

Morph! Becoming Developmental

by Brian Newman

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I love the scene in *Finding Nemo* when the sharks are having an AA meeting of sorts. Their motto, "Fish are friends, not food" goes for naught when Dory gets a bloody nose and one of the sharks smells the blood and goes crazy trying to eat the fish. The two other sharks scream, "**Intervention!**" The ensuing chase scene is both harrowing and hilarious.

When an organisation repeatedly finds itself screaming, "Intervention!" it likely has failed in the art of *pursuing development*. In today's organizational landscape, few Christian agencies are succeeding at being intentionally developmental with their people. Instead, they resort to various types of intervention, which often times ends up being too little too late.

What does it look like to become developmental?

There is a direct, intimate relationship between the organization and the individuals called to lead in that organization. An organization can never be labeled "developmental" unless its core leaders are thoroughly committed to their own personal development. If a developmental bias permeates the lives of board members, senior leaders, and then ministry leaders the organization cannot help but become developmental. Of course the converse is true as well.

Qualities of the developmental person

1. Proactive self-awareness

The Johari Window is a helpful tool for leaders who are seeking to become developmental. The Window is divided into four quadrants, each of which can assist the leader in peeling off layers of his or her life. The quadrants are:

- Public Self: which is known to ourselves and known to others
- Private Self: which is known to the leader and unknown to the watching world
- Blind Self: which is known to the watching world and unknown to the leader
- Unknown Self: which is known only to God at present

A consistent, on-going commitment to being self-aware is the cornerstone of all development. The three key components to a growing self-aware are: 1) Appropriate self-disclosure to mentors, friends, confidants; 2) Embracing wholistic feedback and input from key people; 3) Pursuing God in Him revealing more of the leader's "unknown self."

2. Continual growth in inner-life development

The developmental person is "sold out" on the Light of Jesus shining on the dark places of character in the leader's life. The leader is self-reflective enough to acknowledge his heart can deceive, and that he sometimes lives in the confusion of Romans 7 (as did the Apostle Paul). There is a deep humility that grows in a leader's life that confesses he or she is likely to fall without the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This humility brings the developmental leader to recognize that "few leaders finish well" and

that history shows there are certain potential pitfalls to avoid (abuse of power, pride, sexual issues, family dysfunction, abuse of money, unaddressed psychological issues).

All of that is the bad news. Yet the developmental leader is hopeful rather than fatalistic. While doing a sober assessment of her own heart, she invites God as well as key mentors into the dark places to begin to address these inner-life development issues. In this process there is no shame, but rather a humble appreciation of the leaders' fragility and her need for on-going inner-life transformation. Ultimately this transformation only occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit in the person's life. The Holy Spirit often uses a variety of people, circumstances, crises, and other processing to affect heart change in the leader's life.

3. Community and Aloneness

The ability for a leader to both be in genuine community and to have quality time alone is a characteristic of becoming developmental. By "community" I mean both a self-selected group of people as well as those "thorn-in-the-flesh" individuals we would otherwise not choose to relate to.

One of the great challenges for the leader is to be in a *diverse* community. Many leaders will control their environments and will build teams of like-minded people with similar temperaments to the leaders. The ENTJ leader (such as myself) will tend to be in community with people whose "windows on the world" are similar to his own. This provides ease of communication and some level of comfort, but often times very little challenge to the leader. The developmental leader proactively places himself in community with the maximum amount of diversity – of giftedness, temperament, personality, etc.

The other challenge to the leader is to be alone. Studies of leaders show that much personal transformation happens in solitude and silence. The leader who cultivates times of solitude puts himself in a place where God does transforming work. The obstacle many leaders encounter is that the activity, motion, and urgency of leadership overwhelm the need and desire for solitude. Some leaders verge on being addicted to action, or have a need to be needed which keeps them artificially busy.

4. Quality mentoring relationships

A long-time mentor of mine, Homer Dowdy, once told me that *leaders without mentors will soon not be leaders*. Homer cultivated and maintained a web of mentoring relationships that were the mainstay of his life and ministry. I met Homer when he was 62 years of age and I was 22. He mentored me intensively for three years until he retired. It is interesting that I cannot recall very many *skills* that he taught me (although I am sure there are some). But I do remember the life lessons he shared with me, his reflections on challenges he overcame, and how he asked God to bring light into the darkness of his soul.

For the developmental leader, mentoring relationships come in all shapes and sizes. Some are formal and others are informal. We mentor others and are mentored by those who have come before us. We have peer mentors who "get in our face" and hold us accountable. Mentors take the shape of a spiritual guide, discipler, teacher, counselor coach, and model.

Leaders who allow their imaginations to run a bit also benefit from biblical and historical mentors. They read the Bible through the lens of leadership, which helps them study leaders' lives in the Bible and, in a sense, be mentored by them. Two of the leaders in the Bible who have been formative in my own development have been Moses and Joshua. Other leaders from history (a Desmond Tutu, Winston Churchill, William Carey) provides us with snapshots of a leader's life in which we observe how they dealt with the challenges of leadership. These historical mentors become part of our mentoring circle.

5. Authenticity and humility

Authenticity is the unique ability to know what to share with whom and in the correct context. In our postmodern world we have confused authenticity with transparency, in which a leader is lauded for sharing everything and anything from their personal life regardless of the audience. This confessional attitude does not always lead to a transformed life, however.

Leaders need a safe circle of people with whom they are "real" on a regular basis. This authenticity with an inner circle leads to the wisdom for the leader to be appropriately authentic with wider circles of followers. But it is a humbled authenticity, one that does not call attention to the leader as the object or subject. Rather, the leader is a witness to God and to the grace of Jesus in his or her life.

6. Expanding and flexible styles of leadership

Decision-making is part of the fabric of leadership. A leader who cannot decide quickly becomes a follower. How these myriad of decisions are made tells you a lot about how developmental a leader has been. Rigidity and a "my way or the highway" approach to strategic decisions illustrates an inner world that is insecure and unstable. It may reflect limited emotional intelligence on the part of the leader. It may also point to the fact that the leader has not squarely addressed emotional dysfunction in his past so that there are still wounds rather than scars.

The developmental leader strives to expand her styles of leadership, depending on the situation as well as the ability and readiness of followers. At times the leader must act directive with a "buck stops with me" attitude. At other times the leader must be highly facilitative in a group context where there is a consensus built amongst a team of people. Only an internally secure leader is able to expand his styles of leadership over time.

7. Taking ownership and responsibility

The one major external quality that points to the reality that a leader is thoroughly developmental is that *they do not blame shift or point fingers*. Followers have the luxury of blaming their leaders for failures or setbacks. Leaders step up and take ownership and responsibility. When things go well the developmental leader puts the credit on the team members and applauds their efforts. When things go badly the developmental takes the blame and makes no excuses. This is a mark of true humility.

The questions every leader must ponder are these:

- * *To what extent am I a developmental leader?*
- * *What would others in your inner circle say about you in this regard?*
- * *How are you moving proactively to become more developmental in your leadership?*