

"Morph:" the Texture of Leadership For Tomorrow's Church!

by **Sr. Pastor Ron Martoia** (*Publisher: Group Publishing*) (ISBN# 0-7644--2450-5) \$19.95 (a 'must-read' book on Leadership)
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"Log-In for Lifelong Learning": Chapter 6 (pg. 76-78)

"It's frequently echoed at seminars: "Leaders are learners! You cease learning, you cease leading." From blended families to biotech, we need a working knowledge in a host of arenas just to intelligently speak and connect with the diversity in our congregations. If we are to do our job as leaders, our goal is not only connecting in our talks, but also connecting others with resources. **Leaders at their finest aren't primarily answer repositories: . . . they are resource brokers!**

Not long ago, the pastor was considered one of the leading intellectuals in the community, anymore. We're usually not the leading intellectuals in our community, either. On the contrary, Christianity in general (& the pastoral office in particular) are often demeaned, caricatured & sketched as out of touch, on the fringe, socially inept & intellectually sub-par.

Learning is morphic bedrock. The very nature of growth makes this self-evident. Growth requires change; need for change comes through learning. The Church built by Jesus, against which the gates of hell will not prevail, requires growing-edge, laser-sharp leaders.

Consider this: Who taught you how to assess where you are in your skill-set development, and what next steps will help you arrive at your desired destination? What is your desired destination? How does personal growth happen? What are the things you should be thinking about for long-term interior growth? What is the shape of personal emotional health?

MY DARK CYCLES:

"Credit goes to my wife, who several years ago pointed out cycles of unexplainable melancholy in my life. I'd arrive home from the office and Valerie would notice my typical verbal flow was a mere trickle. Initially, I thought I was simply living a little too much at the office. But there seemed to be a pattern. When I faced a difficult decision, one that impacted how others thought about me, I went into a dark reclusive brooding. This wasn't an easy admission. Discoveries like this invite us into a whole new sphere of personal growth. When we say personal growth, I think we often look to acquire new knowledge to help the church get healthier, assimilate people better, or launch a better small group ministry.

But morphic leaders take a look at self: not first as a repository of skill accumulation for the success of the church enterprise. . . . but as the locus of God's activity to bring about interior maturity. Self is looked at so we can see deeper surrender within ourselves. Deep down, inner-life work is where we confront our fears, identify sources of depression, understand our emotional wiring, come to grips with control issues, confront obsessive patterns & ask God to grow us up. This is growth, that when "leaked" into team-context, sends a clear signal. Personal growth is the basis for leadership life.

Every time we hit a snag in our personal lives, marriages, parenting, or leadership, we come to a critical junction. Any snag tells us our skill-set has reached exhaustion. We hit a plateau in what is available in our arsenal to deal with the current issue. Whether looking at cyclical depression (as I was) or repeated staff-conflict over the same issues, snags are invitations to morph.

At every offered invitation, we have only two options: reset & recede, or morph & proceed. For many, the work of morphing is just too hard. Letting go of deeply ingrained patterns, asking "why" questions until an answer emerges, or seeking help from somebody down the trail a bit further is too painful for some. The plateau only lasts so long before a recession leads to decline.

The other option is to seek help, resources, or mentors: confront inner monsters, and adopt new skills. This option leads to morphic movement deep down inside and the opportunity to proceed further down the path.

Here's the fundamental reason change must start with you and me as leaders. The way we see, interact and view the world is a cumulative result of all our experiences and learning. From our upbringing to our schooling, from our friends to our life experiences. Every factor of our life-experiences molds and shapes how we view everything around us. Stop and think about the implications this has for leadership."

**"Informational vs. Transformational:
We have "Information/Transformation Confusion"(p.31-33)**

The world in which we live places a high value on information. We pick up a subtle message very early in our schooling. Information acquired is what wins the day. My school experience is typical. How long did it take to figure out school tests were about short-term memory skills? By third grade I'd pretty much beat the system. Hone your ability to store

information that the teacher said you would need to spit out on paper, take a test, score a good grade and start storing the next round of data.

We all came to realize that the better our short-term memory, the higher our grade. What was actually learned and integrated into life was secondary. High school and college are the same basic, with stakes a bit higher & cost of classes higher too. We come to equate the intake of information with transformation.

What happens when this migrates church-side. We have "Information / Transformation Confusion".

In the Sunday School classroom, we teach and assume that memorized Scripture, daily devotions and a regimen of prayer brings life-change. While this is possible, it may also do nothing but lead to a calcified, legalistic pattern.

Move down the hall to the pastoral staff offices. It is too closely replicated. This is exactly why we need a less program-driven, technique-fixed model of leadership development. Instead we need an interior development program that helps leaders uncover their deepest core design & then tools them to build on it.

This glance into the inner working of leadership is counterintuitive in our seminar-driven, principle-extracting, "higher-education" model of learning. I confess that I had the '90's seminar-junkie mentality. Attend a conference, grab some resources, go back and blow away your elders with all your new ideas, experience frustration because no one else could quite "get it", and then trot off to another conference to find something that might fit better and meet with less resistance. I must admit I did it more than once.

I think seminars are invaluable, programs essential, and resources the lifeblood of any ministry team worth its salt. However, all those things could be well in place and a church can still miss the health and growth mark. The obvious disconnection happening in my head in those early years of ministry was that techniques and skills don't change my life or the life of anyone else. Life, health and growth are about interior issues, the inner ordering of the leader's life.

Essentially leaders are architects. We don't build buildings, but we do design space. We need to conceive part of our leadership responsibility as being space-feel architects. The ethos or feel is called organizational culture: the unspoken rules of how things work, what values we hold, how we treat each other, and how conflict is handled.) (page 31)

***If people entering our churches instantly "feel" the flavor, temperature & tenor of the culture, ...then how do we shape & sculpt that feel into something inviting, expectant & thick ...with the compelling presence of God?**

People want to "sample". . . . before they are "sold" (page 31)

I asked a downtown Atlanta vendor why they were giving so many samples out front of a # of side-by-side fast-food restaurants. *He said: "People want to sample before they are sold!"* Lesson learned! Church visitors are exactly the same!

We now find people who are far more deliberate & discriminating in their church-selection process. This is especially true of those who've never been in a church, or are reconnecting after a decade-long hiatus. Visitors aren't attending the churches they grew up in as kids.

People investigating church are looking to connect with others,

and then... some are looking for the transcendent: usually in that order.

They are far more apt to want to "belong" f-i-r-s-t... BEFORE... they experiment with "believing"!

People want to "sample" before they are sold. This makes the issue of church ethos exceedingly critical. If they are simply sampling to see if they want to "buy in" then the "feel" they experience each & every week... is crucial!

Church consultants say people decide with the first two to five minutes whether or not to attend a church again. The point? It isn't message, music, or media. It is ethos: pure and simple. When we've done informational surveys of visitors who've been around a few weeks, asking: "Tell us about your experience here: what do you think of our church?" it elicits the same response. People describe what they feel from others in the lobby, and what they feel like when they leave a worship experience. In short, they almost always comment on the tangible . . . though invisible. . . feel of ethos.

The inner morphing of the leader is so critical because what is going on inside us automatically overflows into the space around us. What leaks from the leader & church leadership team does more to sculpt ethos, than any other factor: including preaching, music & the rest of the arts.

What do we know about the leak of morphic leaders ? Over the last several years, I've made several observations which follow.

This is a brief sample of the excellent leadership writing & church-health materials found in Ron Martoia's must-read book: "Morph".
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