

Here are three core cultural truths that make a difference in the ability of a congregation to build a future and where to focus if they are missing:

- 1. There needs to be enough trust in the system to have authentic relationships within the leadership to navigate conflict and to look brokenness in the eye.**

When leadership intentionally avoids conflict with every conversation, as if the church will fall apart if someone disagrees, the tension alone will reduce the capacity to birth any new vision. If all the energy is spent pleasing a few people, literally nothing new can happen. System alert: This is not only about the work of the pastor, deacon, or staff. Taking the risk to trust is everyone's work.

Similarly, the ability to enter into the suffering, pain, and fear in one another is what it means to have authentic relationships. Sunday-nice relationships are missing the grit of daily life. Many of us may have been trained to show up as though our lives are always great, but the white-lies we tell get in the way of really knowing each other. (I use "white-lies" intentionally to alert white people to our blind spots.)

How do you change this?

Agree on the terms of engagement and practice forgiveness. Protect the innovators so new things can happen. Become a learning community by focusing on faith practices

such as reading scripture, praying together, and caring for those in need with a genuine heart. Break the cycle of surface relationships by going first and sharing a little of your own truth.

- 2. There needs to be a willingness to take responsibility for brokenness of the past and as well as future hope.**

The blame game is deadly. Looking back with a finger pointed at who dropped the ball will not build a vibrant future. Looking forward with an expectation that the newest person on the staff will save the day is unfair.

How can you change this?

The practice of grace starts at the top. The council or board, staff, and other key leaders can commit to letting go of the past, and to joining the Holy Spirit in the future by practicing forgiveness and hope together. Naming ways people have been complicit in the suffering of others is key.

- 3. There needs to be intentional listening to the stakeholders.**

When leaders draw on their own experience and needs without continuously listening to others, nothing changes. Blind spots are real.

How can we change this?

Identify the stakeholders and listen to them. Embrace the 50-50 rule: Spend 50% of your time listening to people who are already at church and 50% to those who are not. We have important stakeholders who we do not know yet.