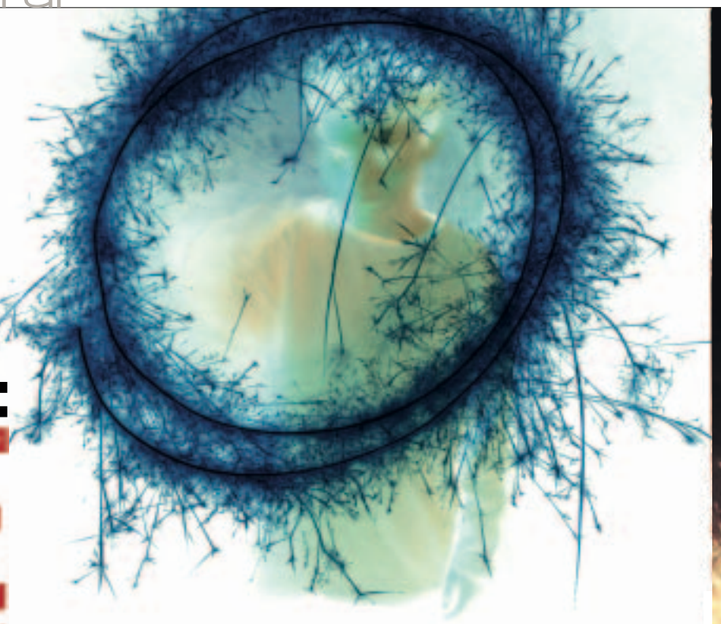
Don't let my love grow cold
I'm calling out, light the fire again
Don't let my vision die
I'm calling out, light the fire again

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TORCHLIGHT: IGNITING THE FIRE OF THE NEXT GENERATION

JOEL BALIN





Lighting The Torch

During a worship conference at our church, I helped host a forum on something I have a great love and vision for: imparting worship, ministry and leadership to the next generation. Most of the initial conversation revolved around "passing the baton." The conversation changed significantly when a young woman said that in the ministry that she was involved with, they stopped using the analogy of passing the baton. Instead, they talked about "lighting the torch." When you pass the baton, your participation in the race is finished, and all you have to look forward to is spending the remainder of your life sitting on the sidelines. However, when we light torches, our own torch stays lit as we ignite life and ministry in those we mentor. This paradigm shift has helped me as an older, seasoned leader to stay the course of mentoring through life-to-life relationships that keep us all burning brighter for Christ.

Out To Pasture Or Out To Pastor?

My commitment to this life-to-life, torch-bearing mentorship was tested recently. I had just finished playing lead guitar for a worship set at our National Worship Leaders Retreat. I had received about half a dozen complimentary comments, and my retreat roommate Josh approached me and asked for a lead guitar lesson. Josh is a very gifted young worship leader/pastor, songwriter and guitarist from the region that I oversee. We have a great relationship, and like many of the worship leaders I get to "lead," Josh is more gifted and talented than I - though he is about half my age. His musically sensitivity and skill, along with tremendous anointing, blessed me when he played guitar for one of the final sessions.

I was enjoying being "proud in a good way," until a voice tried to drown out my father/mentor joy.

"You know, you used to be valued, but it's over now that guys like Josh are around. Let's face it, he already sings and writes songs better than you, so his entering the lead guitar realm pretty much puts you out to pasture. Your useful days are over."

While I was heading for the retirement door, our national events coordinator approached me and said, "Wow, I didn't know Josh was so good. I've asked him to play guitar at the conference coming up in your region. So, instead of you playing all of the sessions like we had planned, maybe he could play two or three and you can still play one or two." I was tempted to believe that playing less lead guitar at our conference would lesson my value, my impact and my acceptance. I have always thought that I had "humility you can proud of," but the enemy, with quite a bit of encouragement from my flesh (or vice-versa), tried to get me to believe that this was about performance rather than relationship. It threatened my relationships with God, with Josh and dozens of other leaders that I've been called to influence.

Along with taking every thought captive and repenting, I quickly re-embraced the mission God has called me to at this stage in my life — mentoring young leaders through relationship. I am truly "proud in a good way" to see those whose torches I have helped to light igniting the world with the presence of God through their worship, creativity and their lives. So, how do we approach the daunting task of developing significant and fruitful mentoring relationships?

Know It All's Don't Know It All

Mentoring is more about impartation than it is about information. There is no way that any of us, even if we have gathered years of experience and wisdom, can compete with the Internet when it comes to providing information. Countless great thoughts by great thinkers on almost any nuance of worship, ministry and leadership are just a Google away. So, what is our value? Our value as mentors is found in life-to-life mentoring and coaching. Having experienced this type of relationship themselves, Paul, Silas and Timothy expressed to the church in Thessolonica, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well" (1Thess. 2:8).

The Spirit, Soul and Body of Worship

Worship, the arts, creativity and people themselves are certainly not one-dimensional. Discipleship and ministry training need to include the development of spirit, soul and body. To accomplish this in our mentoring relationships, we must be prepared to play multiple roles in the lives of those we mentor. Here are a few examples:

Leader – As much as the current generation is repulsed by the lack of authenticity and integrity in public leaders, they are still willing and wanting to follow leaders who will demonstrate honesty and character.

Servant – While praying for one of our worship leaders, I saw a picture of her coming out on a huge stage to lead worship for tens of thousands of people. As she turned to get her microphone from a stagehand, Jesus stood there with a towel and basin instead. Worship leading isn't about being on a microphone in front of all the people; it is about being a servant. Be willing to play guitar while those you are mentoring lead worship. Help them set up and tune their guitar. Model servanthood and humility.

Friend – Being an effective mentor means not only "going before," but also "coming alongside." Jesus told the disciples, "I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends . . ." (John 15:15 NLT). Share meals, and share things about life beyond the worship, ministry or arts arena.

Dad/Mom – In what has been called the "fatherless generation," there is no greater role we can play than that of spiritual parents who model the heart of the Heavenly Father.

Teacher – Learning is more than just the downloading of knowledge; it is the impartation of life. After family, teachers are arguably the most influential people in our lives. Media is constantly teaching a non-God-centered worldview. Our role as teachers can re-center the lives of those who will lead the next generations.

Coach – Motivation is a key component to making a gifted leader into an effective and significant leader. It covers everything from drilling the basics, to revealing the subtle intricacies of life, music, character, spirituality and leadership. Vince Lombardi showed exemplary coaching when he told his team, "Gentleman, this is a football." Brief and debrief often – take advantage of teachable moments. We often meet after worship sets to discuss what went well, and what we could improve upon.

Student – Show that you are willing to learn from them.

Model – We've often heard that leadership and character are more often caught than taught. What we do is more important that what we say. General Norman Schwarzkopf said, "Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy."

Co-leader – resist the temptation to just dump leadership on a newer/younger believer. They need to see your leadership up close, in action. I do much of my mentoring through co-leading.

Empty Nester – students, especially those who are becoming leaders, need to "individuate." Applaud when they go to lead at a church plant or get invited to lead even when you don't. Cheer them on when their flame appears to be getting brighter than yours. It doesn't eclipse your fires when others succeed, it just adds greater light to what we are all trying to accomplish – glorifying God.

Love Kat – This phrase, coined by Tim Sanders, the Leadership Coach for Yahoo, describes people who love by generously sharing all of their information and all of their connections. Help connect those you mentor with others that can help them succeed. Invite them to participate with you in opportunities you have to minister. Give generously, holding nothing back for fear that if you give, you will lose out while others gain.

Greater Rewards

One of the greatest rewards of my life came when my friend and former intern, Billy Somerville, who now has interns of his own, told me that near the end of a conference that he helped lead, one of the main speakers said to him, "You've been mentored haven't you?" Our legacy could revolve around the faint memory of our fifteen minutes of fame while leading worship from a stage, or we can set the stage for eternity by lighting the fire of the next generation as we "Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24 NIV).



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