women and their husbands are nodding and taking notes. But then their expressions become increasingly puzzled as he moves on to academic difficulties in elementary school, dealing with rebellious teenagers, the importance of saving for college, and empty nest syndrome. By the time the class is over, they're looking stunned and glazed over, and the instructor dismisses them with, "Okay, now go out there and parent!"

We can't frontload content like that and expect it to be effective. Just when a parent masters the baby stage, that baby turns into a toddler. What we need is follow up at each stage along the way, step-by-step. Some form of relational coaching—monthly or more frequent—needs to be offered as a piece of that follow-up. Often people aren't sure what the next step is after an event; they need someone along the way to help them figure it out and help them stay on track. Life itself has a tendency to distract us from what's truly important. Lasting transformation is not just about inspiring people, but

about providing the support that empowers them to experience true change over time. In that sense, what happens for follow up is actually *more* important than what happens at the event itself.

Working in isolation

Many leaders also get road-blocked on their way to reaching their goals simply due to lack of connection with others. It sounds simple, but it's essential—we need other people along the way with us. We need additional perspectives and fresh ideas. We need sounding boards and a place to process our thoughts. We need to feel like they're connected to something bigger. All of this is essential to moving forward. Without intentionally creating an environment that allows connection with others around these kinds of ideas—something with set-aside time—many good intentions come to naught. Just as new parents learn from one another, just as basketball players learn from one another, just as teachers learn from one another, we can benefit from connecting and reflecting alongside other leaders in ministry. We often have very limited opportunity to reflect on our experience and learn from others.

Too high too fast

Often we set the bar too high too fast. An athlete training for the high jump wouldn't start with the bar seven feet high. He or she would start much lower and then work their way up with intentional challenges that require an appropriate amount of stretch. Whenever a certain height was no longer challenging, the bar would be raised. Similarly, we need to set small, manageable goals in ministry. Setting the bar too high too quickly results in people failing and feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, and frustrated. But by building up to the goal with smaller steps we can celebrate along the way, we create an atmosphere of encouragement and momentum.

Celebrating the big victories is not usually too difficult. If we met our goal of planting ten churches this year, we know that's something to celebrate. What we often don't understand is that we're more likely to meet our goal in the first place if we celebrate along the way. Celebrating the small victories creates a significant motivation for people to keep trying.

The piecemeal approach

We can't accomplish missional transformation by doing it piecemeal. If we miss any of the basic principles, we won't get the same effect. It's like taking a partial strength vaccine or only half the course of antibiotics: we need the full prescription. Imagine a patient diagnosed with a heart condition. The doctor tells him he needs to make dietary changes, exercise, get rest, and take medication. If the patient decides only to exercise, the results will probably be less than satisfactory at his next appointment.

Likewise, we are often tempted to just focus on one area, as if that one thing is what will fix everything. Maybe just prayer or just relational connection or just vision will fix it. But any one of those without the others will be incomplete. We need the full treatment. We need a holistic approach.

The good news is that there are ways to get there. There are proven principles to help us get unstuck, to help us overcome those stubborn obstacles, to help us accomplish the vision God has laid on our hearts. Every denomination was, at one time, a missional movement. And we can transform to become a missional movement again.

Guiding Principles

So what makes this kind of deep organizational change possible? And what makes that change lasting change? Here are some proven principles that flow out of real life experience—tried and proven.

Cultivate a clear and compelling vision: What do you really want?

The lack of a sense of urgency is the number one reason missional transformation doesn't happen. If we are satisfied with the status quo there is no motivation for change. Instead, we need passionate commitment to a vision—a vision that is clear and compelling. Picture what new things will be emerging—for the vision is for starting new things, not just for revitalization. Look ahead 15 to 20 years, if God had his way, what would look different? "I have a dream where churches...." Once we have this clear and compelling vision in mind, we'll need to paint that picture for others. We'll need to help them uncover their dissatisfaction with the status quo. We'll need to talk about the vision in such a way that it takes hold of people and they respond by wanting to make the sacrifice and take the risk by moving toward this new vision of a preferred future.



Maintain long-term focus: How committed are you to getting there?

Forget about quick fixes. The process of transformation is a daunting journey. A long rugged trail full of steep inclines, intimidating obstacles, deep valleys, high passes, and sometimes, extreme challenges. Good things don't come easily. The kind of deep change we're talking about here—missional transformation—is not for the faint of heart

or for those who desire simply to adopt another program. This kind of change will require a deep, long-term commitment of time and energy.

With real focus, the seeds of transformation can be established in a three year period, but then those seeds must be cultivated in years 4 -7 so that in years 8 -10 the change can be truly established as a part of the organizational culture.

The full process is 7 to 10 years *if* we maintain focus. That means maintaining our focus on missional transformation even through organizational leadership changes. So count the cost—it is high. But for those who are willing to pay the price and embark on the journey, the results can be astounding: long-term denominational transformation.

Build a guiding coalition: Who is passionately committed to investing in this?

Organizational change doesn't happen without a guiding coalition moving that change forward. The point we often forget is that we don't need everyone to be a part of that guiding coalition. If we wait for everyone to join our convoy, we'll never get started. Instead, find those leaders and churches that are more open—those that have a dissatisfaction with what is and are willing to pay the price. The process of selecting the right people and groups to work with is a critical piece of equation; start with people who are passionately committed-- start small and try new things.

When we consider who could be a part of this guiding coalition for change, we need to focus on mobilizing people who can influence others. In general, there are two dimensions of influence: those who can influence by position or spiritual authority and those who influence by being practitioners who do something new. Both are important.

- Capacity to influence others
 - Opinion leader
 - Practitioner
- Passionately committed
- Able to free up time and energy to focus
- Follows through on commitments
- Willing to try (or bless) something new
- Responsive to coaching
- Multiplication potential

The short list may include: denominational, network, and judicatory leaders, key catalytic pastors, church planters, missionaries, and donors. By gathering the right people, an effective guiding coalition is formed.

Focus on the right things: Where is the point of leverage?

Every organization has a different set of current circumstances and different opportunities. First we can look for potential areas of strategic focus, then we can search for the points of leverage that will most effectively move us forward.

What are the right things to focus on?

- Leadership development
- Organic mission and multiplication
- Starting new missions
- Revitalizing congregations toward greater health and mission

Once we've decided on strategic areas for focus, our best clues to finding the points of leverage are the answers to these two questions:

- Where's the pain?
- Where's the opportunity?

Engaging in this process clarifies where to begin focusing attention. From there it's a matter of deciding on specific initiatives and specific people to invest in.

Provide powerful coaching: How can we best cooperate with what God is doing?

Consistent high-quality coaching is critical for sustaining momentum over the long



haul. Coaching is the central thread for implementation; without it, all the best planning will fall to pieces.

Coaching must be offered consistently along the way—at the beginning and then periodically between network meetings and other significant milestones.

Not only does coaching help leaders and organizations stay on track, it also provides the key to future reproducibility. By training new coaches, we can continue to provide more coaching in the future to the ever-expanding pool of new leaders we are developing. As with everything in ministry, the process must be reproducible to be effective.

The creation of a coaching context is what cements the lasting change—it's critical for sustaining momentum. Coaching is the glue that holds it all together. Rather than being dependent on “experts,” coaching provides the kind of empowerment for ministry driven by the leaders' own context and therefore sustainable for the long haul.

Coaching has been proven to make the measurable difference in individual, ministry, and church performance. It's the key to developing and sustaining missional momentum in a network or denomination.

Gather to reflect and celebrate: How can we further intentionalize our efforts?

Working, living, and ministering in isolation is one of the most crippling challenges denominational leaders face. Programs, policies, and boardrooms do little to foster the sort of life-giving communities many leaders dream about. Since community does not merely happen in a vacuum, it takes intentional effort, shared experiences, and work.

When groups of people make difficult journeys together something amazing happens... they change—they transform from a group into a community.

One of the best ways to further intentionalize our efforts is to gather together people on similar journeys. By forming these clusters for mutual learning and community, we mine our experiences by reflecting on what we've done and supporting each other along the way. These network gatherings aren't meant to be a teaching time, but rather a time to gather, share, and pray. The learning will happen organically out of the synergy of community.

The functions of a network gathering:

- prayer
- reflection on what's working and what's not working
- celebration
- discovery of new insights and breakthroughs
- consistent time for reflection and renewed focus
- accountability and affirmation
- mutual learning
- refocusing on next priorities

Coached networks are a proven process, tested through work with church planters.

When this system was implemented, denominations that were having 30% success rate in church planting began having a 90% success rate—and the new churches were twice the size of the old ones. In our work with church planters, we discovered that the ideal frequency and duration of network gatherings is three times per year for a couple of days with monthly coaching in between. Doing this consistently over three to five year period is what made the difference. After three years, you begin changing the patterns.

Network meetings are a huge gift to our leaders. Leaders rarely get the opportunity to gather in that kind of environment, talk with each other, and have time set aside to focus on their next key issue. By creating something that's not within the formal structure, we're allowing people to start thinking outside the box and start to innovate. We also become a blessing to our entrepreneurial leaders. And their success is critical to the organization's success.

Invite others to join in the journey: Who else? What's next?

Once we have traveled this journey of organizational change ourselves, we can pass that torch on to those who come after us. That's part of the legacy Paul talked about in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

We've been on a journey; we've been going somewhere. Now that we've reached a destination, we can return to the beginning to invite others along the journey as well. Often when others within a denomination begin to see signs of a success, they will be motivated to count the cost and join in a journey toward change as well. Then we can expand by inviting others along the way and branching into new paths and new ventures. We can give them wings and let them go as they also begin multiplying new leaders and new communities for the sake of the Kingdom.

What does this look like?

Below is a sample template for what this process could look like for a denomination that wants to become more missional:

Initial consultation

The initial consultation is a discussion facilitated around your specific needs and goals and the development of a customized, realistic plan to get there. Here's the basic process to get started:

- sharpen the vision—what is God wanting you to accomplish?
- identify felt needs or challenges
- determine the agenda for the first two or three network meetings
- figure out who needs to be involved
- create a list of short-term next steps to take us into the first network meeting
- decide on a schedule
- develop a coaching plan

For example, one group had the felt need of denominational survival and the desire to leave a legacy for the next generation. Their agenda became planting a certain number of churches. The barriers associated with that goal led them to decide on these topics for their first few network meetings: rethinking their ecclesiology and rethinking the way they developed leaders for their churches. From there they decided to include certain key pastors with a heart for planting and some potential planters who were open to thinking outside the box in these areas. Several laypeople were also involved, as well as a few denominational overseers.

Selection of participants

- Network participants are often comprised of denominational leaders, pastors, church planters, and coaches.
- Network members must *opt in* as opposed to their participation being *required*.

- Network members must demonstrate passionate commitment to the vision and willingness to prioritize time and other resources to see the vision become a reality.
 - 3 to 7 individuals make a team; 4 to 7 teams make a network.
 - Networks can be anywhere between 12 and 49 people. With 50 or more, it's best to create two networks for quality control.

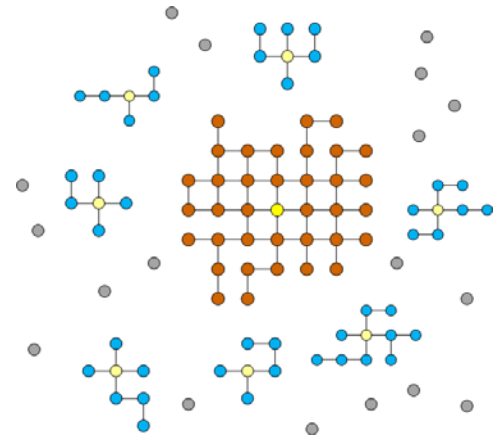
Networks

Networks are a group of committed leaders taking time away from competing agendas to spend focused, intentional time to build a coalition and plan for change.

Networks meet three times per year for three years. We have found that to be the best frequency for building and maintaining camaraderie and movement toward goals.

Network meetings are two-day events.

- 10% of the time is spent in the large group framing the issue at hand
- 80% of the time is spent in the teams discussing the coaching questions and engaging with the ideas
- 10% of the time is spent debriefing in the large group and sharing insights and breakthroughs by the teams



At the end of each network meeting, return to the initial felt needs and agenda determined in the initial consultation to make sure things are still on track.

Coaching

- Coaching is provided for each person involved once a month.
- During months in which network meetings are held, coaching may be done in person. Otherwise it is done by phone.
- One master coach coaches the network leader and the team leader for each team.
- The team leader then coaches each of the people on his or her team.

Launching of pilot projects

As progress is made, the network is able to sponsor and launch pilot projects. These may be somewhat experimental in nature and the ideas for them arise out of the network meetings and coaching.

Additional coaches trained

- All network members are also being trained as coaches to make the system reproducible in-house.
- In some cases, multiple generations of coaches will have been raised up by the end of the three years, depending on the goals of the network.
- After three years, the group should have a fully functional coach training process for use within their organization.

Opening of additional networks

As pilot projects begin to meet with success, others within the broader organization will begin to take notice of the network. At this point, new networks can be formed according to the original pattern as more people are interested in forming them. Completed network cycles can be celebrated as new networks are opened and more coaches are trained.

Past results

Past results are the best indication of future success. What has resulted from this process being tried in the past? Historically, we've used this approach with church planters from various denominations. In the 1990's we implemented the Church Planting Institute, based on the principles above. Here are some of the results we saw:

- The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel increased church planting success rate from 40% to 90%
- The North American Mission Board increased planter recruiting 400%
- The Las Vegas Presbytery of the PCUSA lowered their planting costs 200%

- The Independent Christian Churches (Stadia) increased overall number of church plants 200%
- The Baptist Missionary Association of Texas increased opening new cross-cultural non-English speaking churches 2000%
- The Christian and Missionary Alliance increased congregational giving to church planting 350%

What do these statistics mean? They mean that real change is possible. Missional transformation is possible. And we're here to help you along that journey.

An Invitation

At CoachNet, we've designed a process built around these principles. If you want to move toward helping leaders become more missional within your organization, you can implement a system like the one we've laid out here or you can use ours. We invite you to consider journeying alongside us in an empowering three-year relationship with CoachNet. We can help you guide a team from your denomination or network in a *Missional Transformation Network* to rediscover your organization's unique missional contribution to the kingdom. From there, we can help you create the reproducible systems necessary to accomplish what you want to accomplish.

To create a network or for more information, contact CoachNet North America at: 1.888.318.7920 or support@coachnet.org.