"The Commitments People Make"
**by Dan Reiland**

In a recent edition of the Pastor's Coach I started with the question: "Are you asking for too much?" It dealt with the idea that if you make too many asks, you end up with little to no commitment. This article follows up with more practical ideas to help you cultivate your congregation's willingness to make vision-centered, life changing commitments.

I'm not unsympathetic to the struggles and frustrations of issues related to lack of commitment in the local church. In my own current church leadership I experience last minute cancellations, broken promises, and people who don't seem to want to "get in the game." But I remain encouraged, because this is not the norm, and people will rise up! When people let you down, remember they're human. It's because they exist and Christ died for them that we do what we do! It's up to us as leaders to look for the best in people and inspire them to a greater and more fulfilling Chris-like life.

Here are several practical thoughts that will be helpful to your leadership:

• **Embrace the idea that people do make commitments**People not only make commitments, they make commitments and keep them. They make little commitments, like showing up on time for dinner at a restaurant for fun with friends. They make big commitments, like a 30-year mortgage on their home for a huge sum of money. They make commitments to churches too. You and I both can easily name dozens of faithful people who do what they say they will do.

I want you to consider that from a leader's vantage point, it does little to no good to focus on what people won't do. Or to focus on what certain people won't do. That only wastes time and energy, discourages you, and discourages the people around you. To concentrate on the negative makes the issue worse than it really is. In fact, the more you think and talk about the negative aspects about lack of commitment in your church, you literally help lower the level of commitment even further.

It's essential that you change your focus to the fact that people will make commitments. There is no end to the commitments people make. Kids make commitments to sports teams, adults make commitments to everything from cooking classes to golf and yoga, and employees make commitments to their bosses. The honest reality is that you are competing for a certain percentage or "market share" of the commitments people will make. You must up your (leadership) game to show the value in what you are asking for. Let me be blunt. People need to know what's in it for them until they are spiritually mature enough to want to know what's in it for others.

**• Be intentional and strategic about the commitments you ask for**The previous article, "Are You Asking For Too Much," focused on placing a limit on how many different commitments you will ask of a person, such as Sunday church, ministry involvement, and Small Group participation. When you ask for many commitments that results in a lesser response than when you limit your requests, especially if you make it sound like they are all top priority. It's important that you to become very strategic and intentional in what commitments you desire to see from your congregation. Get a small team of your key leaders together to determine what you can agree on as the top priorities to move your congregation toward.

• **Make sure you are committed before you ask**OK, let's get personal. Don't ask for commitment to anything that you are not completely sold out to yourself. If you are half-hearted or uncertain about something, don't ask people to participate. This doesn't mean that you attend and participate in everything, you can't and shouldn't. It does mean, however, that with full integrity you never stand before the people, or the group you lead, and declare something to be a priority that isn't a priority in the life of the church or in your life. That will help you significantly shorten the list of asks.

• **Be certain that the person, group, or entire congregation can see the purpose and value**Time is the most precious commodity for everyone, and it's a finite resource. There are too many choices and too little time. People must make choices. As a church leader, your great challenge is to create productive environments where meaningful experiences are shared with others within your congregation. In order for commitment to happen, these church experiences must meet an equal or greater need than both the demands of their job and the pleasure of their entertainment. This is a big challenge, but we have no choice but to rise to it. The bottom line is that people commit to their work and play because they find value in it. They participate in an exchange they deem to be worthwhile. They willingly trade 40-50 hours for their paycheck. They willingly trade some of their paycheck for the hobbies they enjoy. In the same way, they must see the value in what you ask of them.

• **Always connect the commitment to the mission and values of your church**When you ask for anything that appears to be disconnected from the primary mission or vision of your church, or if it's not in alignment with your values, commitment will begin to decline. People want to know how they can make a difference and that they are part of a worthy cause – the cause of Christ, a cause that does not vary, drift or decline.
Use your mission and values as a "plumb line" to help you from becoming distracted. A clearly defined focus will greatly strengthen your ability to cultivate commitment. The people will begin to sense in a deeper way, that there is significant value because of your consistency, focus, and results.

**• Make commitment personal and specific**When you call for commitment, invest yourself in the process by "owning the ask." This is done by making a personal connection by saying something like "I want you to . . ." or "I need you to. . ." or "Together we will. . ." etc. The more specific you can be the better. For example, don't say, "Small Groups are important and you will be blessed if you join one." Say something like, "My husband and I both attend a small group and our lives have been changed because of it. I'm asking you to join a small group because I care about you, and I want you to receive this blessing too."

**• Forgive those who fail in their commitments**
No matter how much favor God grants to the process of what you do, or how masterful you get at raising the bar of commitment, there will always be people who let you down. Some let you down because they are not yet spiritually mature, others because they have gaps in their character, and some simply because their schedules are out of control. Extend grace to all of them.
In the case of those who serve in positions of leadership, gracefully offer them a "sabbatical" or another creative way to preserve their dignity, while at the same time placing someone else in that position who is ready for the commitment. Come back to the person in the future, with training and encouragement to step up to the plate again.

I hope these thoughts have encouraged you. People will not only make commitments, they want to make commitments. People want to be helpful. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to be part of a winning team that is connected to eternity and the Kingdom of God. You can offer that to them!

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