

Who Makes an Effective Church Planter? by Ken Behnken

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Ever since churches and denominations have become involved in planting new churches, starting in Antioch in the Book of Acts, the question continues to come up, “Who will we call as the church planter? What are the characteristics we should be looking for?”

Not every pastor makes a good church planter. God has given all of us different spiritual gifts to be used in His body for ministry. A good pastor in an existing congregation does not always make a good church planter and vice versa.

More than twenty years ago 13 denominations came together to discuss the question, “What are the major characteristics needed to become a successful church planter.” All of these denominations had learned the hard way that pastors who had been good and godly leaders in organized congregation often felt like a “duck out of water” in a new mission start. They realized that different gifts and characteristics were needed in a new church plant.

Anxious to discover what these characteristics might be, this group of 13 denominations selected Dr. Charles Ridley, a psychologist from Fuller Theological Seminary, to study church planters from these denominations and determine characteristics that are common to effective church planters.

Dr. Ridley’s studies determined that 13 common characteristics were exhibited by these effective church planters. They are as follows:

1. Has the capacity to vision
2. Is a self-starter and is intrinsically motivated
3. Helps others to have ownership in the vision.
4. Understands and is able to relate to the unchurched
5. Cares for and manages his own family
6. Builds relationships easily
7. Is committed to consistent numerical growth
8. Understands and is committed to reaching the community
9. Releases and equips people for ministry according to their giftedness
10. Is flexible and adaptable as he effectively deals with change
11. Is able to build a cohesive body that works together
12. Rebounds from failure and disappointments with a new determination
13. Believes in the power of God and lives and exercises his faith

Dr. Ridley developed an assessment tool that arrived at these characteristics through behavioral interviewing. This is an excellent tool; however, one could look over this list

and, in dialog with the planter and considering his assessment of himself , determine whether or not he could take on the challenge of a new church plant.

Recently we have been studying the characteristics of an entrepreneur and finding that many of these entrepreneurial characteristics are ones that carry over into the area of church planting. Studying the entrepreneur with the eyes of the book of Acts quickly reveals that Peter, Paul, Barnabas and other early church planters exhibit many of these entrepreneurial characteristics. For more information on this topic see the paper *Apostolic Entrepreneurs*, a study I did for a recent conference, on our website ([click here](#)).

More recently a group of seven denominations, with funding from the Lilly Foundation Endowment Fund, initiated a study on “identifying and analyzing the key factors found in effective new church development pastoral leaders.” They categorized their findings on the following three tiered profile:

Tier One

Catalytic Innovator Work Habits
Faith/Personal Devotional Life
Visionary/Vision Caster

Tier Two

Skills in Recruitment/
Teambuilding/Delegation
Passion for Evangelism
Passion for People
Inspiring Preaching and worship
Administrative Skills
Family/Spouse Health

Tier Three

Understands Change
Dynamics
Ability to Change
Leadership Styles
Ties to a learning community
Humanity/patience
Care for Community
Experience
Energy
Honest self-assessment

In the near future findings from this study will be published explaining each of these tiers and their content more fully. The director of this study is Dr. H. Stanley Woods of Columbia Theological Seminary.

It is evident that planting a new church is a very specialized calling and requires a unique gift mix. Both the calling entity and the new church planter being called to take on this new challenge need to study these characteristics carefully and apply them to the potential new start pastor to determine if God has given him the characteristics and gifts to be an effective church planter.