

Growing Great Leaders



by Chaplain George

Every church needs great leaders. When a position is open, we often use a variety of tools to find such people. We look on the Internet, access college placement, or form a search committee. Once a candidate is identified, we trust that his or her resume is not inflated and that he or she will be a good theological and relational fit for the church.

While there are benefits to using such approaches, my personal preference is to raise up church leaders from within whenever possible. In fact, I believe it's helpful to compare the process of growing leaders with the five basic principles of gardening. Here are the principles in action.

Prepare the soil. Church leaders cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance and anticipation within their ministry soil, presenting the role of church leader as an admirable and desirable, albeit challenging, pursuit. Too often, our best and brightest leave the church to secure formal training elsewhere—and rarely return.

Select the seed with care. Next leaders identify and screen prospective candidates for leadership (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). Do they exhibit humility and a teachable spirit? Do they have a good reputation in the church and the community? Are they actively involved? Are they submitted to current leadership? Are they faithful?

Nurture the young plants. Progressive training programs are developed that will help emerging leaders discover their gifts, grow theologically, develop communication and relational skills, and have the opportunity to express themselves and receive honest feedback. These young “plants” need to be “watered” often with tender pastoral care.

Protect the garden from weeds and pests. Young leaders need to know how to ward off the tempting pests of ministry with personal devotions, a healthy balance between church and family life, Sabbath rest, and meaningful accountability, among other things. And just as small weeds can be pulled without disrupting the plant, so also the early resolution of problems as they crop up within the body should be stressed.

Bring in the harvest. Finally, at the end of this cultivation process, such “home grown” leaders share your church’s vision, purpose, theological understanding—and heart. At the same time, they demonstrate relational strength with your existing team and have the respect of the congregation.

A bumper crop of delicious vegetables doesn’t just “happen.” It takes planning, hard work, and intentionality. The same is true when it comes to growing great leaders in your church. When done properly and prayerfully, the results can be quite rewarding.