

SEVEN

Alignment: Maximizing the Energy of Everyone

Now I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

~ The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 1:10

Clarity → Movement → Alignment → Focus

Do you believe in miracles? Yes!"

That is perhaps the most famous call in sports broadcasting history. Announcer Al Michaels yelled it as the United States' hockey team pulled off one of the greatest upsets of all time. Their epic defeat of the Soviet hockey team is referred to as "the miracle on ice."

*The movie *Miracle* tells the story of the 1980 United States Olympic hockey team that shocked the world. Two days after beating the Russians, the U.S. team defeated Finland and won the gold medal.*

Why was it considered a miracle?

The Soviet team had held the gold medal for the previous twenty years. They were by far the most dominant hockey team in the world. They had recently destroyed an all-star team of professional players from the National Hockey League. The U.S. Olympic team was all amateurs, mostly college kids. They were seeded twelve in the tournament. No one but themselves believed they could win.

Herb Brooks was charged with assembling and coaching the group of amateurs. Before the dream of gold could become a reality, he had to align the team around the same approach to hockey. He had to maximize everyone's energy.

It was a daunting task. The guys came from different backgrounds, colleges, and parts of the country. They came with their own approaches and styles of play.

*Unity did not come easily. They were a group of individuals, not a team aligned on the same agenda. Each player identified with his former team, not the Olympic team. *Miracle* depicts Brooks during practices asking players, "Who do you play for?". Each player responds with the name of his college team.*

Brooks knew this had to change.

After a halfhearted performance in an exhibition game, Coach Brooks decided it was time to push for alignment. After the guys had played an entire game, he had them skate. This is the hockey equivalent of a football team running laps or a basketball team doing suicide runs.

It was a defining moment for the team.

During the brutal workout, one of the players yelled out, "I play for the United States of America." With that statement Brooks dismissed the players. It was the turning point. The group of individuals became one. They no longer saw themselves as playing for different schools but as playing for the United States of America.

They became a team. Each player became a part of the greater whole. Each player committed to align himself to the team's approach to hockey. The energy and contribution of each individual was maximized. It was beautiful. And the impact was great.

The Miracle of Unity

Do you believe in miracles?

Through the sacrificial death of Christ, believers are one with God. Theologians call it the atonement. It is the miracle of salvation. A holy God and sinful man unified.

God also desires the miracle of unity for the church—for your church. Much more is at stake than an Olympic gold medal. Lives hang in the balance. Without the miracle of unity, churches divide and ministry suffers. And all this occurs while the world watches.

In the finality of Jesus' life, He was burdened for unity. In the garden He prayed that believers would be one. He said to the Father, "May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me" (John 17:21).

That is a huge statement.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be as unified as He and the Father are. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are completely one. They are inseparable. Jesus prayed that believers would be that intimate, that united, that aligned. Unity reflects the glory and character of God because God is unified.

Jesus continued, "I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be one as We are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:22–23).

Not only does unity reflect God's character, but it also gets the attention of the world. People are attracted to unity. Jesus said earlier that all people would know we are His disciples by the love that we have for one another" (John 13:35).

The apostle Paul encouraged the same. He challenged the church to be "thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal" (Phil. 2:2).

Unity is powerful. It is magnetic. It is a beautiful thing. And the impact is great. Such is the essence of alignment. Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process.

Builder Brooks

Herb Brooks built a great team. He did so by arranging all of the players not only around the same vision of winning a gold medal but also around the same approach to hockey.

*You are a builder as well. It is not enough to unite the church around the same *what* (purpose), but they also must be aligned on the same *how* (process).*

*Imagine if you were building a house. If the team of contractors and builders agreed only on *what* was being built, you would have a problem. They would also need to be unified on the approach, on the plan. Otherwise the contractors and builders would be competing with one another for time, money, and scheduling preference.*

*The team must also rally around the *how*.*

Without alignment, complexity is assured. Without alignment, you will not be simple. The church must be united around the same approach to ministry. The church must be aligned around the simple ministry process.

According to our research, there is a highly significant relationship between church vitality and alignment. In this chapter you will be given five essentials to alignment. All five flow from the research data.

If you want to maximize everyone's energy, you must recruit on the process, offer accountability, implement the same process everywhere, unite leaders around the process, and ensure that new ministries fit.

1: Recruit on the Process

*Herb Brooks carefully selected players to be on the team. He looked for players who would be more committed to the name on the front of the jersey (USA) than the name on the back. After he chose his team, some insisted that the best players were missing. His response, as depicted in *Miracle*, is a classic line. He said, "I am not looking for the best players. I am looking for the right ones."*

Brooks was looking for players who would align to the same approach to hockey. The right players are vital. Without the right leaders, the church will never be aligned. People follow leadership, and if leadership is not moving in the same direction, then people are scattered. Leaders are responsible to establish and reinforce the culture of the church. Consequently, if the leaders are not aligned, the church will not enjoy unity.

Sometimes the best players are not the right players.

Remember First Church. They hired "the best" for each role and found themselves with a divided staff. Theologically the team was aligned, but philosophically they were divided. Staff members used the same ministry jargon, but their approaches to ministry were often in conflict.

According to our research, it is vital that you recruit and hire people based in part to their commitment to your ministry process. It is critical that you hire and place leaders in key positions who are deeply committed to your simple ministry process. They must be committed not only to ministry but also to how your church does ministry.

We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders about the role their ministry process plays in recruiting leaders. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "We recruit and hire leaders who are committed to our process."

The percentage of vibrant church leaders who recruit based on commitment to the ministry process was much greater than the percentage of comparison church leaders. Of the vibrant churches, 64 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to 33 percent of the comparison churches.

Churches that bring people on the team who are committed to their simple process are enjoying the power of alignment. Everyone's energy is moving in the same direction.

A Funny/Sad Story

Eric and several of his friends (JR, Jorge, and Jeff) posted a fake advertisement on churchstaffing.com as a joke. Now churchstaffing.com is a serious site. In fact, it is the premiere site for churches seeking a staff member and leaders looking for a place of ministry. It is a great service; it is just that Eric and his buddies were bored one day. Actually, Eric is still trying to convince people it was "research."

Figure 1. Respondents' level of agreement with recruiting on the process

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

So they each pitched in forty bucks and pretended to be leaders from "Main Event Church." They were searching for a "Pastor of Extreme Worship Arts." Neither the church nor the position really existed, but they thought it would be fun to see if anyone responded. Here is how the ad read:

Main Event Church is seeking an exceptional leader to be our Pastor of Extreme Worship Arts. We believe the right person will be a unique fit for such a time as this. This person will serve under the Senior Pastor and will oversee all areas of worship. Candidates must embrace the Senior Pastor's vision of aligning all people of all denominations under the same vision. The person must also meet these requirements:

–Ability to infuse the TULIP doctrine in all worship sets

–Postmodern, Visionary, Missional leader capable of creating an ethos and apostolic movement in an Ancient-future church

–Willing to find some songs written from a pre-millennial dispensationalist theological tradition

–Desires to develop an emerging handbell choir

–Some snake handling may be appropriate (for our believers service only)

–Agree that the Lord is to be worshipped through magnificent attire and appropriate versions of the Bible

–Demonstrate proof of a second blessing. Tongue speaking in various accents is a major plus as we are a multicultural church

–Exegetically establish a movement of fluidity in the Extreme Worship Ministry

We realize that many of these requirements are personal preferences and not biblical mandates. Therefore, each candidate must be aligned with roughly 3/4 of all our requirements.

Please send a resume in Microsoft Word or Adobe Reader Format to James at maineventchurch@yahoo.com

The e-mail address was valid so that responses could be read. JR even built a temporary Web site for Main Event Church. The site said "Main Event Church: under construction." On the site was a picture of a young guy with long hair wearing a suit and holding a coat hanger. Attached to the coat hanger was a big random photograph of a snake. It could not have been more ridiculous.

The advertisement and Web site created quite a buzz. E-mails poured in from people applauding the humor of the ad. It was highlighted and discussed in numerous blogs (online journals). The link to the advertisement circulated throughout the country. We know this widespread circulation was real because it was forwarded to members of Eric's staff from people who did not know the origin of the ad.

That is the funny part of the story.

The sad part is that lots of people really applied. With real resumes and cover letters. Real people responded and asked for job descriptions. Some even sent in DVDs of themselves leading worship. We were shocked.

It is sad. Here is why. To apply for the position a person would have to: (1) have no basic theological belief system that guides his/her ministry or (2) be willing to compromise his/her beliefs in order to get a ministry job.

The person described in the advertisement does not exist. The theological tenets placed in the want ad oppose one another at the most basic level. We do not believe there is such a thing as a Calvinist (TULIP) who handles snakes. We do not believe there is such a thing as a leader who claims to be postmodern and traditional (magnificent attire and handbells). A premillennial dispensationalist who insists on a specific Bible translation would unlikely speak of creating an emerging ethos.

Eric and his buddies intentionally crafted the advertisement to contain opposing theological labels under the banner of Christianity. If a person claimed to ascribe to all of the thinking in the advertisement, he or she would be a schizophrenic believer. The person would lack a coherent belief system. Or worse, the person would be willing to subscribe to any belief system in order to land an interview.

Yet people applied. (By the way, Thom wanted to express his cowardice by disclaiming any involvement in this prank.)

This joke speaks to the seriousness of effectively recruiting and hiring people. It seems that some people are willing to believe anything to secure a job interview. If people are willing to subscribe to any belief system to be considered for a job, they will also be willing to subscribe to any ministry philosophy. If people are willing to compromise in the area of personal theology, they will also be willing to compromise in the area of ministry approach.

It is tragic. Churches need leaders who are deeply committed to a core belief system. Theological alignment among leaders in the same church is important. This alignment does not mean that the leadership team has all the answers or agrees on every passage or thought about God. However, they should be in sync on major theological doctrines.

While theological alignment is critical, so is philosophical alignment. Key leaders must be aligned to the same philosophy of ministry. If not, the church will move in a multiplicity of directions, driven by varying ministry philosophies.

*Your simple ministry process is part of your ministry philosophy. It is *how* ministry is done at your church. Therefore, you should reference your simple ministry process as you hire and recruit. You should surface it early in the interviewing process. Use it to evaluate if potential leaders are a good fit with the direction of your ministry. You should recruit people who are not just accepting of your simple ministry process, but are deeply committed to it.*

First, recruit on process. Second, offer accountability to leadership.

2: Offer Accountability

Once you have recruited staff or volunteers, you must lead them. One important aspect of leadership is accountability. It is especially critical to alignment. Without accountability, people naturally drift away from the declared ministry process.

Max DePree once stated, "Movements suffer when leaders are unwilling to hold the group accountable."¹ The church must be a movement, a movement that the gates of hell will not be able to stop (Matt. 16:18). The church must not just be a building, a creed, or an institution. The church is alive. The church is a movement of grace. And this movement suffers without accountability.

Church leaders must avoid the two extremes of micro-management and neglect. Micromanagement stifles creativity and hampers shared leadership. Neglect fosters complacency and leads to a fragmented team.

The balance is good leadership. Leaders should outline the simple process but then allow ministry leaders to implement with freedom and creativity.

According to our research, offering accountability based on the simple process is important. We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders to evaluate the accountability they provide concerning the implementation of the process. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "Our staff/leaders are held accountable for how the church process is implemented in their respective areas."

Of the vibrant church leaders, 55 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 31 percent of the comparison church leaders. In general, the vibrant church leaders are much more likely to hold people accountable to implement the simple ministry process.

Figure 2. Respondents' level of agreement with process accountability

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

While offering accountability is beneficial to the team and the entire church, it is intimidating for many church leaders. While people long for feedback and direction from their leaders, most church leaders are reluctant to offer it. Many church leaders admit it is an area in which they struggle.

Accountability does not need to be painful for either side of the equation. It can be liberating. It opens lines of communication for honest dialogue and produces some great conversations about ministry direction. As you consider offering accountability to those you lead (staff or volunteers), the following tool may prove helpful.

A Tool for Accountability

When Eric first became an executive pastor, he was blessed to have godly men in vibrant churches mentor him. These men had served in the same role as Eric for many years. A few of them are third cousins of Noah. Not really, but they are getting old. A few are waiting for the large-print edition of this book.

One of the concepts that Eric learned from these men was providing accountability to leadership.

Eric implemented Ministry Action Plans (MAPs) with the staff at Christ Fellowship. The impact of MAPs on the leadership culture has been phenomenal. Staff members have a clear direction each year, and each person's goals are tied to the simple ministry process. For those with a business background, MAPs are similar to the Management by Objectives system.

Peter Drucker developed the concept of Management by Objectives (MBO) in the 1950s. It is intended to be a tool that manages for results. Leaders and those they lead agree on measurable goals up front, and their agreement becomes the basis for evaluation. Each person sets his or her own goals based on the direction of the organization.²

At the beginning of each year, Eric sits down with each staff member to discuss his or her ministry action plan. The staff member comes to the meeting with a completed MAP. Each MAP includes how that specific ministry reflects the vision and process of the church, how the programs are designed to move people through the process, the organizational structure of the ministry, and a present evaluation of the ministry.

From these considerations each staff member sets five to seven measurable goals for the new ministry year. The staff member also outlines how these goals will be accomplished.

The MAPs force individual ministry goals to be related to the overall ministry process. Each person has a clear focus. Throughout the year the status and progress of the goals are evaluated. They provided ongoing accountability that is not awkward. It is natural because things have already been written down. Staff members enjoy the feedback because they want to know where they stand.

The MAPs also align the entire team. Each staff member presents his goals to the entire staff. The staff gathers around the individual and prays for his or her ministry year. Each person knows what the others are doing. Everyone sees how the overall ministry process is being pursued in each ministry division. It creates energy. Each person sees that he or she is a part of the whole and that everyone is moving together in the same direction.

Recruit based on the simple process. Offer accountability for the implementation of the process. Implement the same process everywhere.

3: Implement the Same Process Everywhere

Where were you when it happened? Where were you when you realized that Gap is attempting to take over the world?

Surely, you have noticed.

*There once was *the* Gap. One Gap. One store with men's and women's clothes. Great clothes at reasonable prices. Then the coup began to unfold . . . babyGap, GapKids, GapMaternity, and GapBody.*

Gap is everywhere. Their stores are multiplying. Conspiracy theorists, be on guard.

Gap has chosen to appeal to different groups of people at various stages of life. However, they have done so under the same banner. Gap targets many different people under the same name and philosophy.

No matter which type of Gap store you walk into, you will see the same logo. You will see a similar store design and layout. You will be treated with the same type of customer care. And you can purchase items on your one Gap card. Therefore, no matter which type of store you choose to visit, you still know you are at the Gap.

Gap has expanded the number of people they influence while remaining simple. They have placed all services under the same identity. They have been able to grow while fighting for simplicity. They are still known and recognized simply as the Gap.

This is the power of alignment. That is the power of implementing the same process everywhere.

The church seeks to influence multiple groups of people at different stages of life. The church consists of children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors. What does alignment look like in a local church?

A church that is committed to alignment implements the same process everywhere. The simple ministry process guides each ministry department in the church. For example, the children's ministry, youth ministry, and young adult ministry have the same process as the entire church.

Each department, like the different versions of Gap, offers age-appropriate content and design. Each department implements a relevant version of the process for that particular age group. While the process is the same, each ministry area executes it with creativity and age-specific focus.

According to our research, integrating the same simple process into the entire culture of the church is wise. Integrating the same process in each ministry department makes a profound impact.

We asked the vibrant and comparison church leaders if they have the same ministry process in each ministry area. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "While the styles and methods vary in different ministry departments (such as children and youth), the process is the same" (Figure 3).

Of the vibrant churches, 54 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to 30 percent of the comparison churches. The percentage of vibrant churches that have the same process in all areas is significantly higher than the percentage of comparison churches that do.

Figure 3. Respondents' level of agreement with same process everywhere

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

The Benefits

Cross Church, from chapter 2, provides an excellent example. Cross Church's vision statement is, "Love God, love others, serve the world." To promote alignment, they have fully integrated the same process into every major department in the church.

The guiding direction of the children's ministry is to lead children to love God, love others, and serve the world. The guiding direction of the youth ministry is to lead students to love God, love others, and serve

the world. The vision statement for the singles' ministry is to lead young adults to love God, love others, and serve the world.

There are at least three benefits of implementing the same process everywhere.

First, understanding is increased. An observer of Cross Church's ministry integrated process might say, "But that is the same thing for each area. It sounds so redundant."

Alignment is redundant in a good way.

Everyone at Cross Church understands the direction of each ministry department. It is simple. It is the same process everywhere. If you are an adult who understands the ministry process of the adult ministry, you also understand the ministry process of the children's ministry.

The alternative is complexity. Let's be honest: do you really think people know the ten to twelve different vision statements at complex churches? Our observation is that the leaders do not even know them. The people just ignore them. It is too complex.

Second, unity is promoted. Implementing the same process everywhere prevents the church from having multiple directions. A process that is fully implemented pulls each ministry department together. The alternative leads to a group of subchurches that do not reflect the overall direction of the church.

Third, families experience the same process. Age-specific departments such as children, youth, and adults are responsible for the spiritual development of that particular age group. The leaders of those departments are responsible to design a process that brings those individuals to spiritual maturity. When each department implements the same process, families benefit.

Each family member experiences the same ministry process. Each member of a family is challenged to move through the same process. As people age and progress through the ministry departments, they are accustomed to the simple process. It creates synergy for the church and for the family.

At Cross Church each ministry department uses small groups to connect people relationally, to lead people to love others. Each member of a family is being challenged to grow in their love for others by joining a small group. When a father chooses to move to a small group, there will be one available for his son as well. When any member of a family moves to a small group, the rest of the family will be exposed to the next step in the process. Each ministry department is complementing the other ministry department.

That is the power of alignment.

Recruit and offer accountability based on your simple process. Implement in each ministry department. And unite people around the simple process.

4: Unite around the Process

One of the coolest toys for children is Mr. Potato Head. Mr. Potato Head has holes all over his body. The child gets to plug the body parts into the holes on Mr. Potato Head's body. The arms, feet, nose, eyes,

ears, and lips are all placed in a specific spot on the body. When assembled the right way, Mr. Potato Head almost looks human. Almost.

Mr. Potato Head does not always look human though. Most children decide to place the body parts in different locations on his body. An arm will go where the nose is to be. The eyes will be placed where the feet belong. The nose will be attached to the side of poor Mr. Potato Head's face.

Sadly, most churches look like a discombobulated Mr. Potato Head. Everything is badly mixed up. The parts of the body are not aligned as they should be. Confusion abounds. While it is funny on the toy, it is not funny for churches.

Scripture refers to the church as Mr. Potato Head. Well not exactly, but close.

Scripture refers to the church as the body of Christ. When the body of Christ is working right, it is beautiful to behold. All of the parts are in the proper place. They are functioning in the right way. And they realize they are a part of the same one body (1 Cor. 12:12).

When the body is not united, it is not a pretty picture. Imagine when you tried to walk, if one leg went to the right and the other to the left. Imagine the confusion if your right eye looked up and your left eye looked down. Imagine the discomfort if your right arm refused to partner with your left arm. Imagine the perplexity if your feet decided not to operate with the rest of your body.

When a local body of Christ is not united in the same direction, the body is ineffective. When one part of the body refuses to function, there is disarray. When one part of the body wants to be a separate body, there is division. The world watches this and is confused.

The simple ministry process provides a framework for leaders in the church to rally around. The process can be used to unite the body. There is a clear direction, and each person has a place to plug into it.

According to our research, using your ministry process to bring focus to your leaders is beneficial. We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders if they use their ministry process to unite and focus their leaders. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "Our process is the unifying factor that keeps all our leaders focused" (Figure 4).

Of the vibrant churches, 42 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 17 percent of the comparison churches. The vibrant church leaders are nearly three times as likely than the comparison church leaders to use the ministry process to bring focus to the leaders.

Figure 4. Respondents' level of agreement with process as unifying factor

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

The Reality

Churches are filled with a variety of generations, nationalities, preferences, and backgrounds. Thankfully, most churches do not have uniformity. Uniformity is boring, and uniformity is different from unity. Athletic teams wear the same uniforms and may be divided.

Unity is much deeper than uniformity.

In fact, unity is best expressed in the midst of diversity. That is when it is clear that God is the one uniting people. Ultimately unity is found in Christ; however, the simple ministry process is a great tool to keep people on the same page.

In reality, Christ's followers have argued and disagreed for centuries. Differences in beliefs, both major and minor, have separated believers. However, more often in churches, the differences that lead to division are not theological or biblical. The differences that harm most churches are in the realm of ministry approach and philosophy.

People will often agree theologically but disagree about ministry philosophy. People will often nod their heads in agreement about a biblical issue but be diametrically opposed over a specific approach to ministry.

You have heard it, "Why are we doing it this way?" "Why are we not doing this anymore?" These are not theological issues; these are debates over preference, style, and approach.

*Using your simple process as a unifying factor brings philosophical alignment. It helps leaders agree at the level where disagreement most often festers. It helps people be of the same mind in regards to ministry approach. In other words, leaders agree on *how* ministry is done at your church.*

A simple church design is a philosophy of ministry. A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. When people commit not only to the doctrinal beliefs of a church but also to the simple and strategic process, the energy of everyone is unleashed.

*So while we embrace the reality that Christ is the giver of unity, we know that a simple ministry process may be used to unite people. The process of the church should become a point of agreement where people understand the overall picture and *how* ministry is accomplished. In order to keep leaders focused on the simple ministry process, you must remind them of the process and highlight their contributions to it.*

Remind people of the process. The statement, "People need to be reminded more than instructed" is true. People tend to forget the direction of the church. Reminding people of the God-given process the church has embraced is necessary.

Remind people by tying ministry decisions or direction to the simple process. At General Electric, Jack Welch attempted to connect every decision to the direction of the company. By doing so, he reinforced the direction of the company.³ At your church, all of the important details such as hiring, budgeting, facility changes, and building projects must be connected to the process God has given your church.

Highlight contributions to the process. Show leaders how they are contributing to the fulfillment of the ministry process. It takes the body operating properly for the simple ministry process to be realized. Show people how their seemingly small act of service is part of the big picture God is painting in your church.

Walk around. A lot. Management expert Edward Deming coined the phrase MBWA—Management by Walking Around. It is effective. Do ministry by walking around.

Walk around and remind people they are a part of the whole. The greeters fit into the process. Without the preschool workers, adults would not be able to move through the process of discipleship. The building and grounds teams prepare the facility so some aspect of your ministry process can happen. Tell them what it is, and thank them.

When people understand the vital part of the body they occupy, they will be more likely to unite to the whole. Without their commitment, the body of Christ would look like a three-year-old's version of Mr. Potato Head.

To maximize everyone's energy you must recruit according to the simple process, offer accountability for the implementation of the process, implement the same process in each ministry department, and unite people around the simple process. Finally, you must ensure that new ministries clearly fit into the overall design.

5: New Ministry Alignment

If you have ever designed a room or redecorated a house, you know that it is much easier to work with new furniture. You buy furniture with the room in mind. If it does not fit into the design of the room, you do not get it. The challenging part is figuring out where your existing furniture and pictures fit.

The same is true for alignment.

The most challenging aspect of alignment is pulling existing ministries and existing staff in the same direction, especially if they have been moving in opposite directions. It is much easier to align new people and new ministries to the overall direction.

If they do not fit, you simply do not allow them to begin.

According to our research, it is vital that you make sure new ministries fit into the simple process before they begin. Afterwards it is too late.

We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "Before we begin a new ministry, we ensure that it fits within our process" (Figure 5).

Of the vibrant churches, 68 percent strongly agreed or agreed compared to 40 percent of the comparison churches. The vibrant church leaders tend to ensure new ministries understand their place in the process prior to their launch.

Figure 5. Respondents' level of agreement with new ministries fitting

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Checking the Fit

Before you purchase a new pair of shoes, you wear them in the store. You walk around in them. It would be unwise to buy them without knowing if they fit right. Shoes that do not fit are found at the bottom of your closet. They create more clutter. Checking the fit is essential.

Simple church leaders check the fit. Before a new ministry is launched, they ensure it is a viable part of the simple ministry process. They clarify specifically how the new ministry will move people through the process. And they ensure that the leaders of the new ministry understand how the ministry is part of the big picture.

We are drawing a distinction between a program and a ministry. In the next chapter you will be encouraged to be cautious about adding new programs to the ministry process. In fact, you will be challenged to eliminate some programs.

Ministries are different from programs. Ministries are either entire departments (see ministry expansions) or specific groups (see ministry additions) that help move people through one aspect of the process.

In a simple church new ministries can be divided into two broad categories: ministry expansions and ministry additions. Checking the fit prior to inception is critical for both.

Ministry expansions are new ministries that are geared toward a specific age group or life stage. The church ministry is expanding to focus intentionally on a specific group of people. The new ministry is going to be a new department within the church such as a new middle-school ministry department or young couples department. In both of these cases, these groups were formerly a part of a different ministry. Now they will have their own identity.

For ministry expansions, begin the new ministry with the same simple process. Be sure the programs within this ministry are placed to move people through the process. Ministry expansions are a great opportunity to highlight the simple process. You can begin them without the clutter. You can use these new ministries to show existing ministries the benefits of a streamlined approach.

Ministry additions are new ministries that fulfill a specific function within the simple process. These ministries must be set up to help move people through the process of transformation. For example, the baptism ministry team makes it easy for people to move to baptism. The guest reception ministry helps move guests into the life of the church. If it is unclear how a ministry addition will move people through the simple process, do not launch it.

A Lot Is at Stake

*A lot was at stake for the *Miracle* hockey team. They were playing for a gold medal and the pride of a nation. Unity was essential. For them to reach their potential and realize their goal, alignment was not an option.*

Alignment is essential for the church as well. And more is at stake.

There once was a group of people who were facing a stronger and bigger opponent than the Russian hockey team. The group of people was the Israelites, and the land of Canaan was at stake. Here is what happened.

The Israelites were the people God had chosen to love. They were slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. They dreamed about being released and being free. God raised up a leader named Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, out of bondage. God told Moses that He had set aside a special land for them called Canaan, which was to be theirs.

God's agenda was to get His people to Canaan, a land that He described as being full of milk and honey, an abundant land. This agenda was bigger than any game. It was their life and the lives of their families for generations to come.

God sent ten plagues to Egypt so that the Egyptian leader, the Pharaoh, finally told Moses to leave. But after letting them go, the Egyptians decided to chase after the Israelites. The Israelites came to the Red Sea and had nowhere to turn. God divided the Red Sea so that they could walk through the middle of it. They looked back to see it crashing on top of the Egyptians who were chasing them. They saw God rescue them.

God then led them on the way to Canaan. He went ahead of them protecting them each step. They saw His presence in a visible way with a cloud by day and a fire by night. They saw Moses come down from meeting with God with his face glowing. They were hungry, and God provided quail and manna. They had never seen, tasted, or heard of this manna before. But each day God catered a meal for them.

With all that God had done and was actively doing, you would think the people would unite on God's agenda. You would think these people would align to the plan God had given them.

Instead, they complained. They grumbled about everything. They muttered about Moses and his wife. They complained about the food they were eating. It was not a pretty sight. Dissension never is.

God would get furious with them, but each time Moses begged God to forgive the people. Moses was always asking God to put up with the people. God did things to get their attention, but they refused to unite around the calling God had for them.

Now in Numbers 13, they are near the land that God has promised them. It is like the night before the big game. They are about to enter Canaan. Moses chooses twelve people, one from each tribe of Israel, to go spy out this land of Canaan. It was the first committee recorded in Scripture, and the results were not good.

The mission was not to determine whether or not to go into the land. God had already told them that this was the land. The mission was simply to explore it. They spied on the land for forty days. Unfortunately, this forty-day campaign was a bust.

They came back to give the report on what they saw. They said, "The land is full of milk and honey, but." "But we also see the opponents, the other team. They are huge. We are like grasshoppers in their eyes."

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, insist the land can be taken. "We can do it." But the other ten spread what the Bible calls an evil report. The report was not evil because it was false. It was not that they were

spreading lies. The report was evil because of how they were spreading information. It was not what they were saying but how they were saying it.

The evil report spread among the entire camp like wildfire. That night, the people wanted to stone Moses and Aaron. They cried and said, "It would be better if we just died here in the desert than to go and die by the sword in the land of Canaan." That night was the defining moment for this fragmented team. Moses, again, begs God to forgive the people. Here is God's response:

The LORD responded, "I have pardoned them as you requested. Yet as surely as I live and as the whole earth is filled with the LORD's glory, none of the men who have seen My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested Me these 10 times and did not obey Me, will ever see the land I swore to give their fathers. None of those who have despised Me will see it. But since My servant Caleb has a different spirit and has followed Me completely, I will bring him into the land where he has gone, and his descendants will inherit it. Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the lowlands, turn back tomorrow and head for the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea."

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron: "How long must I endure this evil community that keeps complaining about Me? I have heard the Israelites' complaints that they make against Me. Tell them: As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you exactly as I heard you say. Your corpses will fall in this wilderness—all of you who were registered in the census, the entire number of you 20 years old or more—because you have complained about Me. I swear that none of you will enter the land I promised to settle you in, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. (Num. 14:20–30)

Wow! God says, "You want to die in the desert instead of going into the land of Canaan. Well, OK. Wish granted. Every one of you will die here in the desert."

What a tragic story. God had this phenomenal plan for His people. They were to enter into this special land. But they missed it. They missed God's best.

They refused to unite around the plan for their future that God had given them. They refused to trust and follow. Instead, they united around criticism, negativity, and dissension. And God took that very seriously.

He has always taken unity seriously. He still does.

God has a plan for the community of faith in which you are involved. A lot is at stake. Much more than a gold medal or an Olympic victory. Redemption. Eternity. Transformation. All of which are miracles.

Unity is essential.

The story is pretty gloomy, but it does have one bright spot—actually two. Caleb and Joshua. They had a different spirit, and they followed God wholeheartedly. They were willing to embrace God's agenda. They were willing to unite around God's plan. Therefore, God promised they would inherit the land of Canaan. And they did.

People must be challenged to be Calebs and Joshuas, to embrace wholeheartedly what God is doing in your church. People must be challenged to unite, to align to the simple process He has given your church.

A lot is at stake.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Describe the best team experience you have ever had. What made it so special?*
- 2. How have you seen disunity harm a church?*
- 3. Why is unity around a ministry approach important?*
- 4. On a scale of one to ten, how aligned is our leadership around our simple ministry process?*
- 5. How comfortable are we with accountability?*
- 6. What would "the same process everywhere" mean to our programming?¹*

¹ *Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, Simple Church (Nashville: B&H, 2011).*