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Cover Page Footnote

Dr. Robert E. Logan earned his D.Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary and is the author of *The Church Planter's Toolkit*, *Coaching 101*, and *The Discipleship Difference*. Dr. Logan currently resides in Santa Rosa, CA, and works in coaching, consulting, public speaking and training through loganleadership.com.

ROBERTE E. LOGAN
**THE PATH OF LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT**

Everyone wants to develop leaders. And everyone seems to struggle with how to do it well. It's an almost universal aspiration, yet we often fall short and don't accomplish all that we had hoped. I've spent the majority of my life focused on this very issue and want to share from my experience what I've learned. Looking back over the years, I've discovered that there are certain elements that—if we pay attention to them—can make a significant difference in moving us forward.

I've been serving in ministry for 40 years now. I began as a church planter in 1977, fresh out of seminary at age 24. I've since served as a pastor, then a coach and consultant to a wide variety of ministry leaders. What have I learned over the years about developing leaders? Let's start with a metaphor I've found helpful in describing how to develop someone by taking them along on a journey.

Think of developing a new leader as helping them hike a path. To even get to the path, the motivation has to be there for them to leave the parking lot. Just as not everyone wants to hike a trail, not everyone wants to become a leader. There is a cost and each person needs to count it before leaving the parking lot. Those who decide the journey is worth it leave the parking lot and arrive at the trailhead.

At the trailhead, we can serve as a guide for those interested in moving forward. Here we get more specific. We can show them the overview of the path on the sign at the trailhead. Where exactly are we going? What kind of terrain can we expect along the way? Who else has made the decision to join us? What are the major milestones we will pass along the way? Then people can confirm their decision to hike the trail by getting started—or they can decide to return to the parking lot. I've found it's much better to let those who want to return do so now rather than trying to convince them to move ahead if it's

not something they really want.

At the beginning, we lead the way as the guide. The potential new leaders follow, matching our pace, taking notice of our technique, and imitating us. After all, we know this trail; we have hiked it before and they have not. This stage is experiential; they need to be directly involved in ministry and begin acting as leaders, although still with our support. We often provide some initial direction and advice: “We are starting slow in order to get used to the altitude. Sometimes people want to start strong, but haven’t yet gotten used to the terrain and air, and run out of energy before our first break point.”

Soon the instructions taper off and those we are developing are walking alongside us. They begin to gain confidence; they feel they can do this. However, we still check in with them periodically and remain nearby for support. Things come up. The terrain gets rougher and begins to go uphill. Some people begin tripping on tree roots. Most are beginning to breathe hard. We give some pointers along the way.

Finally, over the next ridge, a campsite comes into view and we call for a break: “We’ll stop here, build a campfire and cook dinner.” Sighs of relief are heard all along the path. Everyone needs rest, refueling, and a chance to catch their breath.

As we all sit down around the campfire ring, rehydrating with our water bottles, fellow journeyers begin asking each other questions: “How did you avoid those tree roots?” “How did you handle the altitude?” “Where did you get those shoes?” Tips are exchanged and adapted to the needs of the hiker. The conversation becomes sprinkled with laughter as common struggles are shared—and somehow seem less daunting in the sharing: “Oh, you struggled with that last hill too? I was afraid I’d be the only one out of shape.” “No, I probably would have stopped in that last valley if I’d been hiking this trail alone. But I’m feeling ready to head out again now.” After dinner and sleep, everyone is ready to start out again the next morning.

Smaller breaks scheduled throughout the day provide opportunities to discuss questions with the hikers and celebrate their progress: “We’ve arrived at the waterfall. This is the one I told you about at the trailhead. Isn’t it glorious?” Longer breaks in the evening provide time for stories to be exchanged over the campfires and relationships to be forged between fellow journeyers. The consistent pattern allows for recharging, learning, and connection when people need it, providing structure for the journey.

At last we arrive at the destination. Everyone can feel the sense of accomplishment. “It was hard but we did it!” “Aren’t you glad we didn’t stay in the parking lot?” “There were times I thought I wasn’t going to stick with it, but I’m so glad I did.” Congratulations are exchanged all around and energy is

running high. We begin exchanging plans for future hikes. “Hey, some of us are going to hike a 14er next month. Want to join us?” “That sounds great, but I’ve always wanted to hike the Grand Canyon. I think that’s next on my list.” “What about you?” “Me? I want to take my nieces and nephews along next time—I bet they’d love this!”

A Model for Developing Leaders

Can you see how this path serves as a model for developing leaders? We can serve as a guide for others who want to develop in their leadership. They want to go somewhere, to accomplish something, and are willing to pay the cost. They can see how we are navigating leadership, and can learn from us. We can show them the route, offer encouragement and direction along the way, and help them troubleshoot when they run into problems. We also provide opportunities for breaks and connection with other peers so they recognize they’re not in this alone. When they accomplish milestones, we celebrate. We also encourage them to begin guiding others along the path of leadership now that they are the most experienced as well.

Think how this model applies to any number of ministry situations: some new potential small group leaders learning how to facilitate groups, a new board or team or ministry. Think of virtually any ministry area in the church and you can see how the pieces fit together.

Now for each stage along the path—the parking lot, the trailhead, the beginning of the trail, along the trail, campfires, and destination—I’m going to talk about some of the most commonly made mistakes people make in developing leaders . . . and how you can avoid them.

Mistakes in the Parking Lot

Many strategic errors happen right out of the gate. One of the most common is what I call the “convoy mentality.” It means that in an organization, 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 everything 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.

Rather, we can start smaller pilot projects. We don’t need to get everything and everyone to work at once. We just need to get one small part working and then we can build momentum from there. For instance, you don’t need to get all the Sunday school teachers to take a new approach. Just work with some

of them who are willing and give them the space and support to try it. If it works, others will see and it will catch on.

A related mistake is to start with people who aren't ready or willing. If we have to try to force or convince people that they should engage this path of leadership, they probably don't have the motivation they will need for the long haul. As Jesus said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). People need to be willing and motivated.

Also, if your goal is to develop leaders, you need to start with people who are already disciples. That may sound obvious, but it's not. Too often, we look for church-attenders who are successful in their careers, rather than looking primarily at following Jesus as the qualifier. As a result, many of our leadership development problems are actually discipleship problems. Would-be leaders who are not living as disciples do not make effective ministry leaders. If you want to invest in developing leaders, don't just start with nice people who attend church. Start with people who are committed to living as disciples of Jesus. That doesn't mean they're perfect, but it does mean they're wholeheartedly committed to following Jesus in loving obedience. Trying to make leaders out of non-disciples is like trying to construct a building with no foundation: it will collapse.

Mistakes at the Trailhead

People often tell me they want to develop leaders. I will often ask a simple follow up question: "What do you want your leaders to be able to do?" Most people have difficulty answering that question. "Well, I want them to be able to lead." I press for specifics because often people have a lack of clarity about what they're trying to accomplish. What qualities are they trying to produce? What skills do they want the leaders to have? What do they want the leaders to accomplish? Say you're developing small group leaders. Unpack all of the skills you want them to know how to do: asking good questions, conflict resolution, leading prayer times, etc. When you get vague ideas down to clear, specific objectives, you can do a much better job training leaders. Be clear at the trailhead—usually an initial orientation—about what you want the leaders you're developing to be able to do, and then adjust the development process to be sure it addresses those issues.

One element that often comes at the trailhead stage of leadership development is the training. By training, I mean a classroom-type training meant to prepare people for leadership. I am not against trainings; I've led many of them myself. But I think trainings should do less than what we often expect of them. Instead of "just-in-case" trainings—events that cover everything a lead-

er might possibly need in the future—I find “just-enough” trainings to be far more effective. Give your new leaders just enough information to get started—no more than that. Then get them started. They will learn best through experience. You can always add more information as they need it. They’ll be much more receptive to it at that point anyway.

A common downside of “just-in-case” trainings that try to cover too much is educating people beyond their obedience. For instance, if we teach someone about a specific command of scripture—let’s say serving the poor—then we immediately move on to start teaching them how to pray and then how to use a particular Bible study tool, we haven’t slowed down enough to let them practice the first thing they learned. Rather, if you teach about serving the poor, then give them time and a specific assignment to practice it. Ask them how it went and process that experience. Only after people have already been practicing what they do know is it time to add more knowledge.

Mistakes at the Beginning of the Trail

Following directly from the last point, the beginning of the trail is the time for practicing. People need to get started in ministry before they know everything. There should be no expectation of perfection. Of course they will stumble and make mistakes. That’s an essential part of learning. Just like you cannot learn to swim in a classroom, so you cannot learn to do ministry in a classroom. So give people a few tips and get them into an environment where they can begin to practice and try it out. One of the biggest mistakes we make at the beginning of the trail is not giving people enough space to practice, try, and make mistakes. Put them in a small group, a Sunday school class, an outreach team, and let them learn on-the-job.

At this stage of leadership development, I’ve always been a big fan of “show-how” training. If you want to train a new small group leader, start by letting them watch you lead. Meet and talk about what they observed. Then let them help in some way—maybe they just lead the prayer time. Meet and talk again about how that went. Then let them take the lead while you just help a bit. Eventually, they are leading the group and you are just observing and meeting to give feedback. And beyond that, they can begin training someone else.

Here’s the pattern—applicable to any ministry skill:

I do, you watch

I do, you help

You do, I help

You do, I watch

You do, someone else watches

Whether you follow precisely this pattern or not, be absolutely sure to build

in some kind of hands-on experiential training in the early stages of leadership development. You don't want to leave a brand new leader with an overwhelming amount of responsibility, of course, but you also don't want to give them nothing practical to do. Provide incremental practical responsibilities alongside support.

Mistakes Along the Trail

Leaving new leaders without intentional support is one of the common mistakes as you move along the trail. All too often we provide a training, then consider the job done. For instance, instead of the more gradual process described above, we may offer a training seminar for new small group leaders, then tell them to go start a group and let us know if they have any questions. Although technically we're still there if they need us, very few new leaders will take advantage of that opportunity to circle back and ask us questions unless we specifically carve out time for them to do that. Be sure not to abandon your new leaders as they get started in their ministry roles. They'll need a guide then more than ever.

As we continue to provide support alongside our newly developing leaders, we should make sure it's holistic support. Support is not all about ministry and leadership skills—it's also about the person as an individual. Each time we meet with the new leaders, which we should be doing regularly, we should help them focus on one thing from their personal or spiritual life they want to focus on and one thing from their leadership or ministry life they want to focus on. The best leaders are growing in both areas. Personal development and ministry development need to be done in tandem. Don't fall into the trap of making it all about ministry and ignoring personal growth and development.

Another common mistake along the trail is veering off course because something else now looks more interesting. Visionary leaders are most prone to this error. They've done the fun part—now it's just a matter of implementing the vision. That's the boring part. For a while we were all about launching small groups; now that's forgotten and we're all about whole-life worship. Next month it will be something else. It's tempting for visionary leaders to want to move on to the next big initiative and assume the implementation of any previous visions will just happen on their own.

But what does that look like from the point of view of those following the guide? It looks like you're veering off into the bushes. Maybe that means this trail wasn't very important after all and they should look at a different one. When this kind of behavior becomes a pattern, we are teaching those who are following us to ignore what we are saying. They come to learn that we don't really mean it; we'll be on to the next thing soon anyway so why bother getting started?

The important thing along the trail implementing ministry is consistency: staying on track, doing what needs to be done, and focusing on both personal and ministry development at the same time. One helpful way to do that is campfire breaks along the way.

Mistakes at the Campfire

The most common mistake made at the campfire stage is not having campfires at all. Many leaders consider it a waste of time to slow down, take a break, connect with peers, and reflect on how things have been going. They can view it as taking people off track from what they are supposed to be doing. There are two miscalculations that underlie the decision to skip the campfires: 1) underestimating the importance of a break, and 2) underestimating the importance of peer contact.

Ministry is hard work. People need breaks. They need fun, recreation, and relationships. Although we may think that the more we work straight through, the more we'll get done, but that's not actually the case. Productivity goes up when we build in breaks.

Productivity also goes up when people have time with their peers. We assume new leaders need to learn from experienced leaders and have nothing to learn from each other. That's untrue. Since they are at similar stages of ministry, they can learn a great deal from the experiences, successes and failures of others. Make sure your new leaders aren't working in isolation. Provide them with opportunities to bond with and learn from peers.

These times of taking breaks with peers are meant to provide both stretch and support. Peers can affirm one another, providing encouragement and prayer. They are the people who "get it;" they understand the challenges and can empathize. They also are in a unique position to know just how much to challenge one another. They know what's a realistic stretch versus what's too much.

Tap into the wisdom of peer leaders for all of these benefits. You don't need teaching content or material for these times. Just provide structured time for them to connect and share and pray. You'll be surprised at how beneficial your developing leaders will find it.

Mistakes at the Destination

Finally there's the destination. You've accomplished what you set out to accomplish. Maybe you've developed a functional new generation of small group leaders. Maybe you've implemented a successful new children's program. Maybe the outreach project is working and you're seeing results both inside and outside the church. Whatever the goal was, you've accomplished it and you can see the results.

So what mistakes could you possibly make at the destination? After all, you're finished, right? True, but there actually are several important mistakes to avoid at this stage of developing leaders. The first is not taking the time to celebrate. Be intentional about stopping and carving out time to review the accomplishments. Doing this is especially important if you're working with a team, but individuals should be celebrated, too. Highlight what went well and what was learned.

Another mistake common at the destination is related: moving on to the next initiative too fast. People need a break between projects. By moving immediately on to the next thing, you're communicating that what was just accomplished was no big deal. What's really important is still in the future. This message can be demoralizing to many people who have worked hard on this most recent project. Be sure to take time to celebrate, reflect and rest before moving on to the next big initiative.

Take a Look at Your Own Path

If you take the time to walk yourself through this metaphor, assessing what you have in place for leadership development at each stage along the way, you can make significant improvements to your leadership development pathway. Mine the ideas and tips for each stage of the path. Pinpoint areas that are missing or need improvement. Make adjustments that will work in your ministry environment. Even seemingly small changes can make a huge difference. You can use the key questions below to begin walking yourself through the assessment of your leadership development process. You'll be amazed at what can be accomplished.

Key Questions

Where are your parking lots?

How could you improve engagement in the parking lot?

What kind of orientation do you provide at the trailhead?

What's the fewest number of things people need to know before they can get started?

What skills do you need to teach new leaders at the beginning of the trail?

How are you providing ongoing support for new leaders?

In what ways are you allowing for experimentation and failure?

How could you improve peer contact among your leaders?

Where is your destination? How would you know if you got there?