

# Three Ways to be Sustained as you Lead through Change

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Earlier in this colloquium session, Duane Kelderman spoke about factors that are present when significant change happens.

Those of you who are concluding your grant year probably listened to him and reflected on which of those factors were present in your situation this past year. And those of you who are just beginning are wondering which of those factors might be present in the coming year.

That makes sense, because all of your grant projects have to do with change. It's inherent in the words "worship renewal": this project is about making something new. Some of you may have applied for a worship renewal grant because you weren't content with the status quo. Many of you applied because you could see a better future and had a vision for what could be.

When I read the one-page summaries from the 2012 grants I often read about relationships built and strengthened as a key to a successful project. I read your advice about getting started, staying with it, taking well-paced steps as you move through this change. And I read how the reflection on the projects' changes is having deep-down impact in people in ways that will continue even beyond the grant year.

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about the role of the leader in this process of leading through change.

Leadership is not easy. It's often lonely and difficult—both from having to figure out what to do, and from having to deal with the reactions once you start to do it. Because it's not easy, you need sustenance for the journey.

How do you shore yourself up as a leader, so that you can be strong and courageous as you begin your project, or as you continue to till the garden and the ideas that have been planted?

I'd like to say three things about how to take care of yourself and be sustained as a leader in this process of leading through change, whether you're beginning your grant year or moving into the next stage of leadership.

The authors of the book, *The Leader's Journey*, recommend two things that are critical for congregational transformation—and for the personal transformation of the leader who leads his or her congregation or organization through change.

One is taking care of your own spiritual life—practicing the spiritual disciplines (prayer, contemplation, silence, fasting, etc.). You need to be grounded in Christ if you are to lead other followers of Christ. So you have to make sure to take care of your own health—your spiritual, as well as physical and emotional health.

The second thing that will both sustain you and help your group to move well through change is to become a community of grace and truth. Notice—grace AND truth. We need to be truthful and direct, but also gracious in how we speak to and differ with one another. We need to be able to disagree agreeably and work toward consensus.

Leaders need to model that kind of grace and truth in the community, so that it will grow more and more into such a community. And leaders need a healthy “grace & truth” community of their own to nourish and sustain them. Now, it could be that the congregation or group you’re leading is that for you—but it also could be that you need to find your sustenance from another group while you lead—a group of colleagues, a trusted mentor, even your grant team.

So, take care of yourself by shoring up your own spiritual life and by living in and into a community of grace and truth.

The third way you can take care of yourself is to remember the football. Now, I’m really no expert on football, but I learned a little about it from Ronald Heifetz, an expert on leadership—author of the books, *Leadership without Easy Answers* and *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*.

Heifetz says that a leader is like a football player who is running down the field with the ball, and everyone is chasing him, intending to tackle him. Why is that? Is it because they don’t like him? No, it’s not personal. It’s simply because he has the football!

As leaders, we have to remember that it’s not personal when people object to changes like the ones that may come from our grant projects. It may seem personal, but that’s just because we are carrying the football. We are the project directors; we are the ones perceived to be causing the changes that mean stress and loss for some people. We have to stay calm, not respond as if it were personal, and instead, empathize with the loss these people are feeling.

Even exciting new programs can bring a sense of fear and loss for some—fear of the unknown and loss of the familiar. And people experiencing fear and loss are people in need of pastoral care. If we can differentiate—remember that they’re upset with us only because we’ve got the football—we will be in a better position to care for these people. And that will improve relationships, and in the end, be more effective in gaining support for the project and the changes.

We have to remember that people who ask lots of questions or even oppose some of our ideas are people who are engaged, who love their church or their school. If they seem defensive of the past, then we need to join the defense and express our understanding for what they're going through.

Once they feel understood, they will be more likely to listen to us in turn, and begin to understand and hopefully support some of the changes in the future, especially those associated with the grant project.

So, take care of yourselves. Invest in your own spiritual life. Model how people relate in a community of grace and trust. And remember that you're carrying the football. You may get tackled a few times. Welcome to leadership. But you need to get up and keep going. The benefits and rewards will come!