

How to Raise the Commitment Level in Your Church

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[edited and expanded from various sources]

Rick Warren's observation impacted me deeply:

One way to assess whether your church is maturing spiritually is this: the standards for leadership keep getting tougher as time passes. Every year, a deeper level of commitment to Christ and spiritual growth is required of those who are leaders. The principle is this: every time you raise the standards for leadership, you bring everyone else in the church along. A rising tide raises all the boats in the harbor.

The focus of sermons and classes about commitment is often on those who are semi-committed or barely committed. We are starting in the wrong place! We will see a noticeable growth in the commitment levels of the church when we focus on raising the commitment of the leadership, not those who are the least committed or even on those who are semi-committed to the church. When we raise the standard of commitment for those who are in visible positions of leadership, beginning with self, the expectations of everyone else are raised.

Here are three big concepts to help us toward increased commitment. (1) Share a vision, make it a big vision, and follow it with a big confident ask. (2) Ask personally and specifically. (3) Move forward aggressively with the commitments that are in place to demonstrate the possibilities.

People respond better to passionate vision than to pressing needs

To raise the commitment level, understand that people respond to a passionate vision more than to pressing needs. Too many appeals for commitments and funds focus on the needs of the church rather than the vision of the church. Needs will motivate a few of the most faithful, but even then, the result is often "square pegs" in "round holes." If people were motivated by organizational needs, then every time a need was presented it would immediately be met.

Make sure the vision is worthy of a "big ask." Some church leaders are afraid to ask for a big commitment of time, involvement or funds, fearing they will drive people away. But people do not resent being asked for a big commitment if there is a great purpose to be fulfilled.

Ask confidently. Study the Bible to see how Jesus asked for commitment. He was always clear and confident. He was not reluctant to ask men and women to drop everything and follow him. Here is an interesting reality: The greater the commitment you request, the greater response you will get.

People want to be committed to something that gives significance to their lives. They respond to opportunities and responsibilities that give life meaning. They are attracted to a challenging vision. They want to be a part of something worthwhile. On the other hand, people are unmoved by weak appeals and pitiful requests for help. Jesus knew this when he said in Luke 14:33, None of you can be my disciples unless you give up everything (Luke 14:33).

You must personally, specifically ask people to get on board

You cannot assume that people will automatically commit to the church or its work. If you do not ask people for commitment, you will not get it. You have not because you ask not. Have you considered that many community organizations require more from participants than local churches do? Amazing! If you have ever been a Little League parent, or the parent of a student in a high school band, you know that when your child signed up, you were required to make a major commitment to help with providing refreshments, transportation, trophies, and funding for trips in addition to making sure your child was always present. It was not voluntary; it was required if your child wanted to participate.

One of the most helpful things a church can do for people is to help them clarify what commitments they should make and what commitments they should decline. Many people are half-committed to two dozen causes rather than being totally committed to the thing that really matters. Often the barrier to spiritual growth is not lack of commitment, but overcommitment to the wrong things. People must be taught to make wise commitments.

Ask specifically. A key in developing commitment is to be specific as you ask. Tell people exactly what is expected of them. Make clear that people are expected to commit to faith in Christ, to submit to baptism, to be involved in the church, to commit to discipleship by developing spiritual maturity, to commit to ministry, and to fulfill their life mission. When you ask for a special commitment, be specific about what is needed and how important it is.

Ask personally. Another key to developing commitment in people is to identify the benefits that will come as a result of the commitment. God gives us an example in Scripture. Many of the commands in Scripture have promises attached to them. We are blessed when we are obedient. Explain the personal benefits, the family benefits, the benefits to the body of Christ and to others, and the eternal benefits. People really do have an innate desire to learn, to grow, and to improve.

Build on the commitments you receive rather than hoping for future commitments

Even though you tell people how high they can soar (by challenging them with a big commitment), start with whatever commitment they are willing to give. Begin with an initial commitment regardless of how weak it may seem. Challenge people to make a commitment and then grow into it. Find ways to take baby steps while elevating your expectations over time. Your church will be healthier as a result.