

Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory

by Tod Bolsinger

Summary and Worksheets



1. **You were trained for a world that is disappearing**
 - a. Friedman: A system cannot become unstuck by trying harder
2. **If you can adapt and adventure, you can thrive**
 - a. “Let go, learn as you go, and keep going”
 - b. **Adaptive Change:** a changing environment with no clear answers, necessity for leaders and followers to learn and participate in transformation, and an unavoidable reality that a new solution will result in loss. P 42
 - i. Is not a ‘technical fix’ where we already know what to do, we just need to do it.
3. **You must let go, learn as you go and keep going no matter what**
4. **Leader in the midst of uncharted territory:**
 - a. **Leadership:** Energizing a community toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world.
 - i. Vs. managing the status quo...
 - b. Expressed in behaviors, actions, relationships and responsibility
 - i. Inside the system – in relationship
 - ii. Acting
 - c. is multidimensional:
 - i. Apostolic – like the early apostles –adventuring, moving out toward the world, missional, witness
 - ii. Relational – Communal transformation for mission – gathering and forming a people, so that they together can participate in Christ’s mission to establish the kingdom
 - iii. Adaptive – not just fixing, see above definition
 - d. Leadership requires shared, corporate learning expressed in new shared, corporate functioning. In order to act or function differently in a changing world, all true leadership will require transformation. P 40
5. **Before people will follow you off the map, gain the credibility that comes from demonstrating technical competence on the map**
 - a. **Technical Competence** – best practices, effective sermons, leading worship and prayer, pastoral care, church programs, teaching.
 - i. Contextual skills with organizational value, consistent delivery, developed through assessment/feedback
 - b. Stewardship precedes leadership
 - i. Stewardship of scriptures and traditions

- ii. Stewardship of souls and communities
- iii. Stewardship of teams and tasks of the organization
- iv. Like a farmer, we are not just soil (scriptures and traditions) and plants (souls and communities), but we have fences, tractors and the weather to think about!
- c. “We can fail, but we can’t suck”

6. In uncharted territory, Trust is as essential as the air we breathe – Relational Congruence

- a. **Relational congruence:** (Friedman calls “self-differentiation”) – same person with the same values in every relationship, circumstance and crisis. Keeps promises to God, self, others.
- b. Refashioning narratives on the journey means refashioning loyalties.
- c. Relationships are the holding environment for change
- d. Healthy relationships keep the work in front of the people
- e. Attend to the quality of relationships to prepare for the unknown ahead.
- f. If trust is lost, the journey is over
 - i. **Trust:** When my words match my actions
 - ii. **Integrity:** maturity, emotional spiritual, authentic health
- g. How do we build trust?
 - i. Everyone involved in meaningful work together!
 - 1. Think missions and ministry, not meetings and committees

7. Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast

- a. **Culture:** language that we live in, artifacts we make use of, rituals we engage in, ethics, institutions, narratives
- b. **Organizational Culture:** group of norms of behavior and the underlying shared values that help keep those norms in place
- c. You will see the REAL culture in times of stress and crisis.
 - i. Success of the past reinforces and embeds the culture
- d. Leadership creates culture, aligning towards healthy culture, which is the capacity to experiment, innovate, take risks and adapt.
 - i. Clarity – shared values are the organization
 - ii. Embodiment – mutual accountability for living out the values.
- e. So – How do you change a culture?
 - i. start functioning in a more healthy way, and you will give birth to something new.
- f. This is critical before you lead off the map – get the organization ready and moving towards health!!

8. **When our old maps fail us, something within us dies.**

a. **Replacing our paradigms is deeply painful and absolutely critical**

b. SO – we must become Adaptive Leaders

c. Capacity for Adaption:

- i. Resilience of the people
- ii. Capacity of a system to define the problems and do the problem-solving work
- iii. In the midst of pressure and disequilibrium

d. SKILLS OF ADAPTIVE LEADER: (p 90-91)

i. Calmly face the unknown

1. Recommit to core ideology:

- a. What are we called to as leaders? (p 95 questions)
- b. Why do we exist as a congregation? (p 95 questions)

ii. Refuse quick fixes

1. Reframing – new ways of talking about shifting values, expectations, attitudes and habits.
2. Reframing is vital, but it is only a new way of seeing the problem; if this is as far as you go (teams not committees, missional not a church, etc.) then you haven't fixed anything

iii. Engage others in learning

1. Leaders learn, then teach others so they can also adapt and thrive

iv. Seek new perspectives

1. **In uncharted territory, vision is accurately seeing ourselves and defining reality**

2. Help people see the system – it's a living system

3. DNA of a system – alignment of purpose and relationships

a. **There is no greater gift a leader can give to people on mission than to have the clearest, most defined mission possible.**

b. Change must be consistent with their DNA

c. Three key DNA questions:

- i. What DNA is essential
- ii. What DNA can be discarded
- iii. What DNA needs to be re-created

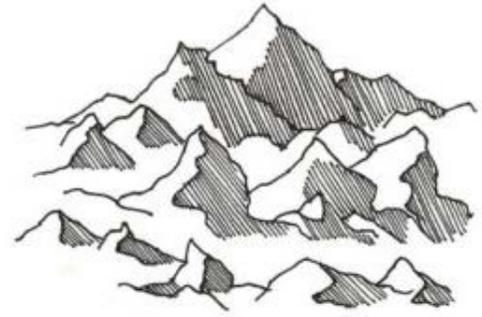
4. Heifetz on the process of Adaptive Change:

- a. Observe the patterns and events
- b. Interpret/hypothesize
- c. Design interventions

5. Observing – over time; not always immediately cause and effect. May take years to see the results of a change.

a. Protecting Minority Voices is important

6. Interventions



- a. solutions should be healthy adaptations of the DNA of the church
 - b. Modest, playful changes
 - c. They will be resisted
- v. Ask questions for gaps and competing values
 - 1. Raise up competing values issues
 - a. There are many good values to choose between – rarely good vs bad! (good book about this: Essentialism by Greg Mckeown)
- vi. Raise up deeper issues
- vii. Explore and confront resistance and sabotage
 - 1. Remember: Mission trumps everything else!
 - a. Experiment, and point to the mission to give clarity to ‘why are we doing this!’”
 - 2. Start with the convictions of the mission (p129-30)
 - a. Can you clearly state the mission – Verb:Subject:Outcome – in 8 words or less?
 - b. Clarity, passion and sticking to them!
 - 3. Stay calm
 - a. Monitor our own emotional state
 - b. We are a critical tool for change
 - c. Prepare for losses – PEOPLE RESIST LOSS
 - d. Keep the mission urgently in front of people
 - e. Raise the heat/urgency while staying calm = a safe holding space for change
 - i. Think crock pot!
 - f. In uncharted territory: Leadership is learning how to ask new questions we have been too scared, busy or proud to ask.***
 - i. Ask ourselves: Am I being motivated by fear?
 - g. Know my personal Red Zone issues (p 148)
 - h. Work on our stuff!
 - 4. Stay connected
 - a. It is all done relationally!
 - b. Heifetz – p 158-164 On WHO to stay connected with:
 - i. Allies
 - ii. Confidants (Clergy peer learning groups are great for these!)
 - iii. Opponents
 - iv. Senior Authorities
 - v. Casualties
 - vi. Dissenters





c. Structurally, in uncharted territory visionary leadership is likely to come from a “Corps of Discovery” while a board managing ongoing health of the organization

- i. Two different groups to work with:
- ii. Those maintaining the mission (your board?)
- iii. Those on transforming the congregation
(Change/Innovation team?)

5. Inspired shared action

- a. Give the work back to the people who care about it
- b. Engage the mature and motivated (Sarah’s take – lead the willing!)
- c. Stay connected to your critics
- d. Expect sabotage

viii. Learn and change without sacrificing personal or organizational capacity

1. In adaptive change, win-win is usually lose-lose.

2. It is usually a ‘peace-monger’ who wants to please everyone that winds up with the most sabotage.

3. Sabotage is NORMAL in the midst of change; you haven’t effectively changed until you’ve tested your change in the midst of sabotage

- a.** Expect it
- b.** embrace it
- c.** It is NOT personal,
- d.** focus on the healthy, emotionally strong people not the saboteurs.

ix. Help congregation make hard, painful decisions to effectively fulfill their mission

1. Make ‘Blue Zone’ decisions no matter what – see the questions on page 179

2. Be courageous:

- a. Act when it is hard
- b. Stay calm in the midst of sabotage
- c. Inspire them
- d. Don’t act alone

9. Those who had neither power nor privilege (the margins) are trustworthy guides and necessary leaders when we go off the map

- a. They aren’t off the map – they are at home!
- b. Listen for answers in diverse voices – especially those traditionally left ‘outside’
- c. The interaction of the center with the margins creates new possibilities.
- d. There is more creativity in these interactions

10. Exploration teaches us to see the familiar through a new frame and demands we become our best selves

- a. Seeing through a new frame – see questions on page 209
- b. Brings differentiation
- c. Requires us to become expert experimenters and question askers

- d. Demands our best selves
- e. Key question: What can I do to keep my church from dying? (p 215)
 - i. Focus on your transformation together, not the dying
 - ii. Focus on the mountains ahead, not the rivers behind
 - iii. Focus on continually learning, not what you have mastered.

11. Uncharted leadership is dependent on the leader's own ongoing exploration, learning and transformation.

- a. The true goal of moving through uncharted territory is to allow God to transform us on the journey.
- b. Christ would have us transform ourselves, transform our congregations, transform our communities, and transform our spheres of influence.
 - i. Romans 12:2 New Living Translation (NLT)
 - ii. *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*



WORKBOOK

Write down one Adaptive challenge see before your church (your mountain, while you only have a canoe in your possession!)

A journey through an adaptive challenge includes strengthening technical competence, building relational congruence, and leading into adaptive capacity.

Technical Competence: Before you start the journey, consider how you are doing in the technical areas of bringing order and stewardship to the church:

Think about worship design, sermons, teaching, pastoral care, administration, staffing. Also your stewardship of: scriptures and traditions; souls and communities; teams and tasks. Which are you strongest in? Which are your weak areas?

Areas I'm good to great on:

Areas I should work on as we get started:

What resources do you need to help you with technical work? What is your plan to get those resources?

Relational Congruence: being same person with the same values in every relationship, circumstance and crisis. Keeps promises to God, self, others. (Friedman calls this “Self-Differentiation”)

How would you rate your self from 1 (this isn’t me) to 10 (I’m always this way, even in a crisis)

Where would you like to get better at this? What kind of spiritual disciplines and habits might help you move closer to your goal? What kind of resources might you need, or coaches, therapists, support groups?

My plan for working on my relational congruence is

Adaptive leadership skills: Which of the adaptive leadership skills listed in the workbook (and page 90-91 in the book) can you say you are good at? Which are you working on? Which are you far from mastering? What resources might you need?

My plan for developing the next most important adaptive leadership skill I need:

If **mission trumps everything else** – what is your personal mission? Try do the clarity experiment he writes about – 8 words, Verb:Subject:Outcome

My mission: _____

Consider – How to get your church mission into language as clear and precise as this?

Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast: what cultural issues are you struggling with in your church?

Bolinger suggests you begin acting and functioning in a more healthy way- lead with clarity, making some hard decisions to ‘clean up’ entrenched culture. Keep pointing to the mission!! (Remember: sometimes the issue is we want to please everyone, so we won’t make the hard decisions to keep the peace)

My thoughts on what kind of functioning would help move through to the other side of a cultural issue:

In the midst of adaptive change, **stay connected**. To whom? In the your initial example you wrote down, who are the people that fit these categories to stay connected with: (see the Heifetz list on – p 158-164)

- Allies

- Confidants (Clergy peer learning groups are great for these!)

- Opponents

- Senior Authorities

- Casualties

- Dissenters

Organizationally, two groups are needed – one for transformation, and one for keeping the organization ongoing and healthy. How might this work in your church?

In the midst of adaptive change, stay calm. Consider his question about Blue Zone and Red Zone areas. Leaders need to be self-aware enough to know their own Blue and Red Zone areas so they can lead toward fruitful transformation. (p 148)

What kind of issues have I noticed I get 'triggered' by? (Red Zone – emotionally charged, personalized conflict, unresolved issues of self, disproportionate intensity, unsolvable, conflict is about me)

Common ones include – when someone seems to question my competence, loyalty, knowledge, authority, or strength? When some tells me I'm lazy, unavailable or a workaholic? When someone criticizes my preaching or other technical skills? When someone gets too close to me, or stays too far away? When I disappoint someone, or I'm 'not enough'? Or when I give bad news, or try to avoid conflicts? Many of our 'trigger' areas come from childhood and/or traumatic experiences that reinforce the triggers.

My known triggers:

Triggers I suspect:

My plan for development of spiritual practices, mental health good habits and other ways that help me recognize my triggers and move through them more calmly: (what resources do I need?)

When working with the congregation on adaptive issues, try the questions from p 179 in the book to help stay in the Blue Zone for the community:

- What furthers the mission
- What principles are at stake here?
- What values are we expressing?
- What pain must we endure?
- How will we support those experiencing loss?

Sabotage is normal. Think of the last time you experienced sabotage in the congregation. Consider these points as you picture that time:

- Expect it
- Embrace it
- It is NOT personal (this is the hardest for leaders, because we are often attacked!)
- Focus on the healthy, emotionally strong people not the saboteurs; lead the willing!

Next time I face sabotage (and I know it will come!) here is my plan to work through it while staying calm and connected:

Key question: What can I do to keep my church from dying? Or How might we face these adaptive challenges together without tearing apart the congregation? (p 215)

- Focus on your transformation together, not the dying
- Focus on the mountains ahead, not the rivers behind
- Focus on continually learning, not what you have mastered.

My thoughts on next steps I will need to take to face adaptive challenge and lead well:

My thoughts on how I can help my congregation prepare for the adaptive challenges ahead:
