

THE YOUNG LEADER'S GUIDE TO BUILDING INFLUENCE



Stephen Blandino

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
A Young Leader's Most Important Lesson	5
A Young Leader's Most Important Test	10
Ten Words of Wisdom for Young Leaders	13
Leading Up: How Young Leaders Can Influence Those Who Lead Them	18
Teachability: A Young Leader's Posture to Maximize Growth	23
Ten Signs of an Emerging Leader	28
Coaching Young Leaders to Succeed	31



Introduction

As a young leader, you're probably anxious to make your mark in the world. That's how leaders are wired, and most of us feel like we're running out of time. That pressure to perform is exacerbated when you're young. You feel the need to prove yourself, garner respect, and build influence with others. Honestly, it's pretty frustrating when the older leaders around you don't take you seriously.

My journey as a leader has been marked by periods of waiting, delay, frustration, and growth. I've experienced the joy of success and the heartache of failure.

I started my leadership journey volunteering regularly with my church youth group. I didn't have any influence, but I had a desire to serve. I'd show up early to set up for services, and stay late to tear down. Eventually I was promoted to "summer intern," and had the pleasure of mowing the grass and serving a couple of days a week in the church office. When the summer concluded, they let me keep mowing the grass.

After a couple of years in college, that role evolved into a part-time associate youth pastor. A year and nine months later, I became the full-time youth pastor. It was exciting to see God changing lives, and I worked hard to invest in younger leaders.

I spent eleven years in youth ministry before transitioning into a vice president role at a young leader development organization. My responsibility was to provide oversight to training and product development.

Four years later my pastor asked if I'd return to lead a new small group ministry. I worked one day per week with the church and continued serving with the leadership organization the remainder of the time. My role at the church increased in responsibility, eventually becoming full-time. Then I transitioned into the role of executive pastor. Finally, my wife and I planted a church near downtown Fort Worth where I serve as the lead pastor today.

Every step of my leadership journey has been filled with ups and downs, lots of lessons, and great opportunities. Most importantly, God has shaped me as a leader. I've discovered how to build influence, the extraordinary responsibility associated with leadership, and the road God uses to develop emerging young leaders.

That's what this guide is all about: *how to build influence as a younger leader in a way that honors God*. There are some parts of this guide that will make you stand up



and say, “Finally, somebody gets how I feel.” But, and I warn you, there will be other parts that make you want to ditch this guide and move on to something more exciting. Please resist that temptation. What I’m going to share with you is crucial to your development as a leader. These lessons are easier to learn now than later.

Leadership can be complicated, and the longer we take to learn foundational lessons, the more we jeopardize what God wants to do in us and through us. There’s nothing worse than building large amounts of influence only to come crashing down later in life.

In this guide I’ll share the most important lesson young leaders must learn, and the most important test every young leader must pass. I’ll also offer ten words of wisdom that will help you along your journey. You’re probably wondering how to build greater influence with the people above, so I’ll give you ten practical strategies to do just that. Finally, I’ll give you three keys to becoming a teachable leader. These tips will help you grow faster and go further as a leader.

If you work with younger leaders, I’ve included some strategies to spot emerging leaders, as well as a helpful plan to coach young leaders. Let’s begin our journey.



A Young Leader's Most Important Lesson

People tend to view leadership as a privilege, a position, or a way to promote a specific agenda. It's often viewed as a title that opens doors, or a permission slip to make a demand, acquire a want, or secure an opportunity. Sometimes it does. But perks and privileges, titles and positions, are not what leadership is all about. In fact, titles are the lowest form of leadership. As John Maxwell observes, "The only thing a title does is buy you a little bit of time." Time to prove what kind of leader you really are. Time to build true influence that isn't dependent on a title or a position. At its core, real leadership is first and foremost a *stewardship*.

Matthew 25 offers a powerful lesson on stewardship from the parable of the talents. In the parable, a man takes a long journey and chooses to entrust his possessions to his servants while he's gone. To one servant he gives five talents, to another, two talents, and to another, one talent. From this parable we learn the most important lesson of leadership... "the stewardship lesson." This lesson has three important faces that have extraordinary application to leadership.

1. Stewardship is a Trust not a Possession

A trust is anything that God has placed in your care. A possession, on the other hand, is something that belongs to you. In our world today, much of what we have—money, jobs, time, ability, skills, possessions, and yes, leadership—is viewed as a possession. We usually see them as something we own. God, on the other hand, views these things as a trust—something we steward with great care.

In the parable, the master brings his servants together and gives each of them talents. A talent was a measurement of weight. The value of a talent was determined by whatever was being weighed. In other words, a talent of gold was worth more than a talent of silver. The master chose to leave talents of money with each servant, what most commentators believe was worth several thousand dollars.

In the exchange, something crucial happens. The master didn't *give* his servants the money for them to take as a personal possession. Instead, he *entrusted* the money to them. Why? Because the servants were stewards, and stewardship is a *trust* not a



possession.

So why did the master give the servants (or the stewards) different amounts of money?” Because each servant had different levels of capacity. Matthew 25:15 says, “To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, *each according to his own ability*; and he went on his journey.” The master distributed opportunity not in an effort to be fair, but rather in a manner consistent with his servants’ abilities.

The servant with the capacity for larger responsibility was entrusted with larger opportunity. And the servant with the capacity for smaller responsibility was entrusted with smaller opportunity. The sum of money entrusted to the servants was directly proportionate to the capacity of the servant’s ability.

I believe the same is true in leadership. God will entrust you with leadership opportunity that is directly proportionate to your leadership ability. But that will only happen if you view leadership as a trust not a possession. Don’t compare yourself with others. You are who God made you to be. He will not judge you based on somebody else’s gifts, abilities, or performance.

God will entrust you with leadership opportunity that is directly proportionate to your leadership ability.

As a young leader, resist the temptation to demand leadership opportunity. You will always feel that you can handle more than you currently have. Always! That’s normal. You may even be tempted to think you can do what your boss does better than he or she does it. That’s also pretty common. In those moments when you’re growing restless and weary, focusing on growing your ability. The greater your ability, the more God will eventually entrust to you.

2. Stewardship is Management not Ownership

When the master entrusted his money to the servants, it’s important to remember the role each person played in the parable: The master was the *owner*. The servants were the *stewards*. What do stewards do? Stewards manage the wealth of their owner, *with their owner’s best interests in mind*.

Notice what the servants did with their master’s wealth. Matthew 25:16-18 says, “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who *had received* the two *talents* gained two more. But he who received the one *talent* went away, and dug a *hole* in the ground and hid his master’s money.”

What was the difference between the first two servants and the third servant?



The first two managed the owner's wealth with *his* interests in mind. But the third servant took an ownership mentality. Owners manage resources with their own interests in mind.

What's the application for us today? God is our master, which means He is the rightful owner of all that we have, including our leadership. We are simply stewards who have been called to manage what God owns with His interests, not our interests, in mind. No matter how big or small your influence is, God owns it. He always will.

If you want more leadership opportunity, ask yourself this question: how am I managing the leadership opportunity that God has already entrusted to me? Be honest. Score yourself on a scale from one to ten. Even if you score yourself high, what are two or three ways you could improve?

Whatever you do, don't adopt an ownership mentality. Your role as a leader is not to leverage your leadership for personal gain, but for the benefit of the people you serve. Keep God's interests at the front of your mind, and serve under your leader with a spirit of respect, kindness, and support.

3. Stewardship is Faithfulness not Recklessness

After a long time, the master returned to settle accounts with his servants. The first two servants managed the talents well, ultimately doubling what was entrusted to them. To each of these servants, the master said, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (verse 21, 23).

Things didn't fare so well for the third servant. He said: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours." (Verse 24-25)

The third servant's stewardship was driven by two things: excuses and fear. This deadly duo is the driving force behind reckless stewardship. As young leaders, it is crucial to avoid excuses. You must own up to whatever you are responsible for, no matter how big or small it is in your own mind. And when fear knocks at your door, ignore its knock and take responsibility for the trust of leadership that God has placed in your hands. Why? Because a "judgment day" is coming. Leaders are always accountable. If you desire more influence, you have to own the responsibility that comes with it. Leaders can tolerate failures, but they won't tolerate excuses.

After hearing the third servant's excuses, the master called him a wicked, lazy



slave. In the end, the talent was taken from him and he was cast into “outer darkness.”

In his book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn contrasts the difference between faithful stewardship and reckless stewardship by sharing the story of two young men in Cairo Egypt.

The Egyptian National Museum with the King Tut exhibit is housed in Cairo. This boy King was 17 years old when he died. Because Egyptians believed they could take their possessions with them into the afterlife, King Tut was buried with all of his treasure. His burial site was literally filled with tons of gold—from gold tombs to gold artifacts. But he didn’t take his gold with him. Over 3,000 years later, it was discovered by Howard Carter in 1922.

Contrast King Tut with William Borden. Borden was born the heir to great wealth in 1887, and graduated from Yale University. He devoted his life to bringing the Gospel to Muslims. At the age of 25, only four months after beginning his ministry in Egypt, Borden contracted spinal meningitis and died. He is buried in a graveyard, overgrown with grass, hidden off the back alley of a street in Cairo. But in his short years, Borden gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. His tombstone reads these words: “Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.”

God doesn't judges us on the size of our ability, but the stewardship of our ability.

What was the difference in these two young leaders? Borden chose to steward his leadership and resources faithfully in service to God. King Tut chose to steward his leadership and resources recklessly in service to himself.

When the master returned to settle accounts, he used “faithfulness” as his measuring stick. The master didn’t look at the one-talent sized servant and judge him because his ability was less than the other servants. He judged him because he was an unfaithful steward with his ability.

God is the same way with us today. God does not judge us based on the *size* of our ability and leadership. God judges us based on the *stewardship* of our ability and leadership.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” God’s job is to determine what he can entrust to you. Your job is to be faithful with what He’s given to you.

Why is faithfulness important? Because, like the servants in the parable of the talents, one day we will stand before our Master to give an account. 2 Corinthians 5:10



says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Let me make one final observation. When the master affirmed the first two servants for their faithfulness, he said, “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.”

Perhaps you want God to entrust you with a larger income, but God is waiting for you to faithfully tithe on your current income. Maybe you want God to put you in charge of greater opportunity at work, but God is waiting for you to faithfully steward your current job. Or maybe you desire a greater leadership role, but God is waiting for you to take the gifts and abilities you have and faithfully use them right where you are. Here’s the point: If we’ll stop focusing on the big things, and start being faithful with the small things, God will take notice of the small things and then entrust us with the big things.

Leadership is a stewardship. It is not something given to us for our own interests or consumption. It is not a privilege we get to spend on a monument to ourselves. Stewardship is a trust managed faithfully, not a possession owned recklessly.

Stewardship is a trust managed faithfully, not a possession owned recklessly.

Stewardship is a trust, not a possession. Stewardship is management, not ownership. Stewardship is faithfulness, not recklessness. And the same applies to the stewardship of leadership. Leadership is a trust that we must manage faithfully. It’s not a possession that belongs to us. We don’t own it. And we cannot steward it recklessly.

I begin this guide with this important lesson because it frames all of leadership. It helps you see the true purpose of leadership, and it gives you the right perspective on how you view the influence God has (and will) entrusted to you. If you don’t see leadership through the right lens, you’ll never lead well. The world needs great leaders, and learning this lesson early will set you up to become one.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How are you stewarding the leadership God has already entrusted to you?
2. What is something practical you can do to better steward your influence?
3. What would happen if you began each day with a prayer of thanks for the influence God has given you? How might this change your attitude toward more influence?



A Young Leader's Most Important Test

You've probably heard it said that 90% of an iceberg is below the surface of the water. Character is the same way. It may not always be seen, but it reveals itself when you bump into it.

Unfortunately, some leaders have very little below the surface because they're enamored by *doing* more than *being*. They're more concerned about what they're accomplishing than the person they're becoming. As a young leader, God is developing you below the surface of the water, where it counts the most. Ruth Barton captured it best when she said, "We set young leaders up for a fall if we encourage them to envision what they can do before they consider the kind of person they should be."

Developing the character to sustain your life and leadership for the long haul is imperative. It's the most important test you'll face as a leader. The question is how? What does it take to build your life below the surface? The answer is *lordship* and *hardship*.

"We set young leaders up for a fall if we encourage them to envision what they can do before they consider the kind of person they should be."

Ruth Barton

Lordship is the first key to building character. Lordship asks the question, "*Who owns you?*" In our Americanized version of Christianity we too often look at Christ as nothing more than an addition to our overly complicated lives. "Addition Christianity" is nothing more than accepting God's grace so that we can receive the insurance of eternal life. Jesus becomes nothing more than an add-on to our lives, like a job, school, car, sport, or television. But this type of Christianity doesn't form Christ-like character within us.

Christ wants to *own* your life...not in an abusive way, but in a lordship way. It only makes sense considering He's already paid for you. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "You were bought at a price."

When Christ owns you, His character is formed in you. Why? *Because you always take on the character of what owns you.* If money owns you, you'll take on the character of greed and materialism. If your job owns you, you'll take on the character



of work-a-holism. But if Christ owns you—if your identity is in Him—your character will reflect it. If I want Christ-like character to be formed within me, somebody besides me must own me. When Christ’s Lordship is truly at work in your life, “Addition Christianity” is replaced with “Ownership Christianity.”

Hardship is the second key to building character. Hardship asks, “How do you perceive and respond to tough times?” As much as we hate to admit it, our character rarely grows during the good times. It’s the hardships of life that God uses to form us, mold us, and shape us. And while the tough times may not come from God, He certainly doesn’t waste them either. *Hardship is a two-sided coin—it reveals our character and refines our character...if we let it.*

Hardship is a two-sided coin. It reveals our character and refines our character...if we let it.

I think Joni Eareckson Tada, who at the age of 17 was crippled in a diving accident, understands the value of hardship best. In an interview with Larry King, when she was asked where God was in the terrorist events of September 11, Joni responded: “After 35 years living as a quadriplegic, I learned that God permits what he hates in order to accomplish those things that he loves.” She went on to say, “Sometimes the reasons for what he allows are hidden from our sight, but what we do know is that he loves to redeem and reclaim and rescue and save those who turn to him in need. You see, I need him now more than I did the day of my accident, and maybe that’s not such a bad thing.”

Most of us won’t have to personally endure hardship like Joni Eareckson Tada’s accident or the horrific events of September 11th, but if you will experience hardship. It’s your character that makes the difference in how you respond.

Character formation isn’t easy. It requires surrender to Christ’s Lordship and suffering through hardship. But in the end, the beauty of Christ’s character is formed within you.

It’s no secret that many leaders have collapsed under the pressure of leadership and allowed their lack of character to sabotage their influence and impact. I don’t want you to become one of those leaders. Let Christ form His character in you. Welcome His Lordship...it truly is a joy. Christ’s lordship is not a damper on your fun. Following Jesus comes with a price, but it also comes with extraordinary peace, joy, hope, and power.

At the same time, cooperate with the life-shaping process that comes during hard times. Don’t waste the tough times by responding to them with cynicism,



bitterness, or anger. As you respond in a way that honors the Lord, He will develop your character under the surface, and in turn, He'll trust you with heavier amounts of leadership. Pass the character test. It's the most important test you'll face.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Is there any area of your life where you are resisting Christ's lordship?
2. How are you responding to the hardships in your life? Does anything need to change in your response?
3. What aspect of your character needs to become more like Christ?



Ten Words of Wisdom for Young Leaders

As a young leaders, you're full of energy, vision, passion, and faith. That's what I appreciate about young leaders. You aren't afraid to dream big and take risks; to think big and break routines. Too many leaders gravitate toward safety and security as they get older. They lose their edge, and they stop dreaming. Worse, they settle for average. That's not the way it's supposed to be.

I want to help you take your vision, passion, energy, and giftedness and channel it in a direction that will help it become the asset God intended it to be. An asset that creates forward momentum, and advances good in the world. I want to ensure the assets God has placed within you aren't short circuited by attitudes or behaviors that will side track your potential. And I want to give you practical tips that will help you leverage who God made you to be for His glory and His purpose. Here are a few words of wisdom to help you do just that.

1. Put Character at the Top of Your List

I just shared two keys on character (lordship and hardship), so I won't belabor the point. Let me simply add this: don't sacrifice character on the altar of achievement. Achievement should always come second, and character should always top the list. You never want to let your competence outpace your character. Choose now what kind of person you want to be (not just want you want to do).

2. Make Listening Your Default Response in Meetings

As a young leader, you want to be taken seriously. One of the best ways you can do that is to embrace a practice that sounds counterintuitive to that statement: *listen*. You may be tempted to frequently voice your opinion; however, when you give voice to your opinions, credibility always hangs in the balance. This doesn't mean you shouldn't ever talk, but you want what you say to be valuable. Speaking wise words will always swing the pendulum in your favor. Speaking foolish words tends to over exaggerate the swing in the opposite direction. The words of Jonathan Swift might help frames this



insight: “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

To help you embrace a listening posture, ask yourself this question: Is what I’m about to say helpful, respectful, and beneficial? Helpful is “what” you’re going to say; respectful is “how” you’re going to say it; beneficial is “who” will benefit from it. If your words don’t land on the positive side of that question, it’s usually best to swing to the silent side of the pendulum. Author and business leader Jim Collins offers some great wisdom for leaders when he asks, “What’s your questions to answers ratio, and how can you double it in the next year?” Learn to ask more questions rather than declaring all of your answers. It’s better to speak less and be respected more than to speak more and be respected less.

When you give voice to your opinions, credibility hangs in the balance.

3. Develop the Master Skill

Authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner once wrote, “Learning is the master skill. When you fully engage in learning—when you throw yourself whole-heartedly into experimenting, reflecting, reading, or getting coaching—you are going to experience the thrill of improvement and the taste of success. More is more when it comes to learning.” You may have graduated from school, but make sure you never graduate from learning. Being a lifelong learner is what empowers your relevance for the rest of your life. Eric Hoffer captured it best when he said, “In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” Don’t be equipped for irrelevance. Keep learning.

4. Sharpen Your Self-Awareness

All of us are trying to figure out who we are when we’re young. That’s a natural part of the growth process. What’s sad is when people get older, yet still lack the awareness of who God made them to be. Increasing your self-awareness while you’re young helps you not only lead better, but also make better decisions during key transitions points. This is especially true when it comes to your life purpose. In other words, the more you understand about how God wired you, the better decisions you’ll make about the direction you choose for your life.

“In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

Eric Hoffer



Good self-awareness will help you make better decisions about jobs, priorities, and time management. To increase your self-awareness, take some practical assessments like *Strengthsfinder 2.0*, *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, or *Leading From Your Strengths*.

5. Seek Out Coaches

Coaching is possibly the most important strategy that will help you grow. Seeking out coaches and mentors will push you light years ahead of where you would be if you travelled alone. As Andy Stanley says, “coaching helps you go further, faster.” Good coaches take A.I.M. at your potential. They *Assess* your performance, provide helpful *Insight*, and cheer you on with *Motivation*. By seeking out coaches and mentors, you’ll close the gaps between who you are and who you have the potential to become.

6. Establish Your Boundaries

Too many leaders have crashed and burned because they didn’t put the appropriate boundaries in their lives to keep them healthy. Research suggests that only one-third of leaders finish well. While you’re young, establish boundaries to help you protect your family, your relationship with God, your health, your schedule, and your sexual purity. Boundaries provide banks for the river of your life. Otherwise, your life becomes an out of control flood of dysfunction and destruction.

7. Learn to Work with People

In my early leadership years, I burned bridges and hurt people because of my own insecurities. I had to learn to cultivate people skills, emotional intelligence, and build goodwill with people. Bill Hybels said, “*My definition of ‘people skills’ includes sensitivity to the thoughts and the feelings of others, and the ability to listen—and I mean really listen—to the ideas of others. I’m looking for people who genuinely care for other people, who view others as more than a means to an end.*”

Your book smarts might get you hired, but your inability to work with people will get you fired.

I once knew a young leader who was so forceful with his opinions that he repelled everybody who worked with him. He couldn’t attract volunteers because of his “my way or the highway” attitude. Your ability to work with people and successfully manage conflict will determine your effectiveness as a leader. Your book smarts might get you hired, but your inability to work with people will get you fired.



8. Own Your Mistakes in a Spirit of Humility

You will make mistakes...this isn't even a question. We all do. The question is, how will you respond when you make them. You can make excuses, shift the blame, point your finger, laugh it off, avoid the critics, and pretend it never happened...or you can *own them*. When you own your mistakes you exhibit a posture of humility and responsibility. When you don't, you actually deplete your credibility. Either way, you reveal your true character.

When you own your mistakes you exhibit a posture of humility and responsibility.

Think about the leaders you know who are consistently arrogant and prideful. Their lack of humility is repulsive, isn't it? None of us like to be around people who think too highly of themselves. In their book, *A Leader's Legacy*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner made a powerful observation about the importance of humility as you advance in your leadership journey: “The words *human* and *humble* share a common origin. They both come from the Latin *humus*, meaning earth. To be human and humble is to be down-to-earth, both feet planted firmly on the ground. Interesting, isn't it, how as people climb the ranks in organizations they also climb to a higher floor in the building, getting farther and farther away from the ground? It gets harder and harder to remain humble the higher up you go.” Embrace a humble attitude now, while you're young. One way to do it is to readily admit and own your mistakes. Learn to laugh at yourself, and don't take yourself too seriously.

9. Grow Your Pain Threshold

Leadership is painful, and some of your greatest pains will come from your early years of leadership. Lack of experience, poor judgment, and unrefined skills may lead to some of your pain. Other pain will be the result of people who betray you, gossip about you, or even lie to you. Still, other pain will stem from the resistance you feel when you try to initiate new changes or launch a new vision.

While your goal isn't to create circumstances that foster pain, you must understand a key insight taught by Dr. Sam Chand: *Leaders only grow to the threshold of their pain*. If you fail to grow your pain threshold, you'll always take the path of least resistance. Good leaders don't seek pain, but they don't avoid it either. Growing your pain threshold happens when you choose to do the hard thing, and when you stop avoiding difficult leadership decisions.



10. Execute with Excellence

One of the things I love about young leaders is your ability to dream and innovate. This is one reason every team needs young leaders. They keep the organization fresh, and prevent it from drifting into complacency and irrelevance. But the great separator between average young leaders and great young leaders is the ability to execute with excellence. It's one thing to dream up brilliant new ideas, but it's an entirely different thing to turn that brilliance into tangible results. Execution and follow-through make the difference. Execute with excellence and you'll build credibility with people.

These ten words of wisdom will take you a long way if you heed them. You already do some of them well, while others need some refining. Keep them in focus. When you're tempted to take a shortcut, push yourself forward. Keep growing, learning, listening, and discovering. You'll be amazed at how much you grow in a very short time by simply putting these principles to work.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Which of these ten words of wisdom is your greatest strength? Which is your greatest weakness?
2. What is one thing you can do today to improve in the area that you need to grow the most?
3. Who are some other young leaders you could discuss these principles with?



Leading Up: How Young Leaders Can Influence Those Who Lead Them

I recently had a conversation with a young leader who is fairly new to his organization. He is full of vision and ideas, but he also recognizes that he's the new kid on the block, and his influence is limited. His question was simple: "How do I lead up?"

This is a common question, and frustration, among young leaders and new employees. While it takes time, I believe there are practical steps that emerging leaders can take to speed up the process. Here are ten ways you can lead up.

1. Responsibility: Do what you were hired to do

The first thing your leader wants to know is whether or not you're getting the job done that he or she hired you to do. Nothing else matters if you're not taking care of the basics. Some young leaders are anxious to take on additional assignments, but if you're not responsible with your current job description, why on earth would your leader expand it? This is the starting point to leading up. It's at the heart of someone who can be trusted.

2. Excellence: Consistently over-deliver

We've already discussed the importance of excellence, but it's worth advancing another step.

Excellence is a commitment to do more than enough to get by. It's delivering work that is downright impressive. *Responsibility means you can be trusted. Excellence means you can be heard.*

Responsibility means you can be trusted. Excellence means you can be heard.

If you want your leader to hear you, he has to see a level of excellence that gets his attention and makes an impression. Doing what you're supposed to do doesn't get



noticed. It's expected. You don't get a trophy or a bonus for doing what you were supposed to do all along. But when you consistently over-deliver, your leader starts paying attention. This one act will set you apart from the pile, and will immediately give you greater influence to lead up.

3. Teachable: Be a curious listener and learner

We're going to tackle this in more depth in just a moment, but let me give you a teaser. Nobody likes a know-it-all. Nobody! If your leader feels like she can't teach you anything because you already know it all, you'll never lead up. That's a turn off.

No matter how smart you are, try not to make assumptions about what your leader does or doesn't know. Often your leader has more information or experience than you're privy too. That additional insight is usually impacting his or her decision-making. Remember, most of us don't know what we don't know.

When you make yourself teachable, you endear yourself to your leader. Be humble, listen more than you talk, and exercise patience. Welcome honest feedback, and don't get defensive when your leader gives it. In addition, increase your value to the organization by cultivating an aggressive learning attitude.

4. Priorities: Value what's important to your leader

Sometimes we let our pet projects get in the way of what's most important to our leader. If you want to lead up, you can't put your preferences ahead of the organization's priorities. That will never work. Embrace the vision and personalize the focus of the organization. You can't lead up if your leader thinks you have an ulterior motive or a secret agenda. If you genuinely can't support the organization's vision, perhaps God is leading you to do something new.

If you want to lead up,
you can't put your
preferences ahead of the
organization's priorities.

5. Sacrifice: Pay the price others are unwilling to pay

We live in an entitlement culture. People want their perks, privileges, and power without paying a price. If you want to lead up, you can't demand your way to the top. You have to be willing to make sacrifices. I'm not suggesting that you sacrifice your values, convictions, faith, or family. I am suggesting you put in more time, mental energy, and a higher quality of work than others. I am suggesting that you volunteer for projects (so long as you're delivering on your other responsibilities) without expecting



something in return.

Sacrifice is not a popular word. None of us like it. It's too personal, too uncomfortable. Truthfully, sacrifice just isn't convenient. Ever. But the leaders I know who are making the greatest impact always made the biggest sacrifices. Maybe it won't be that way for you, but I haven't found a significant leader yet who doesn't share that value.

You usually don't have to search for sacrifice. It has a way of finding you, and calling your name. When it calls, don't pretend you didn't hear. It just may be the voice of the Holy Spirit nudging you to take a step of faith, pay a bigger price, or lead beyond your comfort zone. We all love an inspiring story, we even want to write our own, but the most inspiring stories are always accompanied by the greatest risk, pain, or sacrifice. Dreams that are safe are rarely significant.

6. Team-Building: Be a developer of people and teams

Pastor Peter Haas says there are three types of leaders: technicians, equippers, and multipliers. Technicians do the work. Equippers empower people to do the work. But multipliers build entire family trees of equippers. The employees that get my attention the most are the multipliers.

Multipliers have the ability to build teams and develop leaders of leaders. They don't just get the job done; they get it done with and through leaders of teams. When leaders develop people, they raise the potential of organization. The by-product is that they make themselves more valuable to the organization.

You only have 24 hours in your day. If your entire day is spent doing, and you never take any time for developing, you'll fall short of your ultimate potential. Build teams, release leaders, and watch the quantity and quality of your work suddenly multiply.

7. Creative Problem-Solving: Be solution-minded

Emerging leaders don't whine about the way things are, but rather, wrap their heads around a problem and work diligently to find the right solution. The fastest way to gain influence is to solve problems. I'll say that again: the fastest way to gain influence is to solve problems. Solving problems makes life better for people, which, in turn increases the influence of the person that solved the problem.

I don't mind if a team member brings me a problem. What I do mind is when I have to be the one to always solve the problem. When you bring a problem to your



leader, simultaneously bring three possible solutions. I want to know that you've thought about it ahead of time. You'll never lead up if your leader has to do all of your thinking for you.

I'm also more than willing for my team to shoot holes in my ideas and strategies. In fact, we have a high value for "candor and care." We communicate with candor and care about our ideas and realities. What I don't like is when someone shoots a hole in my idea but offers no alternatives. Anybody can do that. There's always someone to poop on the parade. That doesn't take any skill. True leaders embrace the facts but solve the problems. Their solution-minded perspective allows them to act as creative problem-solvers.

8. Preparedness: Value your leader's time

I used to have a weekly meeting with my pastor followed by a staff meeting that I led with the rest of our team. Before the meeting with my pastor began, I always prepared for two things.

First, I knew every meeting would start with him asking this question: "What do you have for me?" I had better have something. If I didn't have an agenda, I wasn't prepared, and thus, was wasting his time.

Second, prior to the meeting, I always looked ahead to what was coming down the pike. I didn't want my pastor to ask me something that I wasn't prepared to address. If it was time for staff reviews, I wanted to give him an update before he asked. If a major event was approaching, I wanted to bring attention to our action plan before he asked. If something was brewing, I wanted him to know about it so he wasn't blindsided.

To lead up, you have to think and plan ahead. Ask yourself, "What does my boss want to know and need to know?" Anticipate your leader's questions so he doesn't have to ask. Time is valuable, especially for a very busy leader. You'll have greater influence with your leader when you respect his time.

9. Relationship: Develop relational connection

At the end of the day, people like to work with and for people that they like. Without relational connection, work becomes an emotional drain. To develop connection, take three steps.

First, share the conversation. In other words, make sure you and your leader have equal time to talk and listen. Lopsided relationships (and conversations) rarely



work. If you talk too much, you're wearing out your leader. Second, ask your leader questions that you don't know the answer to. This stirs curiosity and demonstrates a spirit of humility. Know-it-all mentalities are relationship killers. Third, spend time celebrating. Whether outside of work, or acknowledging wins at work, a spirit of celebration causes everyone to relax and enjoy the relationship, not just the results. This is my biggest personal challenge on the relationship side. I continually have to remind myself to celebrate the wins with my team.

10. Flux: Know when to push forward and when to pull back

Emerging leaders need to master the art of flux. On one end of flux is what authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner call, "challenge the process." This leadership practice means challenging the status quo, taking risks, and helping the organization improve. Young leaders love this practice because they see things that can get better. This is the PUSH side of flux. Every organization needs it, and young leaders can offer tremendous value by providing it.

Young leaders must also master the other side of flux: PULL. While there are no doubt times to push by challenging the process, there are also times to pull back, yield to your leader, and be sensitive to what's important to him or her. Pushing too hard could break trust, permanently handicap your ability to lead up, or even be your final exit ramp.

The flux between pushing forward and pulling back is more art than science. There's not a perfect formula. You have to know how to read the situation, and how to read your leader. Sometimes you need to challenge the process and help the organization take forward strides. At the same time, not everything needs to be challenged. If you have to give an opinion about everything, you're likely annoying your leader.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Which of the ten strategies for leading up do you need to grow in the most?
2. Which strategy would be most helpful to you at this season in your leadership?
3. Who can you share these ideas with today?



Teachability: A Young Leader's Posture to Maximize Growth

Many leaders pride themselves on their commitment to personal growth. They recognize the connection between personal growth and organizational growth, and they understand the importance of learning new methods, embracing relevant strategies, and staying up to date with best practices. In a word, they might describe themselves as “teachable.”

That would be a true description. But over the years I've come to realize that teachability has three faces to it. If you're going to become the most effective leader, you have to embrace all three forms of teachability, and the sooner you learn them, the better leader you'll become. You'll set yourself apart from your peers by adopting all three.

The Three Forms of Teachability

1. Curiosity

The first form of teachability is a natural curiosity. Curiosity reveals itself as a deep desire and commitment to acquire knowledge. Curious people are never satisfied with what they know. They have an insatiable appetite to learn more and expand the width and depth of their knowledge. If you want to know whether or not you're a curious young leader, ask yourself these questions:

- What have I learned since I graduated school?
- Do I regularly read books, attend conferences, listen to podcasts, and participate in webinars where I will stretch my thinking, learn new ideas, and acquire fresh insights?
- Am I personally driven to learn, or do others have to continually prod my development?
- Do I have a plan for personal growth?



This form of teachability focuses on the acquisition of information. It's like adding files to your file cabinet of wisdom. While a self-directed curiosity is essential to a growing leader, it's also the easiest form of teachability. By easy I don't mean it doesn't require effort, discipline, or commitment. I mean it's contained within the mind of the leader, and therefore is usually void of dialogue or accountability. Basically, the learner decides if he will do anything with what he has learned. There's nobody to push back, challenge thinking, or confront assumptions. The individual ultimately determines if they like what they've heard, read, or watched.

Without the "curiosity" form of teachability, leaders will get stuck in old paradigms, become lazy, and slide into ruts that inhibit personal and organizational progress. At the same time, if the only form of teachability a leader embraces is curiosity, they will fail to mine the gold and confront the gaps that the other two forms of teachability offer. Curiosity is an essential starting place, but there's more.

2. Coachable

The second form of teachability is the willingness to be coached by others. Intensive coaching is one of the price tags of growth. I've come to recognize that some people are not coachable, even those who are highly curious.

Recently I was in a meeting with a group of leaders who were seeking to learn, grow, and improve in their personal leadership and organizational effectiveness. I noticed one particular leader was continually resistant to new ideas. When others would suggest he try something different, he always had a reason why it wouldn't work, or why someone else in the organization would resist it.

This leader was very "curious." He was well read and well educated. But he wasn't coachable. He couldn't see past his own well of knowledge. He couldn't accept valuable ideas from others in the group. In his mind, he already had the answers (which weren't working).

To assess whether or not you're a coachable young leader, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I consciously place myself in environments where I'm not the smartest person in the room?
- Do I intentionally seek out coaching and mentoring relationships?
- Do I listen more than I talk?
- Can I readily receive ideas, insights, and feedback from people "above" me and "beneath" me?



Being coachable introduces the dialogue that is often missing at the curiosity stage of teachability. It combines *insight* with *interaction*. It welcomes the input of a coach when they take AIM at your potential. If you fail to receive their input, they'll look for somebody else to invest in.

3. Correctable

The third form of teachability is the hardest. It's the willingness to let others correct you. While this is the least enjoyable of the teachability forms, it's the one that has the potential to reveal your greatest gaps and your biggest blind spots.

As a young leader, it took me a while to embrace this form of teachability. Needless to say, my first performance review didn't go so well. When my gaps were confronted, I was pretty defensive. Over time, I came to realize that when somebody who cares about me chooses to correct me, they're really doing me a favor. They're saving me a lot of future heartache if I'll receive what they have to say.

To determine how correctable you are as a young leader, ask yourself these questions:

- How do I respond when my boss gives me a low score in my performance review?
- How do I respond when my spouse addresses an area of concern in my life?
- How do I respond when a friend tells me I'm wrong?
- How do I respond when a professor gives me a low grade?
- How do I respond when a peer points out holes in my ideas?

Do you justify your behavior? Do you try to convince the other person that they're not seeing things properly? Do you try to *correct your corrector*? The inability to receive correction in a constructive manner is nothing more than a debilitating posture of pride. If you can't be corrected, you are not as teachable as you think you are.

The inability to receive correction is nothing more than a debilitating posture of pride.

These three forms of teachability provide a complete picture of what it means to be teachable. All three are crucial to your growth. Without curiosity, you'll never get started. Without coaching, you'll never live up to your full potential. And if you're not correctable, you'll never address the gaps and the blind spots that everybody (but you) sees in your life.



So, take the test. On a scale from one to ten, grade yourself:

How Curious am I?

How Coachable am I?

How Correctable am I?

Which area did you score the lowest in? What can you do to improve by two points?

A Final Word

We've covered several keys to help you build influence. My prayer is that you won't race past the most important lesson or the most important test. My hope is that you will yield to some words of wisdom that will save you a great deal of heartache, and put you on a path to greater personal and organizational impact.

As you implement the tactics to "lead up," I trust you will honor your leader without slipping into manipulation. And throughout your journey—young or old—I trust you will remain forever teachable. This learning journey as a leader never ends. We can always grow, always improve, and always help others.

In the final section of this guide, I offer some helpful tips for those who work with younger leaders. That may be you. If so, I hope you enjoy some practical tips on identifying and coaching emerging young leaders.



For
Those
Who Work
With
Young
Leaders



Ten Signs Of An Emerging Leader

If you serve in any kind of leadership role, you have the incredible responsibility and opportunity to develop young leaders. Spotting them isn't always easy, but there are certain signs to look for. While most emerging leaders don't exhibit all of these characteristics, here are ten signs that might indicate they have leadership potential.

1. They Have Influence

This one's pretty obvious. If people are following, pay attention. Others see something in the young leader that makes them *want* to follow.

2. They Take Initiative

This is a crucial sign of potential leadership. If an individual takes initiative, it demonstrates their ability to *lead themselves*. Leading self opens the door to leading others.

3. They Possess Forward-Thinking Abilities

When somebody can think with innovation and creativity, they may have the ability to move things in the right direction. They are not confined to the world as they know it, but, instead, can envision better ways to get the job done.

4. Their Spiritual Giftedness Indicates or Assumes Leadership

Leadership is a spiritual gift. However, it is not the only spiritual gift that requires the ability to lead. Consider giving a young leader a spiritual gifts assessment and see what comes to the top. They may have the gift of leadership. Or, they may have a gift that assumes a position of leadership—such as pastor, teacher, apostle, administration, etc.



5. They Possess Strong People Skills

The ability to work well with people will naturally increase a person's influence. When you see solid people skills, you may see an emerging leader.

6. They Have the Ability to Motivate and Mobilize Others

Anybody can point out a need. People with initiative see the need and then do something about it. But people with the ability to motivate and mobilize see a need and then inspire others to join them in meeting that need. It's a natural progression toward higher capacity leadership.

7. They are Problem Solvers

Emerging leaders don't whine about the way things are, but rather, wrap their heads around a problem and work diligently to find the right solution. Again, the fastest way to gain influence is to solve problems.

8. They are Growing as a Disciple

Followers of Christ are committed to lifelong growth. And as disciples prove faithful in the small things, God tends to elevate their responsibilities—often in areas of leadership. This was true in my life. My leadership journey evolved from faithfulness in simple volunteer opportunities to increasing levels of organizational leadership.

9. They are Teachable

When a young leader is teachable, it reveals his or her desire to improve, grow, and be excellent in all they do. Teachability leads to excellence and excellence makes people take notice. It's the excellent that often lead in any given field or industry.

10. They Model Servant-Leadership

Servant leaders lead by serving and serve by leading. When you see a potential young leader focused first on serving, leadership opportunities may follow. This characteristic builds on the idea of "growing as a disciple."

I am not suggesting that emerging leaders must possess all ten characteristics before they can be considered for leadership. That's unrealistic. After all, potential must be developed. In fact, I didn't exhibit at least five of these when I first started out.



Our job as leaders is to spot the potential and then proactively develop it. Somebody believed in you; now go believe in another young leader in the making.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Which of these qualities do you see in the younger generation around you?
2. Who is an emerging young leader that you can invest in today?
3. What should be your first step to invest in a young leader?



Coaching Young Leaders to Succeed

On a couple of occasions I referred to taking AIM at a young leader's potential through the power of coaching. I sincerely believe coaching makes a significant difference in the growth of all leaders. We never outgrow our need to be coached. Nor do we outgrow our responsibility to coach young leaders...to take AIM at their potential by providing Assessment, Insight, and Motivation.

Assessment

Coaching begins when an individual's performance, character, skills, strengths, and weaknesses are adequately assessed. You cannot effectively coach a young leader if you do not understand his or her current reality. And you cannot help a person reach their potential if you do not understand their capacity in key areas of life.

By asking thoughtful questions, administering strengths assessments, and/or watching performance, you will quickly glean the information necessary to accurately assess an individual's strengths and gaps.

Insight

Following an accurate assessment, coaches provide valuable insights that will help a young leader grow, improve, and accelerate. This process takes place in three ways. First, the coach asks *good questions*. Questions are typically the best coaching tool. Most people will come to the right conclusions about growth steps when a coach asks the right questions.

Second, coaches provide *perspective*. When a person is being coached, they will share ideas, strategies, and practices they feel compelled to pursue. As a coach, your job is to help leaders process these ideas, serve as a sounding board, and provide perspective.

Third, coaches offer insights that serves as the *missing ingredient* to success. Coaches must be careful not to prematurely jump into "answer mode." You should ask questions and providing perspective first so the young leader can learn to think for



himself, and identify solutions best for his context. However, there are times when a leader hits a sticking point and the coach needs to offer ideas and best practices. This is especially true in formal coaching relationships that revolve around professional matters where the individual is seeking specialized expertise.

Motivation

Finally, a good coach serves as a motivator...someone on the sidelines cheering on the individual as they implement new ideas and pursue growth. Coaches that cannot encourage people will never inspire them to keep going when things get tough. Great coaches balance the right amount of motivation with appropriate accountability. They encourage the people they coach without endorsing excuses.

I'll say it again, great coaches take A.I.M. at potential. They provide Assessment, Insight, and Motivation. It's really not all that difficult when you think about it. All of us have helped people gain perspective on their strengths and weaknesses (ASSESSMENT), asked questions and offered valuable thoughts and ideas (INSIGHT), and come alongside to encourage them in the journey (MOTIVATION).

Leveraging Your Connection Capital

Each one of us has a network of relationships that have impacted or enriched our lives. These relationships make up our **connection capital**. In other words, we have connections with people who also have influence with us. When we share this connection capital with the people we coach, we help them grow. Simply put, when we give the people we mentor access to our network of relationships, we help them go further, faster.

For example, if during the process of coaching a young leader I discover their desire to grow in an area where I have little knowledge, the best thing I can do is lend my connection capital to them. How? By connecting them with a potential coach, expert, or friend in my network of relationships. Doing so enables young leaders to gain access to insight and expertise that they otherwise would not have been able to get. I'm not talking about multi-level marketing or some abuse of relationships. Rather, I'm promoting what professor, author, and leadership mentor, Bobby Clinton refers to as "Sponsoring."

Sponsoring is a form of mentoring. Sponsoring essentially means that you become a connector—matching the right apprentice with the right mentor based on the needs of the apprentice and the expertise of the mentor. It means sponsoring



people into relationships that will accelerate their growth.

When leaders embrace this form of mentoring, they leverage their relational network for the good of emerging young leaders who need coaching in areas where your relational network may excel.

When we hoard our influence capital, we do two things. First, we limit the use of our network's God-given gifts. Second, we limit the growth of the young leaders God has placed in our lives. If you want to develop young leaders, become a connector. Strategically lend your connection capital to those you are coaching and mentoring.

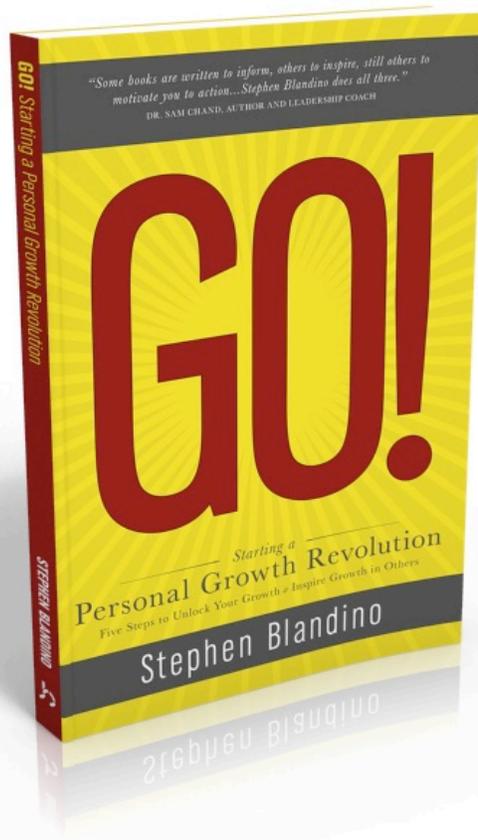
Questions for Reflection:

1. How can you begin coaching a young leader in your sphere of influence?
2. What does AIM look like in this coaching relationship?
3. Who in your network of relationships do you need to connect with a young leader?



GO! Starting a Personal Growth Revolution

By Stephen Blandino



Five Steps to Unlock Your Growth and Inspire Growth in Others?

Do you want to close the gap between who you are and who you want to be? Do you want to help your friends, co-workers, or employees grow to their full potential.

In *GO! Starting a Personal Growth Revolution*, Stephen Blandino guides you through the five levels of personal growth, and equips you with the practices to maximize growth within you and around you. No matter how you want to grow, *GO!* provides the inspiration and the roadmap to help you take your next step.

“Some books are written to inform, and others to inspire, still others to motivate you to action. In *GO! Starting a Personal Growth Revolution* author Stephen Blandino does all three. You will learn, grow and move forward. The concepts are real-life and the strategies, if followed, will actualize your full capacity potential.”

– **DR. SAMUEL R. CHAND**, Leadership Coach, Consultant, and Author of *Cracking Your Church’s Culture Code* (www.samchand.com)

“Anybody who wants to become all that God wants them to be has to read *GO!* Stephen hits the nail on the head on how we develop personally so that we can maximize our God given potential!”

– **HERBERT COOPER**, Lead Pastor, People’s Church, Oklahoma City

Available Today At

amazon.com

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS

Check out
Stephen Blogs

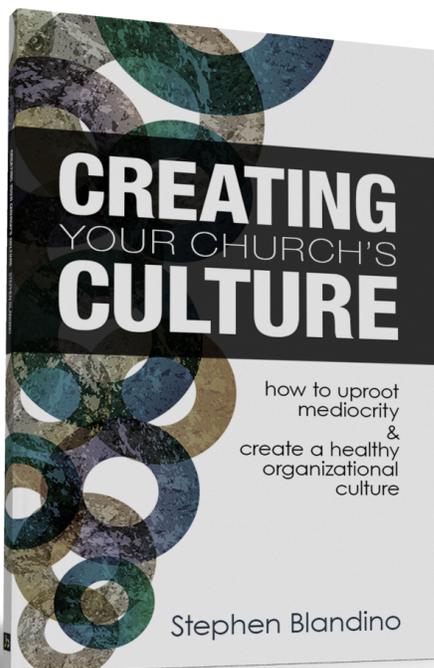
www.StephenBlandino.com



Creating Your Church's Culture

How to Uproot Mediocrity and
Create a Healthy Organizational Culture

By Stephen Blandino



How do you create a thriving organizational culture in your church? Churches are committed to a spiritual mission, but it is often the *organizational aspects* of the church that hinder the mission from moving forward.

In *Creating Your Church's Culture*, you'll learn how to define your culture, activate the culture equation, infuse your values into your culture, create a learning culture, develop effective systems, increase employee and volunteer engagement, measure the health of your culture, and uproot bureaucracy.

This practical book is loaded with wisdom and inspiration to help you improve the organizational aspects of your church's culture. Plus, the book includes a culture assessment and implementation guide to help you apply

what you're learning.

"Concise, strategic, and practical! Stephen Blandino gives you the roadmap you need to develop a healthy organizational culture with fully engaged team members."

- **Scott Wilson**, Pastor of The Oaks Fellowship and author of *Ready, Set, Grow: 3 Conversations that Will Bring Lasting Growth to Your Church*

"Too often we make leading a church more complicated than it ought to be. *Creating Your Church's Culture* is an honest look at how to accomplish the mission of the church with more simplicity. Readable, practical, and insightful."

- **Jeff Galley**, Team Leader for Life Groups and Missions, LifeChurch.tv

Available Today At

amazon.com

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS

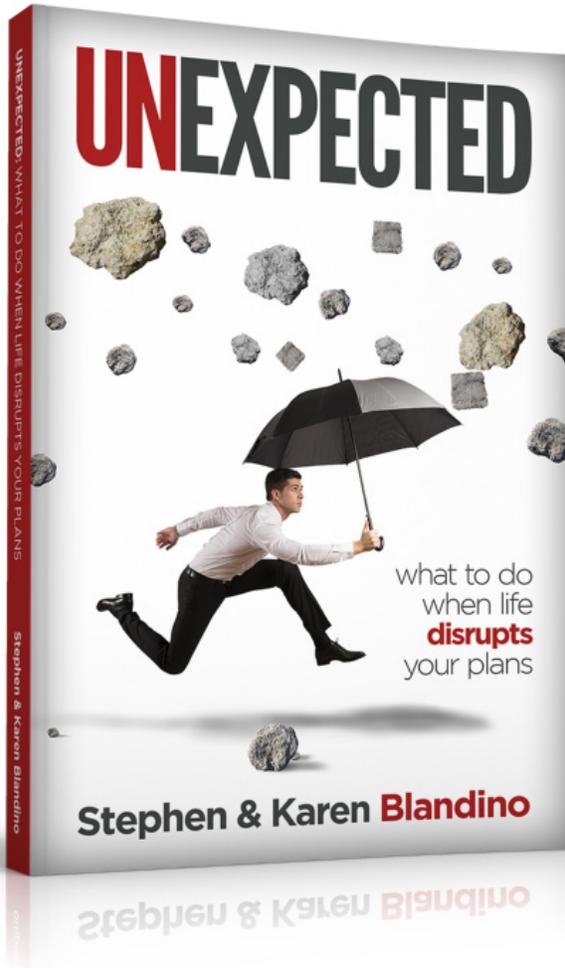
Check out
Stephen and Karen's Blogs

www.StephenBlandino.com



Unexpected

What to Do When Life Disrupts Your Plans



Everybody Encounters the Unexpected! Whether it's losing a job, receiving a bad report from a doctor, a late-night phone call, a relationship ending, or a dashed dream, "unexpected" shows up in unwelcome ways. Sometimes it feels like it's raining rocks, and we're doing our best to dodge a fatal blow. The question is, how do we respond when life unexpectedly disrupts our plans.

In ***Unexpected: What to Do When Life Disrupts Your Plans*** Stephen and Karen Blandino share their personal stories of pain and disruption. Karen shares how her peace was stolen during a robbery when five young men broke into her house, and then dragged her out of the shower at gunpoint. Stephen shares his journey of simultaneous congestive heart

failure and pulmonary failure despite years of annual check-ups with good reports. From their stories, Stephen and Karen share *seven valuable takeaways* about prayer, trust, perspective, family, community, purpose, and legacy.

Available Today At

amazon.com

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS

Check out

Stephen and Karen's Blogs

www.StephenBlandino.com

www.KarenBlandino.com

