

---

# GROWTH POINTS

---

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

---

## Build Trust

---

Loving relationships are foundational to focused, faithful, and fruitful ministry. Speaking to his early disciples, Jesus told them “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). “Follow me” defines the relationship, while “make you fishers of men” defines the mission.

Relationship comes before mission in the life of a church. The primary relationship is with God the Father through Jesus Christ His son. However, the importance of relationships with both Christ and his earthly disciples is seen throughout the early church.

Paul also pointed out the crucial nature of relationships, by calling attention to the reality that people follow leaders as they follow Christ. “Be imitators of me,” Paul commanded, “just as I also am of Christ” (Romans 11:1; see also 1 Corinthians 4:16 and Philippians 3:17).

Regrettably, some pastors struggle to create meaningful relationships with people, and trust is consequently undermined. Remember: with every action, you are doing one of two things: establishing trust or mistrust.

Here are some insights and tips that you may find useful, as you seek to build trust with your people.

*First, initiate good conversations.* One of the main ways to build trust is through good conversation. You may find it helpful to actually track the relational encounters you have with people in your church. How many lunches do you have each week? What do you talk about? What do you learn about the people? If we honestly care about people, we’ll ask good questions: “Oh, you have a son? Tell me about him?” “So, you like working with your hands? What do you like doing the most?” “It’s nice to know you travel a lot. Where was your favorite destination?” If you can initiate good conversations, you’ll build a certain level of energy to enable trust to develop.

*Second, follow the social mores.* It’s essential that one follow the basic manners or customs to establish, build, and maintain credibility. Social mores are the customary or acceptable way to behave. While you may think some of the customs in your church are silly, it’s best to follow them until you gain enough trust to challenge them.

Order Dr. McIntosh’s  
newest book -  
*The Ten Key Roles  
of a Pastor.*  
Available from Amazon.

*Third, close the loop.* We've all experienced a time when someone made a promise and then failed to follow through. The person didn't "close-the-loop." Failing to return phone calls or answer emails is a regular occurrence, but a bad communication skill. If you habitually stall on replying to others, doing so undermines trust in your leadership. Now, you don't have to return calls and emails immediately, but you'll need to develop the fine art of saying "no." One way to do this is to say something like, "May I call you back in an hour?" Or, "I can't talk right now. When would a good time be to call you back?" For emails, simply reply, "I'm tied up right now, but I'll get back to you later today." Then make it your goal to close the loop by returning calls and replying to emails.

*Fourth, take your time.* Build trust incrementally and patiently. Don't appear to be in a hurry. Time and taking time are essential for connection and relationship building. In the first few years of church ministry, people are checking you out to see if you're trustworthy. They need to know from experience they can trust you with their hearts—their deep feelings, hurts, and pains. This only comes after they've seen you up close and personal in real ministry situations. So, give it time. The people will come around to work and support you fully in time.

*Fifth, don't over schedule.* As you

build relationships, gauge your time wisely, don't over schedule. Make room for interruptions. Remember: these are not interruptions; they are God-ordained time for building relationships.

*Sixth, Ask others for advice.* If you go about the work of pastoring as though you don't need others, it indicates you don't value others in the work. Asking for advice shows that you respect other's gifts, knowledge, feelings, and experience. A successful pastor always asks for help. It's only as you enter into conversations with an open beginner's mind that you'll build trust.

*Seventh, connect on an emotional level.* This takes asking a lot of questions and listening to what people say. Use words and phrases like "Why?" "I think there's a story behind that," and "Tell me more." This shows that you care for others, and are willing to listen to what they think before recommending changes. Be sure to take notes as you listen, for it conveys your care. To help you listen better, try these ideas. First, summarize what others say before you make your reply. Second, repeat the last three words of the person's comment before you launch into your response. Third, ask two questions about their comments before you respond.

---

Start using these ideas to build trust in your own church.

Which of these ideas do you do well?

Which can you begin using today?

**Growth Points** is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$29 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.

Copyrighted 2022 ISSN 1520-5096