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## On growing leaders and leaders growing

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## EDITORIAL

# ON GROWING LEADERS AND LEADERS GROWING

At the age of 26 he was an international student pursuing a master of divinity degree. He and his wife were adjusting to having a baby and living in a completely different culture. Still struggling with his insecurities and doubts, he wondered what exactly was God calling him to do and on what to focus. One day a few of his schoolmates invited him to attend a two-day Willow Creek leadership conference with them. It was the first time he had heard this name, and although did not have money, he was able to attend with their help.

Somewhere in the middle of the conference Bill Hybels said something to this extent: “Dear participants of this conference, I am going to share something with you. If it is going to leave you uninterested and cold, you are not a leader. If your heart will start to beat faster and you start sweating over what is said, you are a leader and you should work with that. . . .”

After that talk he realized God was calling him to be a leader, and he took it to heart. Out of that conviction a strong vision for reaching the most resistant people in secular society was developed. As a result, hundreds of people have been touched by God’s love.

In the early process he took leadership classes. Advisors mentored him through his study of the people God was calling him to reach. After graduation, not everything turned out to be easy. He experienced difficulties following that vision. His denomination did not accept his calling to be a missionary to secular people. They wanted him to be a pastor to the people in the church. After the loss of denominational employment there were times he lived from month to month as a freelance “tent-maker” while being a missionary.

When he looks back, he confesses: “At times the circumstances were very humiliating and painful. I learned God allows things to happen as an opportunity to grow as a leader. It took me awhile to realize the tough times

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were actually God’s favor.” This story illustrates one of the many ways in which God is uniquely involved in raising leaders and providing them opportunities to grow.

One of the factors God uses is people. If it had not been for that moment of ignition by Bill Hybels at the leadership conference, the leadership developing process would have started very differently, and probably much slower. Without growing his own out-of-box vision, his life would have probably been more in tune with the flow of what already was politically correct, to stay “out of trouble,” pursuing no-risk decisions. It would have been perhaps less stress for his wife and family, and leadership development would probably have been replaced by a steady denominational career.

We are told that the leadership development business involves 14 billion dollars annually just in the USA (Gurdjian, P., Halbetsen, T. & Lane, K., 2014). Various studies also come to the conclusion that most leadership development programs fail to achieve their goals (Gurdjian, P., Halbetsen, T., & Lane, K., 2014). How can that be? You can imagine that this continues to be a hot topic. In this issue we are seeking to provide a direction for answering some serious questions.

You will read that developing leaders is God’s business, not ours. But the questions linger on. To what degree do we join God in his work when we seek to raise leaders, when we mentor apprentices, when we teach and model? Is leadership development something “others” are doing (such as God Himself, universities, companies), or is it something with which each one of us is to be called?

The story above sets the tone for this issue of *JACL*. Reading through this issue you will encounter and reflect on a number of leaders from the biblical times such as Nehemiah, Barnabas, Paul, Timothy. Our goal is to connect theory and practice in life and ministry in the hope that they will open new insights towards more effective leadership development. As Bob Logan says in his article, “Just like you cannot learn to swim in a classroom, so you cannot learn to do ministry in a classroom.” So how then does it work? Are some people born leaders and some not? What makes a good leader? How can one obtain the ability to turn around church and bring about a positive change?

Research in leadership development has been a life-long passion for Erich Baumgartner, the senior editor of *JACL*. You will want to read his thought-provoking answers in the interview where he admits that being a leader has become more challenging due to the changes in society and the complexity of the challenges leaders face. For this reason every leader has to develop his or her own learning strategy, which has been captured by Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle.

Gregorutti, Siebold, and Ferguson examine the quality of leadership development through an undergraduate program. Hall envisions intentional mentoring in pastoral formation through a graduate program. Sparkman zooms in on leadership development experiences of several bishops within an African American denomination and shares relevant implications for those who accept the role of an executive leader.

Bob Logan, well known coach and church planter, draws from his life-long experience of great practices for growing leaders and shares helpful tips on how to avoid some common pitfalls. Stanley Patterson completes his *Theology of Leadership* article focusing on implications for the church today. As usual, we offer book reviews followed by dissertation notices we have found helpful.

As you read through the *Journal*, keep in mind that “unless you’re developing others, you’ll never have time to develop yourself.” In other words, “by developing others, you’re setting yourself up for sustainable success” (Calvert, 2017).

## References

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