

**A process and  
conversation guide  
for sending pastors,  
church planters, and  
teams**

# **THE PEOPLE FACTOR**



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*Churchwork is different. Churchwork may be the only enterprise where the investors are the owners are the customers are the employees are the product. Unlike manufacturing, we do not load a machine with the same materials each day and get the same widgets out the back. While there is much to be said for processes and systems, they do not guarantee disciples are made. Every human being is different, has different needs, and responds differently to our efforts. Human beings are as mysterious, wonderful, and frustrating as anything in creation.*

**-Rodney Shaw**

We assume, and rightly so, that church planting is spiritual warfare. And we understand that church planting carries with it an element of financial warfare.

- But we must also recognize that church planting is **relational warfare**.

By this, we mean that success and vision fulfillment hinges primarily on the people involved. People can make church planting an exciting and wonderful process, but they can also make it a very heavy and laborious ordeal.

Scripture declares that "God is not slack concerning His promise" (2 Peter 2:9) and thus, we are left to conclude that God is *always* working on our behalf and for the good of our church. This truth leads us to also conclude that if things are not working out, it is most likely a "people issue." Furthermore, this does not justify finger-pointing around the room or blaming others for our frustration or disappointment. Rather, it forces us to look in the mirror and analyze how exactly we are leading and treating the people around us. A neglected reality of ministry is that to cultivate longevity a leader must continually improve his/her relational intelligence.

To last as church planters and pastors, we must get really good at working with people and navigating the complexities of people dynamics. A great strategy is worthless without people. Furthermore, people should not be viewed as pawns or tools to achieve a vision.

- People *are* the vision.

This means that if you want your church plant to last, you must work to cultivate meaningful and authentic relationships. Everything you do as a pastor hinges on "the people factor."

- You cannot **evangelize** effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot **disciple** effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot **lead** effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot **preach** effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot **implement** a God-given growth strategy without building healthy relationships.

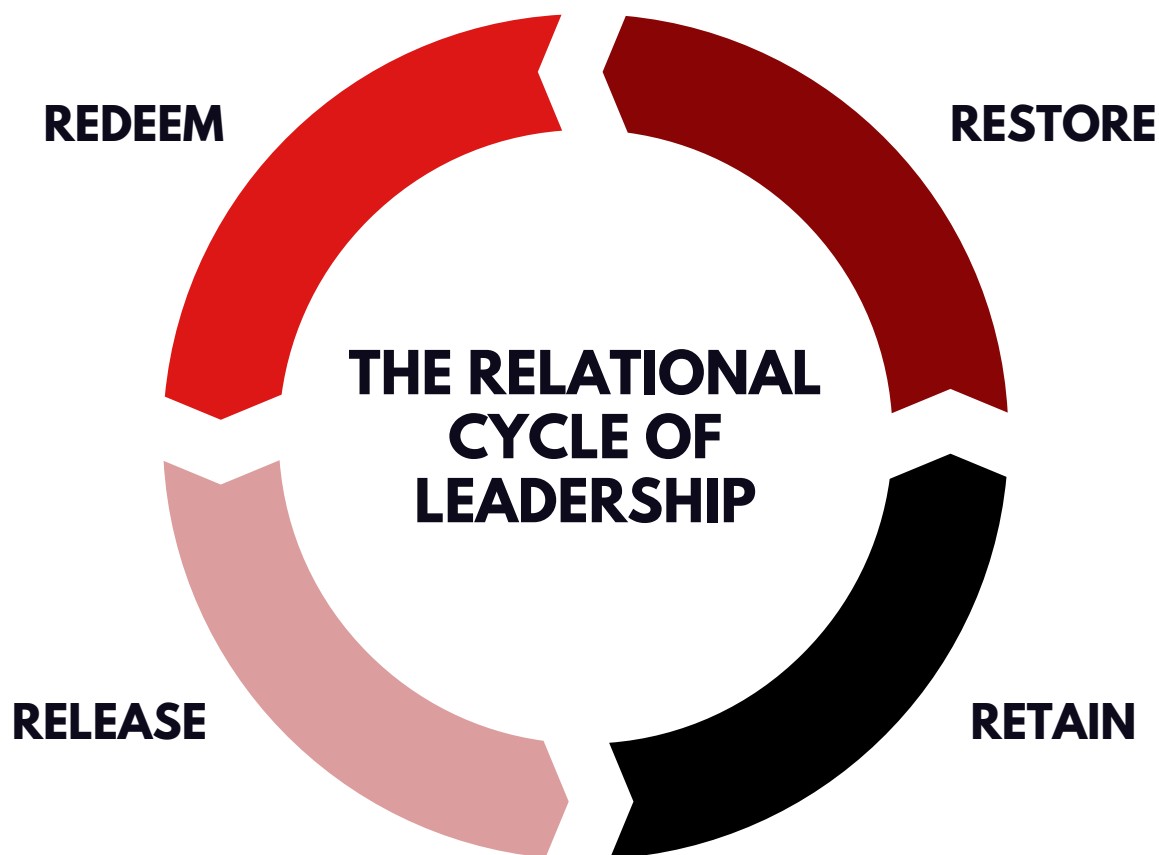
God's plan for His church in the world today is built by building healthy relationships. Your effectiveness as a church planter and pastor is not determined by your speaking ability or social media platform. Your effectiveness as a church planter and pastor is built by how you lead and treat the people in your circle of influence. Therefore, you must work hard to cultivate a healthy relational culture within your team and in your church.

- If people issues arise within the leadership team, they will be felt and indirectly experienced by the entire congregation.

It has been said that within the first three years of church planting we should "leave our commentaries in the closet and go buy someone a cup of coffee." In other words, we develop leadership capital with people through the art of vulnerable and authentic conversations.

- If there is an issue keeping you awake at night it is likely because you have neglected to have a crucial conversation with someone in your circle of influence.

Throughout your church planting and pastoral journey, you will be called to redeem, restore, retain, and release people. This relational cycle is something that you cannot avoid in leadership. It is a cycle that continuously repeats itself over time.



## **REDEEM**

When you meet someone in your city that is lost in sin, your role will be to help them experience redemption. In fact, if God has called you to a city it is because He has identified people there in need of redemption. The moment you take your first step into your city, you should do so with the understanding that "there are many people in the city that belong to God" (Acts 18:10). We observe redemption in the life of a person when they repent of their sins, are baptized in the name of Jesus, and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

## **RESTORE**

In time, you will find that certain individuals and families also need to be restored. We observe this in troubled marriages, the addicted, those with great financial needs, and anyone who has experienced great loss or adversity. In each case, there is something in need of restoration and it will be your role to help facilitate that process. We accomplish this through small groups, counseling, recovery classes, need-specific education, focused prayer, and continued emotional support.

## **RETAIN**

As your church grows and you begin to build a team, your role as the leader will be to cultivate an environment in which your team can flourish. You do this by giving each person ownership, allowing space for open feedback, and by attuning to their unique skills and giftings. To effectively retain good people, you must practice self-awareness and understand how your temperament and strengths compare or contrast with those of others. In certain situations, you will need to confront or correct team members in order to retain them. This should always occur in the context of compassionate conversations. Over time, as you invest in people through active listening and relationship building, you will gain the credibility needed to lead them.

## **RELEASE**

The most difficult part of the relational cycle is when you, as the leader, are called to release people. This can happen through death or loss, but also through life transitions and job changes. In other cases, people may leave because you don't meet their expectations. Or, perhaps, they were called to your church for a season instead of a lifetime.

However people leave, take time to grieve the loss, and ask God to help you release them into his care. Own the reality that as a church planter and pastor you are not called to exert control over people. Rather, you are called to steward people to the best of your ability, and then as God leads to release them back to Him.

There will be critical moments in your ministry, and in the life of your church, that you will be called to release people. This is not something you can avoid. It is a requirement. At times, you will have to make decisions that are the best for people but difficult for you.

- Rest assured that this process is a necessary part of vision fulfillment.

For the church to move forward, some people will have to leave; and you, as the pastor, will have to release them. Though you may not realize it at the moment, you will see in time that it was all a part of God's plan for your church in your city.

In each new season and phase of church growth, consider where you may be in the relational cycle of leadership. As each new person steps into your circle of influence, consider whether there is a need to redeem, restore, retain, or release them. God will lead you and give you the strength for every stage in the leadership journey.

As you consider your leadership journey into church planting and pastoral ministry, take time to think through the following reflection prompts:

**How much time each week do I spend building relationships?**

**When I think of the members of my leadership team, are there certain people I have not spent much time with? How can I cultivate more meaningful relationships with these people?**

**Is there a crucial conversation I may be avoiding?**

**Who is God calling me to redeem, restore, retain, and release?**