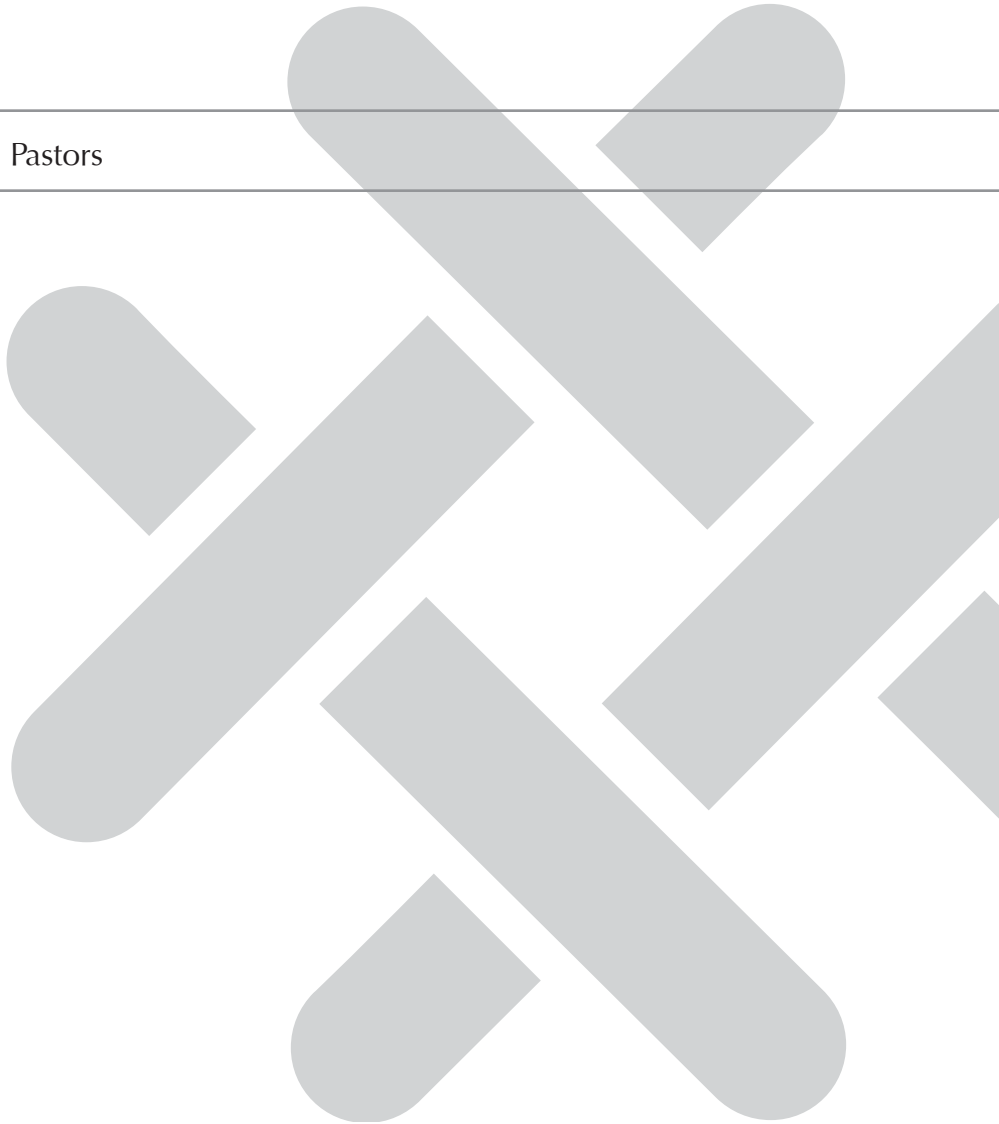


CREATING A CULTURE OF BALANCE

A Mandate for Next Generation Pastors

by Pat Springle



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“If I’m going to be in the ministry ten years from now, I have to create a culture of balance for me, my family and my staff.” Many next generation pastors—senior pastors in their 20s and 30s who are growing in influence and impact—echo this comment from Brad Bell, founding pastor of **The Well Community Church** in Fresno, California (www.thewellcommunity.org). Brad knows the strain of trying to juggle his personal life, his family and the demands of a growing church. Half-hearted efforts to correct the imbalance, he has concluded, simply aren’t enough. He explains, “As leaders, one of our primary responsibilities is to be ‘cultural engineers.’ We have to create a culture of balance for those we lead and serve. And if we don’t model it ourselves, it won’t be reproduced in their lives. We need to enforce it in the lives of people on our teams and step in and confront them when they are out of balance.”



BRAD BELL

Next gen pastors are rising champions in pastoral leadership. They are young lions who use their God-given talents, vision and drive to expand the kingdom of God, and they want to learn to manage the stresses of success and failure. If they find this balance, they will keep their sword in the fight for many years, but if they fail, they risk hurting those they love most, and eventually, they may burn out and leave the ministry.

**YOUNG,
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Young, successful spiritual leaders experience enormous pressures. As their churches grow, an ever-increasing number of people expect their pastor to be available to meet their needs. Mark Henry, pastor of **North Metro Church** in Marietta, Georgia (www.northmetro.org), explains that as his church has grown, he and his wife can’t go anywhere without church people coming over and wanting to talk with them. “Don’t get me wrong,” Mark relates. “I love these people, but there are times that my wife and I want to have a private, romantic dinner. We tried to get away to Cancun last year to spend time alone, only to find that two couples from our church were staying at the same hotel. It seems like we’re ‘always doing church,’ and that’s

tiring.” Heightened expectations are evident in the gathered congregation on Sunday morning as well as from individuals at the mall.

Chip Henderson, pastor of **Pinelake Church** in Brandon, Mississippi (www.pinelake.org), explains the pressure he feels every week: “People at our church expect me to hit a homerun every Sunday. I feel okay most of the week, but by Friday, I can feel the tension. By Saturday after lunch, it weighs a ton. People are listening to me and making decisions based on what I preach on Sunday morning. That’s a huge burden of responsibility.”

The complexity of leading a large church escalates as each growth goal is exceeded. Brad remembers, “Things were a lot different when our whole staff could fit into a small car and go have lunch together. As we’ve grown, we’ve added staff, and my organizational structure—everybody reporting to me—isn’t working anymore. I don’t want to lose touch with my staff by adding layers, but something’s got to change.”

Overview

To create a “culture of balance,” many next gen pastors have learned that they need to understand the nature of stress, and they also practice healthy self-examination to discern if—or to what extent—their lives are out of balance. They find that pressure comes from expected sources such as failure and conflict, but surprisingly, success and growth produce their own forms of stress.

Solutions, however, are at hand. These answers are both internal and external, spiritual and functional. A “broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51: 17) is also essential in gaining God’s perspective on the pressures and opportunities of ministry.

In addition to this important spiritual perspective, next gen pastors offer a wide range of practical suggestions to get real change to take root in their

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lives, their families and their leadership teams. Their goal is not just to make it through one more day. They want to serve God with passion and excellence for a lifetime. (Note: The people quoted in this paper are all next gen pastors who have seen rapid growth in their churches and who have earned the respect of others in their various spheres of influence.)

Stress: Constructive or Destructive

In his book, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Our Overloaded Lives*, medical doctor Richard Swenson observes that stress isn't the problem; the real struggle comes from *too much* stress. Moderate levels of stress actually bring out the best in leaders. Pastors report that appropriate challenges stimulate their creativity and motivate them to accomplish bigger goals.

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[As with] the proverbial frog in the kettle, stress levels can rise so gradually that we don't notice them. As tension escalates beyond a certain point, we experience detrimental effects of too much pressure. When high levels of stress become normalized, we fail to notice the problem and make changes. Under intense pressure, our capacities are diminished, we make poor decisions, and every facet of our lives is affected. We feel generalized anger and resentment, we experience physiological symptoms like headaches and stomach problems, our most valued relationships suffer, and our effectiveness declines. At that point, we can experience the devastation of burnout.¹

Some next gen pastors endure a level of stress that can be compared to combat fatigue and compassion fatigue. In the Civil War, officers noticed that the effectiveness of many soldiers was adversely affected by the strain of battle. Thousands had to be taken out of the front lines to recuperate, but little was understood about the

phenomenon. The intense artillery bombardments of World War I caused hundreds of thousands of soldiers to become emotionally and psychologically incapacitated. The condition was called "shell shock." In World War II, high-ranking officers and doctors grasped the causes and impact of continuous combat on soldiers. They noticed that the effectiveness of soldiers deteriorated sharply when they were in combat more than 90 days. In *Combat Exhaustion*, a study by Army psychiatrists, research showed that a soldier "became steadily less valuable [after 90 days in action] until he was completely useless."² The PBS documentary, *The Perilous Fight*, reported on American soldiers in the Pacific theater: An astounding "1,393,000 soldiers were treated for battle fatigue during World War II. Of all ground combat troops, 37% were discharged for psychiatric reasons."³

Some might argue that the pressures on next gen pastors more closely approximate "compassion fatigue," a mild form of post-traumatic stress disorder commonly associated with doctors, nurses, pastors, chaplains and charity workers. Providing care for hurting people is, to a large degree, the stock-in-trade of the pastor's role, but the combination of intensity (such as trauma counseling) and prolonged seasons of care-taking (such as caring for the chronically ill or those displaced by hurricanes) can erode energy and seriously affect a pastor's effectiveness. Steve Robinson, pastor of **Church of the King** in Mandeville, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans (www.churchofthekinginfo.com), reports that after Hurricane Katrina devastated their city in 2005, it took eight months before a sense of normalcy returned to his community and his church. During that long ordeal, Steve tried desperately to help rebuild broken lives and faced issues of compassion fatigue firsthand. He observes, "We're just now coming back to life. A lot of people lost everything they had, and we were there to help them. When the storm hit, a lot of people left town, and about a third of them have never come back. It's been a long struggle to rebuild, and now we're looking at another Hurricane season."



STEVE ROBINSON

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THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE PEOPLE TO REACH AND MORE BELIEVERS TO DISCIPLE.



MARK SAUNDERS

reaching more people, so we always have lots of immature Christians to grow up. Often, my personal goal is to just stay alive spiritually.”

A Look in the Mirror



Matt Williams in his office at Grace Church.

POPULAR AUTHOR AND PASTOR JOHN ORTBERG IDENTIFIES TWO SIGNS OF STRESS IN PASTORS— SPEEDING UP AND MULTI-TASKING

Perhaps next gen pastors also experience a form of stress that comes from the powerful combination of their awareness of the desperate needs of people in their communities and their own intense desire to expand the kingdom of God.

Instead of combat fatigue or compassion fatigue, it might be called “Great Commission fatigue.” In a sense, the job is never completed. There are always more people to reach and more believers to disciple. Mark Saunders, pastor of Bay Life Church in Brandon, Florida (www.baylife.org), observes, “When I came to the church, there were many new believers. We’re trying to grow them, but we’re also

“Some of us wear all the stress of being a pastor as a badge of honor,” notes Matt Williams, pastor of Grace Church in Greenville, South Carolina (www.gracechurchsc.org), a non-denominational church in the heart of the traditional Bible belt with attendance of almost 2,000. The “badge of honor” though, comes at a steep price. Matt reflects, “But pride in being stressed out is sick. When I’m under stress, I become more driven, more isolated, more demanding of people around me. Stress produces a lot of anger in me. The high level of stress in my life has become ‘normal.’ I’ve gotten to the point that I don’t even notice it. I need to look in the mirror and be honest about what I see.”

In his article, “Diagnosing Hurry Sickness” in Leadership magazine, popular author and

pastor John Ortberg identifies two signs of stress in pastors—speeding up and multi-tasking:

- Speeding up. You are haunted by the fear that you don’t have enough time to do what needs to be done. You try to read faster, lead board meetings more efficiently, write sermons on the fly and, when counseling, you nod more often to encourage the counselee to accelerate.
• Multi-tasking. You find yourself doing or thinking more than one thing at a time. The car is a favorite place for this. Hurry-sick pastors may drive, eat, drink coffee, listen to tapes for sermon ideas, shave or apply make-up, direct church business on the car phone—all at the same time. Or they may try to watch TV, read Leadership, eat dinner and carry on a phone conversation simultaneously.

Other symptoms of stress overload include:

- Loss of compassion. For pastors under pressure, one of the first character qualities to slip away is genuine care for the hurting. Matt Chandler, pastor of The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas (www.thevillagechurch.net), feels disgusted when excess stress causes him to lose his heart for people. He notices, “When people’s needs start to bother me, I know I’m losing it. They had been ‘my people’ to love and nurture and challenge and rebuke, but when stress steals my compassion, these dear people become my enemies. I begin to resent their needs because it requires more from me than I’m able to deliver. At that point, I’m happy for them to go down the road to somebody else’s church and become another pastor’s responsibility.”

FOR PASTORS UNDER PRESSURE, ONE OF THE FIRST CHARACTER QUALITIES TO SLIP AWAY IS GENUINE CARE FOR THE HURTING.

Bryan Collier, pastor of The Orchard, a United Methodist Congregation in Tupelo, Mississippi (www.theorchard.net), has a



BRYAN COLLIER

genuine heart for the lost. In fact, he keeps pictures of people in his community in his office to remind him that every effort is designed to draw those people into a redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ. But Bryan admits that stress robs him of his compassion for those people. He remarks, "When I'm under too much stress, I stop loving people. I only tolerate them, and to be honest, I sometimes move beyond tolerating them to using them to accomplish my own objectives. This attitude shows up first with my family. Instead of enjoying the children, I rush them through their baths and bedtime because I have other things to do that, at the time, seem more important than my children. I love people, but when I'm under too much stress for too long, I resent them and use them instead of loving them."

- *Snapping at people.* Stress seems to surface most often in short tempers with family and staff. The sense of heightened expectations on pastors affects all their relationships. These unrealistic expectations inevitably lead to verbalized demands instead of grace, and conflict instead of understanding. The higher the stress level, the greater the need to control people and situations. Ron Zappia, pastor of **Harvest Bible Chapel** in Wheaton, Illinois (www.harvestglenellyn.org),

became a Christian during a crisis in his marriage. At the time, he was a successful businessman, but he soon left the business world to go to seminary to deepen his grasp of Scripture and his walk with God. Ron found himself called to be a pastor of a growing church in the shadows of Wheaton, home of Billy Graham's alma mater college and numerous parachurch organizations. Ron reports that stress from the office can have adverse affects on his patience levels at home, "There are times in the midst of much pressure at church where instead of leaving these issues at the office I have the tendency to bring them home with me and not give my family the attention they deserve. Instead of letting go immediately upon arrival I can

hang on to these things for some time causing me to be distracted and difficult to be around."

- *A cloud of discouragement.* Sooner or later, unfulfilled expectations result in discouragement, and leaders sometimes find they have slipped from vision, hope and joy into a pervasive cloud of pessimism. Ken Werlein, pastor of **Faithbridge Church** in Spring, Texas (www.faithbridge.org), comments, "Sometimes when I've been under a lot of demands for a while, my wife can see it in my eyes. She'll tell me, 'You don't look like you're filled with the Holy Spirit. You're not here for me right now.' And she's right. I've lost my joy. I'm frustrated and impatient that 'nobody is doing enough' to help me. Her comments often bring me back to reality so I can remember that it's God's job to change lives, not mine."

- *Physical symptoms.* Some physicians estimate that 70% of their patients exhibit physical effects of the stress in their lives. Their symptoms manifest at their weakest points. Some experience chronic headaches, some have gastro-intestinal problems, and others suffer from muscle aches and pains. High levels of adrenaline created by intense stress over time often interrupt sleep, but conversely, some people respond to intense pressure by sleeping too much. Darrin Patrick, pastor of **The Journey** in Clayton, Missouri (www.journeyon.net), reports a time of

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extreme stress in his life: “In addition to stomach problems and not being able to sleep, I couldn’t concentrate. In fact, I usually read to gain insight and encouragement, but during this time, I couldn’t focus well enough to read. I used caffeine and sugar to keep my engines going. On top of all that, the joy of serving God turned into a burden. It was a dark time.”

- *Withdrawal.* “Nobody understands.” “I’m all alone and nobody cares.” “Why the heck did I become a pastor anyway?” These and a hundred other thoughts of loneliness and despair push stressed leaders to withdraw from people. Certainly, there are times when getting alone is good and beneficial, but when a leader is filled with self-pity and discouragement, spending time alone is fertile soil for even deeper discouragement. Though his church has grown to 5,500 in only a few years, Toby Slough, pastor of **Cross Timbers Community Church** in Argyle, Texas (www.crosstimberschurch.org), sometimes feels overwhelmed. At those times, self-protection is his driving goal. Toby says, “I can tell when I’m under too much pressure. I withdraw. It’s like I crawl into a cave and pull back from people and events to protect myself as much as I can. But this isn’t healthy; it’s hiding. I withdraw even from the people who love me and could help if I’d let them.”



TOBY SLOUGH

Even some of the most energetic and visionary next gen pastors report times when they felt so alone and discouraged that they sat around for days refusing even to answer the phone. Toby continues, “God has brought me a long way back, and now, recognizing that ‘black wave’ of depression in the distance is an early warning signal for me to stop, take stock of my life, slow down and refocus on God’s grace.”

- *Hyper-vigilance.* Too much stress causes some people to shut down, but other people grow antennae to pick up every nuance in every conversation and every event. They feel threatened, and their coping mechanism is to heighten their sense of awareness. Unconsciously, they hope they can notice and solve problems before they get out of

hand. This hyper-awareness also causes them to be very sensitive to appraisals by those around them. They live for approval, and they are often devastated by criticism.

- *Fantasies.* People under stress desperately want to escape. Leaders aren’t any different. Darrin Patrick reports, “When I’m under a lot of stress, temptation looks really good. I think that’s the reason some guys experience moral failure. They want to escape the pain and find some happiness, and that’s the quickest and easiest way they can find.” Fantasizing is insidious because it’s private but powerful. Thoughts drift and tantalize, and eventually, behavior that was once unthinkable becomes a thought, then an option and perhaps even a plan.
- *Anger at God.* As stress continues to mount, minor irritations become resentments, and anger becomes a way of life instead of a momentary emotion. Eventually, people under stress perceive that those in authority *should have* prevented or *could have* alleviated the oppressive load they feel. They feel angry at those in authority, and of course, the ultimate authority figure is God. Bay Life Church’s Mark Saunders feels the stress of trying to lead a church with many young believers and too few leaders. He describes his out-

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rage that life can be so unfair: “I go into a room alone, and I tell God that I’m really hacked off at him. I remind him of all the stuff I’ve done for him, and I ask, ‘Is this how you repay me?’ Like an outraged teenager reacting to a parent, I threaten to do something that will wreck my ministry. That’s what happens to me when I get too hopped up on getting—or more accurately, losing—people’s approval of me. At those times, I think irrationally and say all kinds of things to God. By his grace, he listens and forgives and gives me a fresh perspective. But these are the times that scare me the most.”

- *Meltdown.* The experience has many labels including “crash,” “crater,” “nervous breakdown,” “clinical depression,” and “burnout.” When excessive stress isn’t relieved over a long period of time, people almost inevitably experience a devastating meltdown when they are forced to back away from responsibilities for a time to recuperate. A young pastor of a large, growing church admits, “A couple of years ago, I started shaking. No matter what I tried, I couldn’t stop. I wondered if I had multiple sclerosis, and I honestly thought I was dying. I learned that my shaking was my body’s way of signaling me that something was wrong—*really* wrong—in my life.”

An excellent online article, “Burnout: Signs, Symptoms, and Prevention,” defines and describes burnout this way:

Burnout produces feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, cynicism, resentment and failure—as well as stagnation and reduced productivity. These stress reactions can result in levels of depression or unhappiness that eventually threaten your job, your relationships and your health.

Burnout is associated with situations in which a person feels overworked, underappreciated, confused about expectations and priorities, concerned about job security, overcommitted with responsibilities, and/or resentful about duties that are not commensurate with pay.

Burnout can occur when you feel you are

unable to meet constant demands, and you become increasingly overwhelmed and depleted of energy. Debilitating sadness, anger or indifference can set in. You begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place.⁵

One of the potential problems, of course, is that a wrong diagnosis of the problem leads to wrong solutions, creating even more stress. Many high-energy visionaries see all the needs in people’s lives and conclude that they need to work just a little harder to get more done. When they’re tired, they drink more coffee to keep them “up.” When things go wrong, they become more controlling and demand more of their staff. They skip meals and multi-task to get a little more done in a day, but these solutions actually increase levels of stress. They do nothing to alleviate unrealistic expectations and bring wisdom.

When church leaders think of the problems of stress, they usually think of the negative, painful things that come into their lives. But stress is the natural by-product of change, positive or negative. An instrument called the Survey of Recent Events (SRE) assigns a point value of stress to a wide range of common experiences. A baseline of 50 points was given to getting married, and all other events were calculated in comparison. The levels of stress for negative life experiences included:

- *Death of a spouse: 100 points*
- *Death of a close family member: 63 points*
- *Son or daughter leaving home: 29 points*
- *Trouble with in-laws: 29 points*
- *Minor violations of the law: 11 points*

But positive experiences also increase levels of stress. For example:

- *Pregnancy: 40 points*
- *Major adjustment at work: 39 points*
- *Outstanding personal achievement: 28 points*

WHEN CHURCH LEADERS THINK OF THE PROBLEMS OF STRESS, THEY USUALLY THINK OF THE NEGATIVE, PAINFUL THINGS THAT COME INTO THEIR LIVES.

- Major change in living conditions: 25 points
- Major change in recreation: 19 points

In their book, *Psychological Testing*, Robert Kaplan and Dennis Saccuzzo comment on the SRE, “Remarkably, there is little disagreement about these values among raters differing in age, sex, marital status, education, social class, race and creed. In addition, there was substantial agreement among people from different cultures.”⁶ Research showed that those with higher scores were twice as likely to become physically ill than those with lower scores. Stress, it appears, can be caused by success as much as by failure and conflict.

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Stress Caused by Success

Larry Osborne is a ministry consultant to next gen and other pastors, as well as lead pastor of **North Coast Church** in Vista, California (www.northcoastchurch.com). He observes, “It’s a mistake to assume that every pastor will experience devastating failure and burnout. In some cases, God gives them grace to see a long pattern of success in their lives and ministries. But each stage of growth creates a greater degree of complexity and demands higher levels of organizational skills. Growth produces a stress all its own.” The pressures that come from successful, growing churches are real, but they can be anticipated. Typically, they aren’t as difficult to manage as stress resulting from failure or conflict.



Larry Osborne teaching at North Coast Church, Vista, CA

Growing churches require increases in the quality and quantity of staffing, and next gen pastors feel tremendous pressure to make the right decisions in hiring and placing staff members on their teams. “Things have changed so much,” The Well’s

Brad Bell reflects. “I have to work a lot harder to build relationships with all the staff we have now. And I don’t think our organizational structure has caught up with the additions we’ve made to our team.”

Another pressure created by success is that the bar is continually raised to the next level, so next gen pastors have difficulty enjoying the fruit God has given them. “What if we stop growing?” asks Pinelake Church’s Chip Henderson, who has seen steady growth to about 5,500, but who knows he’s under the microscope of others’ eyes. “We’ve seen God do some incredible things at our church, but to be honest, I live in fear that we’ll get stuck where we are now.” Many next gen pastors voice the same internal struggle. They are thankful for the success God has given them, but to a large degree, their identities have been shaped by their success. They are known as “young pastors of growing churches,” and the fear of stagnation haunts their thoughts.

Tommy Gray, pastor of **Clearbranch United Methodist Church** in Trussville, Alabama (www.clearbranch.org), grew up in a small church, and he is amazed that God is using him to build a large congregation. As his church has grown, he has experienced a time of intense challenge and tension in his personal life, his family and his denomination, and he observes, “Most people in our churches want us to be happy and healthy, but many of us set our standards and expectations incredibly high. When we feel the internal pressure to meet these high goals, we project those expectations onto our congregations and blame them for pressuring us. The problem is in us, not them. I remember one of my seminary professors saying that pastors love to talk about their busy schedules because it strokes our egos. It makes us feel important—and even indispensable.” Tommy recalls reading Gordon McDonald’s 1985 book, *Ordering Your Private World*. “That book defined the difference between being *driven* and being *called*. I realized I had been living a very driven life, full of fear and pride. That had to change.”



TOMMY GRAY

Tommy also identifies stress in his marriage that was unwittingly created by good intentions. To protect his wife from unnecessary pressure, he chose to avoid talking to her about the

Ceilings of Complexity

According to Larry Osborne, pastor of North Coast Church, Vista, California (introduced earlier):

For next generation pastors, every stage of growth creates a new challenge of complexity. Additional staff, larger programs and more people demand more of their time, and if they aren't careful, pastors will lose their edge that made them successful. The principle is to "stay small so you can stay creative." A group of two or three can stimulate creative juices in each other, but groups of seven to fifteen can only offer critiques, not creativity. The goal of organization, then, is to recognize each "ceiling of complexity" and make adjustments so the central planning team can remain small, vibrant and alive.

How can you tell if your structure needs to change? By the level of discord you experience. When staff and ministries are added, lines of communication increase exponentially, not arithmetically. If the structure isn't adjusted, problems surface among good people. When that happens, I assume it's a structural problem, not a character flaw in the individuals.

At each ceiling where the current organization can't cope with increased complexity, you need to reorganize to produce:

- New ways of relating. It's not as easy to communicate with a larger team, so you'll have to step back and examine how to cast vision to everybody and assure that planning and implementation occur at appropriate levels in the organization.
- New sources of insight. I've had the privilege of watching gifted pastors shape and lead some wonderful ministries, but sooner or later, all of us hit the limit of our knowledge and expertise. At those times, we need to go to the experts who will challenge our thinking and help us reshape our direction. We may find the assistance we need in our denomination or from other ministry sources, or we may need to look outside the church to find the expert we need.
- New personal habits. We are creatures of habit, and if those habits have served us well and provided success, we are often tenaciously wedded to them. But growth demands that we change some of our cherished habits so even more growth can occur. For example, for years I prepared my messages late in the week. That worked for a long time, but as the church grew, we realized we needed to prepare questions earlier in the week for small groups so they could be printed and ready on Sunday morning. For that reason, I had to change my habit and prepare my messages earlier in the week. I don't like it, but it's a necessary accommodation to our growth.
- New organizational structure. I simply can't have 20 staff members reporting to me. I knew I had to stay small to stay creative, so I restructured our staff so that only a handful of people report to me. This tiered approach has worked really well.

I've noticed that a lot of successful young pastors get tied in a knot about pride, ego and humility. They might say something like, "I want it to be all of God, not of me." That's a noble sentiment, but the fact is that God has called them to lead and serve. He uses people: people with flaws, people who struggle with their motives. But still, he uses people. God gave us our abilities, and he placed us in our roles. Acknowledging this fact relieves our fears and limits our pride. Paul wrote, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7) We have received our abilities and roles from God, and as we grasp that fact, we can serve him with joy, strength and humility. It's not pride to recognize that God has equipped us to lead.

complexities and demands of his role as the pastor. "It backfired on me," he remembers. "She told me, 'You don't come to me for advice anymore. You don't value my input in your ministry.' I had wanted to protect her from stress, but I actually created a different kind of stress by shielding her. We had to talk through all that and find a balance so she felt included but not overwhelmed."

Next gen pastors sometimes find themselves in a unique and precarious position. They are young visionaries, often giving spiritual leadership to people who are decades their seniors. These pastors may not have as much experience as other ministers, but God has used their passion and vision to build large, successful churches. This combination of youth and success generates a powerful blend of insecurity and high

expectations, resulting in enormous pressure to grow even more. On the outside, pastors appear to have it all together, but most people don't comprehend the oppressive weight of their responsibilities. Few people grasp the complexity of pastoral ministry. Most people think pastors work only a few hours a week. They have little idea of the demands of building and developing staff, training leaders, orchestrating programs,

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counseling people with troubled marriages or wayward children, and juggling all the other "balls" associated with a growing church. And at the end of each day, these young visionaries go home to the joys and demands of being loving, attentive husbands and fathers.

Failure may be a difficult pill to swallow, but success can have a dark, seductive side. Vance Pitman, pastor of **Hope Baptist Church** in Las Vegas, Nevada (www.hopebaptistchurch.com),

has seen phenomenal growth in his church in only a few years. In addition, God has used his ministry to plant five more churches and begin ministries in nine countries. Still, Vance has seen the dark side of success. "I love what I do," he reflected, "but to tell you the truth, the rush of seeing so much happening is addictive. Our church was planted by the clear leading of God, and by his grace, we've seen phenomenal growth. In a city where only 2% of the population attends church, we've seen a large influx of blacks and whites, Asians and Hispanics. It looks like the Kingdom of God every Sunday. We've planted five churches, and we have ministries in nine countries around the world. It's been a rush, and life's a whirlwind. We call it 'whitewater church' because we're always in the rapids. I don't want to slow down, and I'm not sure I could if I wanted to. I've

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Staffing a Growing Church

*According to Bruce Miller, pastor of **McKinney Fellowship Bible Church**, McKinney, Texas (www.mcfbc.org), and coach to next gen pastors:*

As their churches grow, next gen pastors often add staff who report directly to them. That may work fine in the early stages, but sooner or later, a flat organizational chart in a large church makes too many demands on the pastor's time and energy. These pastors soon discover that they can be hands-on with a few, but not with many. Different denominations and pastors with different personality types have several options for organizing their staff. I recommend they consider:

- Early in the church's growth, hire a competent administrator. This person can take a lot of the load from the pastor's shoulders, and he or she doesn't need to have a seminary degree or be paid a high salary.
- Hire an executive pastor. When the church staff reaches a size that demands a different structure, consider hiring someone with a strong blend of ministry experience and organizational skills. Some churches have made the mistake of hiring someone from the business world who has no ministry background, but this role demands a strong grasp of ministry philosophy, skill and heart. The executive pastor and perhaps one or two others on the staff will report directly to the senior pastor as the "senior pastoral team," and the other staff ministry leaders will report to the executive pastor. Support staff, of course, will report to the person they serve. This organizational structure allows the senior pastor to focus his time and energies on his God-given calling, but it still allows him to speak powerfully into the lives and ministries of staff personally and in regular meetings without the burden of supervising them.
- Some churches have adopted an organizational structure of "pods," in which a few (usually three) directors of complementary ministries meet together regularly for planning, delegation and prayer. For example, one church made a group from the directors of worship, creative arts and music; another group came from the directors of small groups, education and missions; another group came from the leaders of college, high school and junior high ministries.

gotten used to that level of adrenaline, and I'm not sure I know how to operate without it."

Next gen pastors anticipate the pressures that come from success. "That's what we signed up for," says Grace Church's Matt Williams. "The ministry is like a football game. The quarterback calls plays. Some of them work; some don't. You read the defense to figure out what you can do to move the ball, and you make adjustments. Fumbles and mistakes are just part of the game. There's nothing tragic or devastating about them. But the internal drive to achieve recognition thrives on success. The problem is that this drive doesn't feel like a football game. It feels like cancer. If I don't recognize it, I have no hope of fighting it."

Stress Caused by Failure and Conflict

"I couldn't sleep, and I gained 40 pounds."

"My stomach was in knots for months. I felt like the world was caving in."

"Nothing was fun anymore. And God seemed like only a memory."

"I cratered. It was over. I experienced complete collapse—mentally, physically, relationally and spiritually—for 18 months."

A number of next gen pastors point to a checkered past of successes and failures in their ministries, and especially, in building a team of staff and key lay leaders. Pastors who respond in healthy ways to failures recognize they must set realistic performance and spiritual expectations for themselves.

Some see failures as a natural and inescapable part of taking risks in their pursuit of expanding the kingdom of God. But for others, their identity is too closely tied to success, so failure can be devastating.

Conflict, and the sense of betrayal, is often even more damaging.

North Coast Church's Larry Osborne describes a point in his ministry when someone closest to

him on his staff led a mutiny against him. Larry considered him to be a partner in ministry. Together, they had seen God use them to reach thousands of people with the gospel and grow their church. "To this day, I couldn't tell you why it happened," Larry explains. "We had worked together so well, but I guess he felt threatened by my role as senior pastor. Behind my back, he led a rebellion. It was one of the darkest days of my life, certainly of my ministry. To his credit and by the grace of God, we worked through it, and we are friends again, but those months of betrayal, intrigue and slander were devastating to me."

Isolation is all too common for visionary leaders who find themselves ahead of the pack. "Nobody understood the pressures I was under," one pastor confided. "I felt completely and absolutely alone. None of my staff understood all the pressures I felt each day. I tried to talk to my wife, but I sure didn't want to bring all my church stuff home every night and dump it all on her."

When next gen pastors reflect on times of struggle in their ministries and their lives, many of them point to those moments as times when God touched their lives more deeply than ever before. Though the pain of those moments was intense, they point to them as turning points when they learned valuable lessons of brokenness.

The Paradox of Brokenness

Next gen pastors may have a powerful vision of successful ministry, but they also possess a genuine grasp of the role of spiritual brokenness. Human nature resists being broken and contrite, but even a casual reading of Scripture reveals that humility is the door to a deeper, richer walk with God. The process is almost universally messy, but God has his way. On the other side, we become less demanding of ourselves and others, and less threatened by failure. Cross Timbers' Toby Slough remembers, "For the first time in my life, I was in a place that I couldn't perform my way out of. I was out of options, completely broken before God. In my darkest moments, I wrote in my

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Mark Saunders and Jim Leggett getting to know each other. Relationships are important to keep from feeling isolated; to talk about the successes and failures.

journal, 'God, I never want to come back here again, but I never want to forget how desperate I am for you at this moment.' Before that time, I had preached about being desperate for God, but I had never experienced that point of desperation. Now I knew. Today, we won't even consider anyone for our staff who hasn't experienced brokenness. That's our ministry; that's our church's culture. Our greatest weakness has become our greatest strength."

SOME NEXT GEN PASTORS EXPERIENCE BROKENNESS WHEN THEY CRASH AND BURN FROM EXHAUSTION, BUT SOME LEARN THIS VITAL LESSON BY SEEING DEVASTATION IN OTHERS' LIVES.

Some next gen pastors experience brokenness when they crash and burn from exhaustion, but some learn this vital lesson by seeing devastation in others' lives. Mark Saunders reflects on watching a trusted mentor admit to years of infidelity and lies. "When he confessed his sins to the church, people asked me how I was doing because they knew I loved him and trusted him. At that moment, I was learning one of the most valuable

lessons of my life. I realized how insidious and seductive sin could be, and that I'm vulnerable to fall just like my mentor fell. Recognizing that I'm fragile shatters my pride. I'm not invincible, and I need God's grace every day. In fact, this experience taught me that my identity is not in my role as pastor. I can walk away from it today. I just want to be honest, stay close to Christ and love my family. God can use me wherever I go. I want to live my life broken and real."

Brokenness doesn't imply that we lose our passion. Instead, it means our passions are purified and directed. Steve Robinson observes, "I don't think God wants to change us from being passionate, powerful leaders into doormats. We're wired to be leaders and take risks. Being broken doesn't change our personalities, but it radically changes our perceptions. Instead of being compulsively driven to achieve goals, we learn to trust God for his work in his timing."

But under stress, strengths can become

weaknesses. Andy VomSteege, pastor of **New Vintage Church** in Santa Rosa, California (www.newvintage.org), is building a church in a community that is 94% unchurched. He has a genuine heart for the lost, but he experiences a heavy burden of trying to lead so many young believers. To maximize his energies, Andy found a mentor who helped him identify and utilize his most effective talents. He observes, "God has given me leadership abilities, but when I feel pressured, I become too controlling, too demanding of everyone around me. I love to operate in my gifts, and I'm learning to do that more as I grow as a leader, but I have to realize that my God-given abilities can become big problems when I'm under stress." To Andy, brokenness is trusting God during difficult times so he continues to love and lead people instead of controlling them.

Rudy Rasmus took over **St. John's United Methodist Church**, a dying congregation in downtown Houston (www.stjohnsdowntown.org), and God gave him and his wife Juanita a heart for people around his church: the homeless, the addicted, the poor and the broken. Beginning with nine members in 1992, God has used Rudy and Juanita to touch thousands of lives, including over 9,000 who now call St. John's home. In his book, *Touch*, Rudy describes one of the lessons he and Juanita learned from a crisis of burnout in their lives: "Like many who serve God, some of our initial, pure zeal had gradually eroded and some of our actions had become empty habits. We hadn't even recognized this shift in our hearts, but the crisis forced us to examine our motives. Now, instead of doing good things because others thought we should or because we felt we had to, God gave us a new vision, a fresh motivation and a genuine desire to please him by touching others' lives. Instead of ordering our lives just to please people around us or check off enough boxes on our to-do lists to keep from feeling guilty, God gave us a fresh, pure motivation to please him."⁷

The presence or absence of joy is a primary

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indication of brokenness. The Journey's Darrin Patrick comments, "If I'm trying to do God's work in my own strength, I lose my joy and my passion. David asked God, 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me' (Psalm 51:12). That joy is then the source of authentic worship and ministry of teaching others to walk with God. If I don't have joy in leading and serving people, my anxiety and resentment at 'all the work I have to do' tells me I need to experience a new sense of brokenness with God."

The experience of brokenness may be dramatic and life changing, but our wandering hearts can forget our desperate need for God. As the pressures mount and demands erode the edge of faith, leaders need fresh reminders—from God, from a spouse and from trusted friends—to depend on God. But dependence on God and an aggressive vision to build God's kingdom are not mutually exclusive. Paul wrote to the Colossians about laboring in ministry with God's power: "We proclaim him. . . . To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29).

Practical Suggestions

Many next gen pastors tend to be students of spiritual life, and they have found some powerful and practical steps to help them create a culture of balance. Some of these include:

- *Notice and name the stresses.* Perhaps the first and most obvious step (but one that is most often missed) is to simply notice when the level of stress reaches overload. Be honest when your spouse tells you that you haven't spent enough time at home or with the kids. Listen when a colleague tells you that you've looked tired for the past three weeks. At certain seasons of the year and certain seasons of our lives, stress levels predictably rise. For example, when a couple has children—from birth until the nest is empty—they experience an unending series of stresses. The fact that they are in the ministry doesn't exempt them from experiencing stress like any other couple in the community. In fact, expectations for them are even higher, so they compound natural, normal stress with imposed pressures of unrealistic expectations. When next gen pastors recognize these seasons, they aren't surprised by the stresses they encounter.
- *Find a winning rhythm.* Bruce Miller encourages pastors to find rhythm in their weekly, monthly, quarterly and



BRUCE MILLER

Three Types of Brokenness

According to Jim Leggett, pastor of *Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church*, Katy, Texas (www.whatisgrace.org):

In my study of brokenness, I've noticed three distinctly different types. One is the result of our sins. This is the kind David wrote about in Psalm 51 after Nathan confronted him with his sins of adultery and murder, and David responded with "a broken and contrite heart."

The second type is involuntary brokenness that comes from experiences beyond our control. Natural disasters, consequences of others' sins, illness and the effects of aging are some examples of this kind. Here, we can't point to a specific action we've done as the cause. In fact, we may not understand the cause at all, and the "why?" that is so commonly asked is never answered. We have to dig deeper into the sovereignty and goodness of God, and as London's great pastor, Charles Spurgeon, wrote, learn to "trust God's heart even when we can't trace his hand."

A third kind of brokenness is one we voluntarily and purposefully seek. If we observe the devastating consequences of pride in people's lives—including our own—we may be motivated to fall on our faces before God and ask him to change us, make us good listeners and give us a heart to obey him. We pursue disciplines of fasting, prayer, study of the Word, solitude and confession and try to develop these as habits that will shape our lives and focus our hearts on God.

IT IS UNREASONABLE TO TRY TO MAKE EVERY DAY, WEEK OR MONTH PERFECTLY BALANCED, BUT IT IS ENTIRELY REASONABLE TO PLAN OUR SCHEDULES SO THAT TIMES OF INTENSE WORK ARE OFFSET BY LESS STRESSFUL TIMES.

yearly schedules. Rhythm is “balance over time.” It is unreasonable to try to make every day, week or month perfectly balanced, but it is entirely reasonable to plan our schedules so that times of intense work are offset by less stressful times. Eighty-hour weeks should be followed by rest or, at least, 40- to 50-hour weeks. Certain periods of the church calendar require more time and effort: Easter and Christmas, the beginning of the Fall season and any time a program is kicked off. During these times of the year, expect to work harder, but make sure that your pace during these times doesn’t become normalized.

- *Value the right things.* In his book, *Choosing to Cheat*, Andy Stanley says that we are forced to make choices based on our values, and we can’t meet every demand. We are forced to “cheat” somebody, so we need to make sure we cheat the right person or organization. The Well’s Brad Bell has told his staff that he wants them to cheat the church instead of their families, and in fact, he holds them accountable for those decisions. Brad also observes, “I have to take a look at the kinds of questions I’m asking my staff. Do I only ask a staff member about production—the number of people in small groups, the number in worship, or the number of leaders changed? If I fail to ask about family, fun and faith, I’m reinforcing imbalance in that person’s life.” Brad has told his staff that their number one value is fun. “We take ourselves far too seriously,” he related. “If our staff team is enjoying each other and the work God has given us to do, people will sense that and want to join us. But having fun as the top priority in ministry assumes we have developed a strong sense of trust in each other so no one abuses the freedom.”

- *Carve out daily, weekly and monthly Sabbaths.* It is popular to say we are “fully devoted followers of Christ,” but reflective young leaders notice how often Jesus spent time away to refresh, replenish and recharge. The pattern of Jesus’ life was that he was never in a hurry, and he was committed to spending time alone and time with his closest friends to stay spiritually fresh. This is not a luxury for next gen pastors; it’s a necessity.
- *Model a life of balance and rhythm for your staff, and establish patterns that value reflection.* Matt Chandler has instituted a program he calls “Restore” for his staff. The first Monday of every month, Matt and his staff go to a camp about 30 minutes away so they can spend time alone with the Lord. They are at the camp from 9 to 3. Matt gives them a devotional to read and study during the first few hours, and then they get into groups of friends to share and pray for each other. Tuesday morning is their regular staff meeting, except on those weeks when they have been to the camp. At lunch on those Tuesdays, the entire staff, including administrative staff, get together, then they hit the ground running for the rest of the week. “It’s been incredible,” Matt reports. “I’d encourage every pastor to do that with his staff. Not only does it refocus each person on the Lord, but it also builds a strong family atmosphere among our staff.” Many next gen pastors take a Sabbath day each week and refuse to turn on their cell phones. They instruct their staff not to contact them except in life-and-death emergencies because they realize the absolute necessity of regularly getting away from the grind of ministry.
- *Exercise regularly.* Many next gen pastors recognize the critical link between physical

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health and spiritual leadership, so they build rigorous exercise into their schedules.

- *Identify and use competent resources.* “People may think I’m Superman,” Matt Chandler relates, “but I’m not. The best thing I can do is to find some great resources for people in my church. After I talk to them and help them at the moment of their crisis, I need to refer them to counselors and organizations that can help them. Before I made this commitment to refer people, I tried to do far too much by myself, and it was killing me. I woke up one morning and thought, ‘Why am I doing this? I’m not good at counseling. My life is out of whack. Something’s got to change.’”

- *Find a friend; be a friend.* Next gen pastors can be incredibly busy, but they understand the value of having a friend who shares similar passions and stresses. Being honest with someone like that can mean the difference between diffusing a bomb in our lives . . . or exploding it. Finding someone you enjoy and trust may not be easy, but it’s

well worth the effort. And the goal is not only to find a friend. We need to be a friend to those who reach out to us. If another pastor calls you to talk about the pressures in his life and ministry, take the call. And listen. Really listen. North Coast Church’s Larry Osborne remembers, “I had a mentor who pounded a statement into my heart. He said, ‘You have nothing to prove and no one to impress.’ That perspective gave me a lot of freedom to follow God with joy and creativity.”

- *Be authentic.* The stresses and pressures of being a bulletproof, successful young leader can tempt next gen pastors to put on masks of invincibility instead of placing greater value on authenticity. Appropriate self-disclosure models honesty with God and invites others

to be honest, too, but it shouldn’t give too many details of our sinful behavior or be used too frequently. Staff and congregations delight in knowing their pastor is genuine and approachable, so most next gen pastors share their struggles as examples of the process of growth. Some go even farther. Grace Fellowship’s Jim Leggett said that on a few occasions in the past ten years as pastor of his church, he was led by God to put



Jim Leggett and his wife Lisa, of Grace Fellowship in Katy, TX

his sermon aside and “stand before them naked.” He relates, “I told them that I was not the man they thought I was. I didn’t deserve to be on a pedestal. I am a sinful, fallen man who struggles with life just like they do. No, I haven’t committed adultery or embezzled funds, but I am selfish to the core, and I have a long way to go. I knew it was a risk to say those things to our people, but God was leading me to say them. And God used those few Sunday mornings to bring our church together like nothing else we’ve ever done.”

- *Examine your staff and structure.* As Larry Osborne observes earlier in this document, some of the problems we experience with people aren’t character flaws; they’re structural problems that surface as people problems. Look at your organizational chart and reporting procedures. Hire an expert to analyze your church’s structure and give you advice, and make changes to “stay small so you can stay creative.”

- *Hold each other accountable.* To create a culture of balance, each person needs to understand his or her vital role in others’ lives. Instead of trying to one-up each other in working to death and building a kingdom, church leaders need to speak the truth in love to each other and encourage people to value the right things. Brad Bell explains his approach: “Sometimes I have to step in and ask hard questions. And sometimes I have to give clear directions to a staff member to ‘take

THE STRESSES AND PRESSURES OF BEING A BULLETPROOF, SUCCESSFUL YOUNG LEADER CAN TEMPT NEXT GEN PASTORS TO PUT ON MASKS OF INVINCIBILITY INSTEAD OF PLACING GREATER VALUE ON AUTHENTICITY.

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a day off' or 'go home and spend time with your family.'" As we cultivate open and honest relationships, we may find that some (or much) of the stress we've experienced is self-induced. We may realize we have been driven to prove ourselves, or we may recognize a fear of failure. But we may also find some encouragement to reach higher than we've ever reached before.

Balance, after all, isn't the ultimate goal. For next gen pastors who want to serve Christ with passion and power, pleasing God is their goal. Balance is simply one of the tools to keep them in the game. As Brad Bell said, they don't want to burn out. They want to be involved in reaching the lost and building leaders for a long time.

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ENDNOTES

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