

Leading *From Your* STRENGTHS

Four “Inescapable Transitions” Every Ministry Team Must Face

By Rodney A. Cox



It's 10:20 p.m. and a piercing winter wind refuses to relinquish its iron grip on an early spring night. Kevin sits alone in his office. Normally this senior pastor of a growing church would have raced home from work, wolfed down his dinner, and gotten ready for a weekly small-group study at his house. That study was a high point of the week for Kevin and his wife, Karen.

Not tonight.

Tonight Karen got a call saying Kevin was staying late and to go on without him. The lights from his office shine out onto a dark, empty parking lot as he sits at his computer and struggles with the words on the screen.

Kevin isn't wrestling with the right phrases for Sunday's sermon; he's working on his resumé. In fact, he's seriously thinking about getting out of pastoral ministry altogether.

For 12 years at his former church, Kevin experienced a fruitful, fulfilling ministry. He'd built a small, close-knit staff; worked well with his elders; and been able to focus on preaching and teaching his flock. Now, after only 18 months at his present church, Kevin had become so frustrated—so deeply angry with Rick, the senior music minister—he dreaded even coming into the office. That wasn't the worst. His internal tension level had risen so high because of the conflict that it often overflowed at home. He snapped at his kids and even pushed back from his wife.

The emotional burden of these unresolved issues weighed on Kevin like a 75-pound pack. That weight became a constant feeling of failure—a nagging heaviness that he had let down his family, his God, and especially the people in his flock. As Kevin typed his resumé, struggling to paint a positive picture of his gifts and strengths, he thought

about adding words like hypocrite, loser, failure and quitter.

How could he talk about reconciliation and forgiveness on Sunday, and yet have so many unresolved issues with Rick? It wasn't from a lack of prayer or face-to-face effort to make things right. He'd never tried harder in his life to get on the same page with another person. But these two committed Christians were polar opposites. On every issue—from the look of the bulletin to the style of music on Sunday—they had different points of view. And every time Kevin tried to bridge the gap and make things better, he seemed to make them worse.

You might ask, “As the senior pastor, couldn't he just fire the source of all this frustration?” Kevin knew this wasn't an option. There were no ethical or moral problems, and there was no question that Rick worked hard and wanted the best for the church. This, added to the fact that Rick had been at the church for 17 years, meant he wasn't going anywhere.

Which was why on this dark, windy night, Kevin thought of going someplace, anyplace where there wouldn't be so much pain.

What If Things Really Could Change?

If you've ever worked or volunteered at any level in a church, ministry or other organization, you can probably identify to some degree with Kevin's feelings of isolation, frustration and disappointment. In far too many ministry teams, what's common is discord and division, rather than the unity of the Spirit. Instead of exercising our spiritual gifts and callings, many times we feel pressured and stressed, frustrated instead of fulfilled.

But what if the solution to these common conflicts was

closer than you ever dreamed?

What if there really was a way for a team to eliminate predictable problems before they happen? What if there was an effective solution for conflict that already exists between team members? What if you really could put people in positions on a team that matched their strengths, so they felt useful and energized? What if there was a way to keep the focus of a team on ministry, and serving the Lord with honor and excellence, instead of division and defeat?

What Will Tip the Balance?

In 1 Corinthians 12:18, the apostle Paul concludes his discussion of how God's people are like members of a body by stating, "But now God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as he wanted." We believe that's absolutely true today. The people you're working with isn't the result of a random coincidence. These people are part

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of God's story for your life. That's an amazing thing to think about in itself. It's also why investing time in building a healthy, functional, effective, empowering team is essential, not optional.

Which takes us back to Kevin whose ministry and, potentially, his career hung in the balance. It was during this time that he was introduced to a simple process called *Leading From Your Strengths™*. Kevin took a simple 10-minute online assessment as part of the process that opened his eyes to the way God wired him. What he learned about himself and others not only transformed his relationship with Rick, but fundamentally changed the way he related to other important people in his life.

For Kevin and Rick, going through

The Leading From Your Strengths™ Assessment

There's a reason your ministry team operates the way it does, relating to the strengths and limitations each member brings to the team.

For many teams these strengths and limitations are never examined, and the result can be a constant state of problems, conflict, or simply, ineffectiveness. Without such an examination, the source of these issues remains a mystery, and finding a solution that leads to building a close-knit team is difficult, if not impossible.

Discovering your God-given strengths and the strengths of the people God has called you to work with is easier than you might think. A 28-page online strengths assessment is included in the purchase of the *Leading From Your Strengths* book—just released by Insights International. In just 8-10 minutes, this online assessment gives you instant eye-opening results! With over 19,860 statistical combinations, this assessment will amaze you with its accuracy.

Many people have told us they've never experienced an assessment that told the story of how God wired them like this one does.

this process made working at church fun and fulfilling again. But what most amazed Kevin was what happened with Rick. In working through their personalized reports and understanding the principles involved, they not only turned the corner on their long-standing animosity, but their relationship turned into a genuine friendship!

Four Inescapable Transitions

The process of building close-knit ministry teams involves *four inescapable transitions* every team must face. Learning how each person on your ministry team is wired and how they respond to each transition is the first step in valuing and appreciating the diversity of strengths God has placed on your team.

■ **Problems and Challenges.** The first transition involves discovering who on the team is "Aggressive" and who is "Passive" when it comes to solving problems and accepting challenges. Some people naturally have an aggressive problem-solving bent, while others tend to approach problems and challenges more passively.

The former have many valuable traits. They're results-oriented. They'll get the job done if given the appropriate authority. No one needs to push them. They naturally have a drive to make things happen. Problems and challenges are opportunities, rather than reasons to quit. In fact, aggressive people crave a challenge. Without one they'll become bored, and their motivation will disap-

pear. They tend not to mess around!

People who are passive when confronting problems and challenges are also valuable. By nature, they're conservative and cautious. They want to know all the facts before they move forward to solve a problem or challenge. The Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared," could be their motto too.

The passive style can be critical for a team to have when difficult decisions must be made or complex problems arise. Typically, these decisions can't be made and these problems addressed as effectively with an aggressive style. The person with a passive style will insist on studying the problem before a solution is sought. Decisions are purposefully and carefully considered. No hasty decisions will be made if the passive style is in charge.

■ **People and Information.** The next unavoidable transition your ministry team will face involves people and information—namely, how your team members trust others and the information they receive from them. Some members of the team are "Optimists," who tend to be trusting of information they receive from others. Others are "Realists," who look at that information with a more skeptical eye. Do they view what others say using logic and facts, or are they influenced by words that stir their emotions?

Optimists are expressive and trusting, outgoing individuals with a high need for social interaction. They're parties waiting to happen! They love to talk

and communicate in an emotional, enthusiastic way, which makes them eager to share their feelings with others. They instinctively believe the best about people and trust what others tell them.

optimists, those friendships are generally deeper. Realists are good listeners, which may be one reason for those strong relationships.

■ **Pace and Change.** Change can have

What if you really could put people in positions on a team that matched their strengths, so they felt useful and energized?

Optimists can be creative problem-solvers, often using their innate persuasive ability to influence others to their point of view. These strengths make the optimist an invaluable, fun part of any ministry team.

The realist has many strengths as well. Realists are logical and critical thinkers. They're not easily taken advantage of. If you have a difficult decision or complex issue, the realist is the one you want to help think it through. Although realists tend to form fewer friendships than do

a great impact on your team. Change is a constant for ministry teams and is the third inevitable transition all ministry teams must face. Sometimes change appears abruptly; other times it approaches with fair warning. How your team members react to change is critical to the success of the team. Do they take change in stride, adjusting on the fly to different circumstances, or do they need preparation before change, and logical reasons to do so?

People who are "Predictable" love

stability and security in their lives. They won't respond well to change unless they understand how and why the change is being made and have time to adjust. "We've always done it that way," is their motto. They would prefer the pace of activity on the team to be slower rather than faster.

The "Dynamic" person can also bring incredible strengths to a team. These people can work at a fast pace, juggling many different projects at once. They're true multitaskers! They bring energy to the team along with their versatility. Dynamic people usually won't be overlooked or uninvolved. They're change agents who want to move forward, rather than cling to the status quo. They prefer a fast-paced environment.

■ **Rules and Procedures.** Every team has rules, procedures and constraints its members must deal with, and the last unavoidable transition involves how your team members will respond to them. Some are going to operate by the book. They naturally follow established rules and procedures in their business and personal lives. Others will consistently challenge the status quo and question established procedures.

People with a "Conservative" style tend to follow established rules and procedures in all areas of their lives. They're conscientious people with high standards for themselves and others. They believe there's a right way and a wrong way of doing things, and they're constantly trying to find the right way. In addition, they're precise and exacting, with great attention to detail. If you want to influence the conservative person, make sure you have the facts to back up what you say. They're not swayed by emotion or lots of words; rather, they want facts and figures to verify what they're told. They prefer this information to be in writing and from a reliable source.

The "Independent" person, not surprisingly, has the ability to think independently. They're the "out of the box" thinkers, and may even be seen as pioneering. They're not bound by maintaining the status quo and, therefore, believe there's always a better way of doing things. They're bold and willing to take risks. To achieve their goals, they may be willing to bend established rules and procedures.

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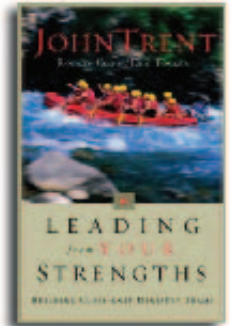
Putting it All Together

There's a reason your ministry team operates the way it does. It relates to the strengths and limitations of each team member. For many teams, these strengths and limitations are never examined. The result can be a constant state of problems, conflict or simply ineffectiveness. Without such an examination, the source of these issues remains a mystery, and finding a solution that works is difficult, if not impossible.

The Leading From Your Strengths™ process involves learning the principles of the *four inescapable transitions* and applying those principles by having each team member take the assessment, sharing the results with the team. Just as the process helped Kevin and Rick, it can help each person on your team understand his or her God-given strengths and value, and appreciate the

strengths of others on the team, blending the differences to break down barriers and build unity as God desires.

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