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Acts 2 Journey Cohort

Pastor and Spouse Session

# Guiding Change in the Local Church



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Here, you'll find video segments of the teaching for the pastor and spouse leadership sessions for all four Acts 2 Journey Retreats.

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## Five Reasons People are at Your Church

While the struggles we've discussed are common reasons to resist change in any organization, there is another reason why change is particularly difficult for the local church. Given that the local church typically struggles with change more than most other entities, it makes sense that there must be a reason that is unique to our setting—AND THERE IS!

For the local church, change will almost always threaten the very reasons our people identify with our local church. Studies have demonstrated that there are five primary reasons why people have connected with their local church. We can say that these are the reasons your people say that your local church is "MY Church." And while each of these are good reasons to feel connected, each reason will also struggle to allow for change.

### 1. \_\_\_\_\_

The top reason why many people connect with their local church relates to the significant events in their lives that have happened there. People say, "that's my church" because of what has happened in their lives at that "place."

"That's my church because that's where I received salvation." "That's my church because we were married there" or "our children were dedicated to the Lord there." "That's my church because we were married there" and many more. When people experience significant moments in our church, they can form a strong attachment to our place.

Of course, this is good. We want people to experience life-changing moments among us. But, funny thing about place people: They tend to want the place to keep looking like the place looked back when they had their significant moment. In fact, place people can become quite resistant when you want to make changes to the place.

Every pastor likely has stories of those people who resisted changes to carpet color or any redesign of the auditorium platform. Sometimes that resistance can take on an almost comical form (at least someday it will seem funny). These are place people and when you change the place, some of them will feel disoriented—*my church doesn't feel the same anymore.*

### 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Another group are attached to our local church because they have connected with one of the key leaders of our congregation. "That's my church because that's my pastor!" Perhaps their students feel a strong connection to the youth pastor or they find the efforts of the worship leader particularly inspiring.

Is this a good thing? Sure. Often on the road to significantly connecting with Jesus, people will connect with those who help them engage Him. Of course, as leaders in the local church we want to steward such responsibility well. Like Paul, we want people to follow us as we follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). But the truth is, they will follow us.

While connecting with a leader is an acceptable reason to feel connected to a local church, when change comes, this reason also proves unable to manage it easily. When that favorite youth pastor has moved on to a new assignment or someone else now leads us in worship, these "Personality people" feel disoriented, just like those PLACE people felt when we redecorated. Things simply aren't the same anymore.

## 3. \_\_\_\_\_

As you might imagine, here we are speaking of people who have connected with our local church because of one of the programs we use to help disciple them. “That’s my church because I love the Thursday night women’s Bible study.” “That’s our church because our children love the Kids’ programs” and on it goes.

Once again, we have found a great reason to connect with our church as it’s a good thing when our various ministries can create belonging and meaningful moments of life change for those who participate. However, this is another reason that doesn’t accept change easily. When that Thursday evening Bible study moves to Tuesday morning and I can no longer attend, my reason to be at this church feels compromised. Make changes in the Kids’ program and everything feels different. Once again, someone feels disoriented by our changes, even if our goal was to help us be more effective.

## 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Our fourth reason why people connect to our local church is the people. Simply put, “My friends are there.” Now we know this is a good thing. We want people to build relationships with others in the body of Christ. Frankly, that’s the nature of the Church itself as we live out Christ’s command to “Love one another.”

But what happens when my friend moves away or (harder yet) my friend decides to worship at another church across town? Now my church doesn’t feel the same. Every pastor knows the two questions that quickly come to mind when we hear that someone is leaving our church—*What happened?* and *Who might be going with them?*

Again, this reason for connecting with our church is a great reason to be there, until it changes.

## 5. \_\_\_\_\_

The final primary reason that people say “that’s my church” when speaking of your local congregation relates to the position they fill, “That’s my church because I’m a deacon there.” “That’s my church because I’m a part of the worship team” or “That’s my church because I’m a small group leader there.”

Again, this is another great reason to feel connected to our local church. We want people to feel that sense of ownership of the ministry assignment that Jesus has placed before them. We want them to move beyond simply “helping us out” to the real sense of mission that can be found when they’re doing what their abilities or God-given gifts have equipped them to do.

It’s a great reason to feel a part of our local church—*until change comes*. Maybe this is the year that the bylaws require me to step down from my deacon role or now others are available to help lead worship and I’m not on that schedule nearly as often. When I am no longer doing what I once have done in ministry, church feels different—even if I’m the one that made the decision to step away from that ministry.

One of the greatest challenges to leading change is that your effort for change will likely collide with one or more of these reasons and, thus, disorient or even anger those who are connected for such reason(s). Frankly, if you can’t make changes to the PLACE without disorienting some people and you can’t change the PERSONALITIES that fill certain leadership roles without causing others to struggle.

If you can't make changes to the ministry PROGRAMS or make changes that could risk the possibility of some PEOPLE leaving us without creating problems for others or make changes in the POSITIONS that or the people that fill them, is there anything left for us to change?

No wonder the local church struggles mightily with change!

So, what do we do? To lead change effectively, you must help people connect for a 6th reason and the best reason of all:

#### 6. \_\_\_\_\_

When people connect to your church for this reason, they will embrace change when they believe that change will help us more effectively fulfill our purpose. However we state that purpose—*We're here to see lives changed* or *We want to love God and love people* or *We bring hope to the hopeless* or *We want to invest in the next generation*—we want our people to identify most with that vision.

Now, we don't want to eliminate those other reasons to connect with our local church, but when we can help a PLACE person connect with our PURPOSE, change will impact them less. When PURPOSE becomes a bit more important than my other reason to connect with my church, I simply will need you to help me see how the proposed change can move us closer to our PURPOSE.

This is a key part of a pastor's responsibility in leading change—we must help people understand our need for change and keep our PURPOSE consistently before them so they can begin to grasp it more fully. Only then will people begin to embrace the change journey our congregation desperately needs to engage.

As you know, a change journey can generate a lot of potential for conflict. People are often resistant to change, particularly when what is changing is very important to them. It can be helpful to understand some of the core reasons people don't want certain things at their church to change.<sup>1</sup>

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### Four Critical Questions for Local Church Change

1. Do we know we \_\_\_\_\_ to change?

Each year, church health reports tell us that 70-80% of local churches are plateaued or in decline. That means that only roughly 1 in 4 congregations can be considered growing or on the ascending side of their current lifecycle. This fact alone seems to scream that SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE!

Of course, there's more. As America continues its unabated march away from a Christian worldview, many local churches have lost contact with their communities and the world around them. This shift has seen a significant decline in the influence that the local church exerts on its culture and that should concern us greatly. SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE!

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, *Future Church*, Baker Books, 2020, 22-29.

Studies demonstrate a growing mindset of the privatization of faith or religion that has led many to decide that their own personal beliefs are just that—personal. Less than 10% indicate any real intent to share their faith with others. Again, SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE!

But no change can come to the local church until the congregation acknowledges its current reality. Sadly, many churches that need to change seem unaware of their need. They don't notice the lost connection with the neighborhood around their church building. They ignore the slow loss of Sunday attendance or the diminishing effectiveness of their ministry programs. As we will see in the Acts 2 Journey, many don't recognize a problem until their losses have become significant.

Frankly, until we see a need for change, nothing is likely to change. In fact, until the pain of staying the same grows greater than the price of change, most people will opt for the status quo.

2. Are we \_\_\_\_\_ to change?

Of course, seeing the need for change is only the first step. We must also help our people become willing to engage change. There are many congregations where people know that change is needed and must come at some point, but they simply don't want to face that reality now.

For some, the need for change implies that we will have to do some of the things that other churches have done or become like some of the churches we've heard about or seen on our social media. Often an older generation fears engaging the methods of younger congregations either because they dislike what they see or they doubt that they can be successful with such approaches.

But, for us to engage the change that our church needs, we must be willing to walk the road of change.

3. Do we know \_\_\_\_\_ to change?

Now this is likely the most challenging of our change questions. Once we know change is needed and we're willing to do what's necessary, finding the right path is important. Change alone won't automatically make us more effective. We need the right change for our congregation.

Frankly, this is a big part of what the Acts 2 Journey is all about. As we work together to discover our congregation's unique vision, the values that will help us become that church, and design strategies to get there, we will find our answers to the "how" question.

In truth, making changes that fail to move us forward can negatively impact the congregation's willingness to let us make other changes in the future. While change will always challenge us, we must find the change that we are meant to pursue.

4. Are we willing to \_\_\_\_\_?

Once we know what we must do, our final question is one of commitment. Will we do it? As we work together with other leaders in our congregation, our determination toward a new future is strengthened. Our new vision and strategy will have the support of our team from day one.

The journey of change in our church will ultimately require us to say "YES!" to each of these four questions, and that can be a journey in itself.

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“The real world is a world of chaos. Culture is changing so quickly, with so much diversity, in so many simultaneous directions, and using so many learning methods that church groups organized around traditional principles can’t keep up. They find themselves spending more and more energy lamenting change, resisting change, struggling with change, expressing anger about change, desperately trying to ‘manage’ change, or just plain ‘surviving’ change. Change, however, will not go away. It is relentless—and accelerating.” Thomas G. Bandy

### Why Do People Resist Change?

“Most of us plateau when we lose the tension between where we are and where we ought to be.”  
John Gardiner

“Many church size barriers are really self barriers.”  
- Wayne Schmidt

1. Loss of \_\_\_\_\_  
There’s comfort in the familiar, even if what we’re doing isn’t effective.
2. Threatened \_\_\_\_\_ status or position.  
Often those who have risen to leadership in our current approaches will feel threatened by changes that might place their rise to leadership in doubt.
3. Implied \_\_\_\_\_ of the past or present.  
For some, change suggests that past efforts were wrong or that our former leaders didn’t know what they we’re doing.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Work.  
In truth, change will almost always require more work than maintaining the status quo.
5. Seems \_\_\_\_\_ or unhelpful.  
Many who struggle with change will want to see results quickly if they will lend their support. If they don’t, their fears will quickly turn to doubts.

### Three Steps for Initiating Change

1. Explore the true \_\_\_\_\_.

As we have said, until the pain of staying put begins to exceed the difficulty of change, people will usually prefer the status quo. So, the first step in any change journey is to explore why the change is necessary. There are two primary types of urgency:

- \_\_\_\_\_ is better than \_\_\_\_\_.

Survival urgency suggests that we must change or we will cease to exist. While many congregations in need of change may actually be at such a place, those whose survival is truly threatened may find the kind of change needed to be more radical than they can bear. Surely, we don’t want to wait until such an extreme moment to pursue needed change.

It’s also worth noting that while the need to survive can help people accept change, once the crisis seems to have passed, people often want to return to their former ways. For example, if your doctor insists that your eating habits change or you will face serious health problems, you will likely change those habits. However, once the weight is lost or the threat seems to have lessened, some of those old eating habits may return. In the same way, a local church can find a return to former ways tempting.

Missional urgency exists when we acknowledge that we need to change because we are not effectively fulfilling our mission. There are families that need hope or students that we’re not connecting with or a whole community of people we’ve yet to reach. These are missional reasons for change and they typically don’t diminish as we begin to find some success. Instead, missional urgency reproduces itself every time we recognize an opportunity to reach others.

SURVIVAL URGENCY “We must or we close our doors”	MISSIONAL URGENCY “We must: we’re not fulfilling the mission”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance in decline</li> <li>• Church finances diminishing</li> <li>• Key leaders have left</li> <li>• Conflict is dividing us</li> <li>• We have to change for the sake of the church!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families in crisis in our community</li> <li>• A people group we’re not reaching</li> <li>• Concern for high school students</li> <li>• People are hurting all around us</li> <li>• We have to change for the sake of the lost!</li> </ul>

**IMPORTANT:** For the local church survival urgency can drive a moment, but missional urgency can produce a future.

Survival urgency can achieve change, but often once the crisis passes, old behaviors re-emerge. Missional urgency pushes us toward new behaviors that continue as long as the mission remains unfulfilled. That’s why missional urgency is our best approach to change.

- Your \_\_\_\_\_ for the urgency is the single biggest reason your team will accept change.

The very nature of urgency requires passion. We’ve noted many reasons why change can be difficult for the local church. If that change is going to happen, those who lead us must be fully convinced that we must achieve it.

Certainly, we must convey that passion in appropriate ways. Demanding attitudes or trying to motivate others with guilt won’t bring about healthy change, but your people need to see your passion for the future demonstrated in your commitment, self-sacrifice, and hard work toward that future. Your passion will encourage others to bring their passion to the effort as well.

2. Build the right \_\_\_\_\_.

For the existing congregation, leading change must be a team sport. A leader who seeks to implement change on his own is far more likely to encounter insurmountable difficulties than one who includes others in the effort. Sadly, many churches have allowed their leaders, past and present, to become isolated and alone in the challenge of leading change.

For more than a decade, the Acts 2 Journey has seen many congregations succeed greatly in their efforts to change, and one of the key reasons for that success can be found in the team approach. When we find the path forward together, a momentum is created for our congregation that an individual simply can't generate alone.

- People who \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_

Whom do we need on this journey with us? First, know that any leadership group elected by your congregation must be represented. If we exclude the established leaders from our efforts, we will find we have immediately built resistance to what this journey will produce. Every member of that leadership group doesn't necessarily need to be a part of this team, but elected leaders must be represented in the effort.

Once we've identified some from this group for our team, we can now look to include others. When building your team, look for people who care about the future of your church.

You'll also want people who can dream with you—people who believe your local church's future can be greater than its past. Remember, no church has a future until its dreams get bigger than its memories!

Finally, you'll want these friends to be able to think with you too. People who are grounded in reality but able to imagine a greater future are ideal choices to be a part of your team.

A team of 8-12 people can be ideal, but having the right people (regardless of the number) will likely make all the difference.

### 3. Ask the best \_\_\_\_\_.

- What is our \_\_\_\_\_?

No journey can really get started until you know where you're going. Still, somehow many churches continue to keep doing what they've always done, without any real sense of a desired destination. Everything starts with vision!

- To fulfill our vision, what must our \_\_\_\_\_ be?

Next, we must determine the values that will bring us to that destination. Frankly, if we're going to be the church we want to be, certain priorities must move to the forefront. These values or priorities shape the culture of our church and open the way for us to fulfill our vision.

- What \_\_\_\_\_ will it take to fulfill our vision?

Once we know where we're going, we need a plan to get there. In the journey of change, these strategies become critical. We must always ask more than just "will this work?" We must be certain that the strategies we choose will actually bring us to fulfill the vision that drives us.

The Acts 2 Journey will guide us through these first three steps for the future of our local church, but they are also the first three steps for any level of change we need to engage.

A few more strategy questions are important as well. While change means we will identify some new things that we will do (that's the easy and fun part), we also need to consider how we'll most effectively deal with our current efforts.

- What should we \_\_\_\_\_ doing?

As we think of future strategic steps, we should first review our current efforts, looking for the contributions they can make to our vision. It may be that some of what we're doing can continue to move us in the right direction.

- What should we do \_\_\_\_\_?

Perhaps some of what we currently do could contribute to our future vision if we adjusted it a bit. Maybe one of our ministry efforts hasn't been succeeding as we had hoped, but with a slightly different focus or approach, we can see new potential. Sometimes a small adjustment can make all the difference.

- What should we \_\_\_\_\_ doing?

Of course, some of what we're currently doing won't be a part of our future. After all, to take new steps, we will need to reclaim some energy and resources we're currently expending.

Now, the order in which we ask these questions matters greatly. When considering change, we can be tempted to start naming what we want to stop doing, but we'll likely create a better environment if we choose positive steps before taking negative action. People generally find letting go of something easier when there is something else to reach toward.

- When will we \_\_\_\_\_?

Our final step in the change journey identifies the "when" of our implementation. Someday must be replaced by launch day if our plans for change will ever move forward.

While wisdom and good timing are always essential, change will never occur until we begin to move forward.

## Moses' Amazing Change Journey

Easily one of the greatest change journeys in human history is provided for us in the story of Moses leading the people of Israel from Egypt to their Promised Land. It was truly a journey that would make a great movie—and many film makers have made that happen.

There's a lot we can learn from this familiar story, especially when we reflect on peoples' responses to change. You would think that Moses' journey would be filled with nothing but excitement given its extraordinary vision, quality leadership, clear direction, and miraculous provision.

1. Extraordinary Vision - From Slavery to Promised Land
2. Quality Leadership - None better than Moses
3. Clear Direction - Cloud by Day; Fire by Night
4. Miraculous provision - Miracles, Manna and More!

And yet, people resisted! Before we consider why, we should at least acknowledge that our journey is likely to experience some resistance too.

Let's reflect on Moses' reality for a few moments. By most estimates, he was leading 1-2 million people across that desert, the kind of numbers it can be hard for us to imagine. For example, do you realize that if they were lined up ten abreast and marching in tight formation, the line of Israelites could have stretched for nearly 100 miles! Of course, they're not likely that organized and with all their possessions, this herd of people probably seemed to Moses like it stretched on forever.

A little math will reveal some interesting reality. If that line did, in fact, cover 100 miles of desert pathway, that means the gap between the front and the back of the line might have actually covered a week or more of hard travel. Covering ten miles a day could have been quite challenging when you're traveling with young and old and everything they own, but for the sake of illustration and to keep the math simple, let's say that they could cover ten miles a day, meaning that there was ten days journey from the front of Moses' group to its final family.

Imagine how different this journey would have seemed, depending on where you were in that massive line. First, consider life at the front. Surely that's where things are most exciting. For those at the front...

### Life in the Front of Moses' Journey

1. They saw Moses and the other leaders frequently.
2. They received their information directly from Moses himself.
3. The journey and the destination felt exciting.
4. They imagined their destination might be just over the next sand dune.
5. They moved whenever Moses said "let's go!"

So, who's up here at the front? Well, we will surely find Moses there, along with other key leaders God has appointed for this moment. But the crowd up front also likely included some of the younger travelers who could move more quickly, those who may have had less to carry, and those who had less attachment to where we'd been.

These are what we could call Early Adopters. They are ready to move when Moses' command comes. But while their quick response feels good to the leader, the Early Adopters only comprise a small number of the total traveling party, **usually less than 20% of our group.**

Sadly, many leaders are tempted to see the Early Adopters as the only ones who really want the destination ahead of us. This simply isn't true! They just happen to be the ones most ready to move when the opportunity comes.

But a few days back is another group, and it's a big one. The folks in the middle of our journey face a very different set of realities.

### Life in the Middle of Moses' Journey

1. They seldom have direct interaction with Moses and the other leaders.
2. Their information was passed along from others.
3. The journey felt longer and success often seemed less certain as they trudged through the footprints left by others.
4. Each day, this group knew the destination hadn't yet been reached by those up front with Moses.
5. These wait to move until they see others moving and seeming to be successful as they do.

So, who are these folks in the middle? It's a big group and there may be several reasons why they walk here. Because they don't have regular contact with Moses or aren't as close to Moses as others, they may not be as clear concerning where we're going or what they should do to get there. Others may once have been near the front, but they have more to carry and simply can't move as quickly as they once did. Still others may have had their pace slowed by a few bad experiences or difficult times. Now they find themselves more cautious and less likely to simply "move out" until they can trust the plan or the planners a bit more.

**They can be called Mid-Adopters and they likely comprise nearly two-thirds of the group on any journey as most of our travelers will always be in the middle.** These friends want the destination, but they have their reasons for moving more slowly toward our plan to get there. Mid-adopters are looking for signs in the forward movement of others that indicate success is ahead. They won't be the first to get there, but they don't feel they need to be. If we're on the right path, then they know they'll get there soon enough.

Tragically, aggressive leaders can sometimes think these friends don't really want to reach the destination, simply because they require a bit more convincing before they move forward. But imagine trying to fight the battles ahead without them!

Of course, there's still some more folks to consider. Every line has its end, and somewhere back there we find a third group that's traveling with us, though a lot slower than the rest:

### Life at the Back of Moses' Journey

1. They have virtually no interaction with Moses and the other leaders. In fact, Moses doesn't even think to invite them to the meetings.
2. Their information was passed along from others who got it from others, who also got it from others.
3. There are days when the journey back to where we came from is tempting and looks easier.

4. This group wonders if there is a Promised Land and if there will be a place for them if we get there.
5. These typically don't move until they're afraid they'll be left in the desert if they don't move.

So, who are these folks at the back of our line? These are the people who don't move as quickly and they've got their reasons. Some might be slower simply because of age, though let's not think that all our older saints are back here (some are running at the front). Some of these people move more slowly because they have the most stuff to move with them. Others may feel a bit more attached to where we've been than where we're going. It seems likely that the ones in Moses' journey who wanted to go back to Egypt happened to be the ones who were closest to their former home. Still others may have doubted whether Moses and the others really saw a future for them. Would there be a place for them in this new life?

Late-Adopters can feel like the most challenging folks on the journey, but the truth is that they really want the future that others dream of. They're just less certain that they can get there and sometimes the rest of the group shows impatience and little understanding of that uncertainty. When these people move forward, it can be more out of fear of being left behind than any real enthusiasm for the road ahead. But Moses and every leader who walks in his sandals is tasked with the mandate to help them get there too.

It can be easy for a pastor to interpret the complaints of Late Adopters as opposition to his efforts, but these friends will go with us if we demonstrate the love and support they need for a journey that feels harder for them. In truth, there are few moments that feel better for the leader than when one of these late adopters picks up his stuff and begins to move forward with the rest of us.

Of course, there can be a final group we've yet to consider, and our hope is that this group is the smallest of all...

### **The Life of those who Rejected Moses' Journey**

1. They wanted to go another way and separated themselves from Moses and the people of Israel

*Without vision, people perish...*

In Hebrew, the word translated *perish* can also mean *scattered*. When people lack direction and scatter in the desert, *they die!*

Non-adopters are always a possibility any time you choose to move in a certain direction. Our attitude should never be to send people away or encourage them to leave us, but sadly some may choose to do so.

So, while the experience of our change journey will seem different, depending on where one walks within our group, the leader's goal is to help every individual make it to the Promised Land ahead. That requires sacrificial love and occasionally a great deal of patience, but the opportunities and challenges ahead will make us glad for every effort we've made to help each individual complete the change journey successfully.

**APPENDIX: FOUR QUADRANTS OF CHANGE**

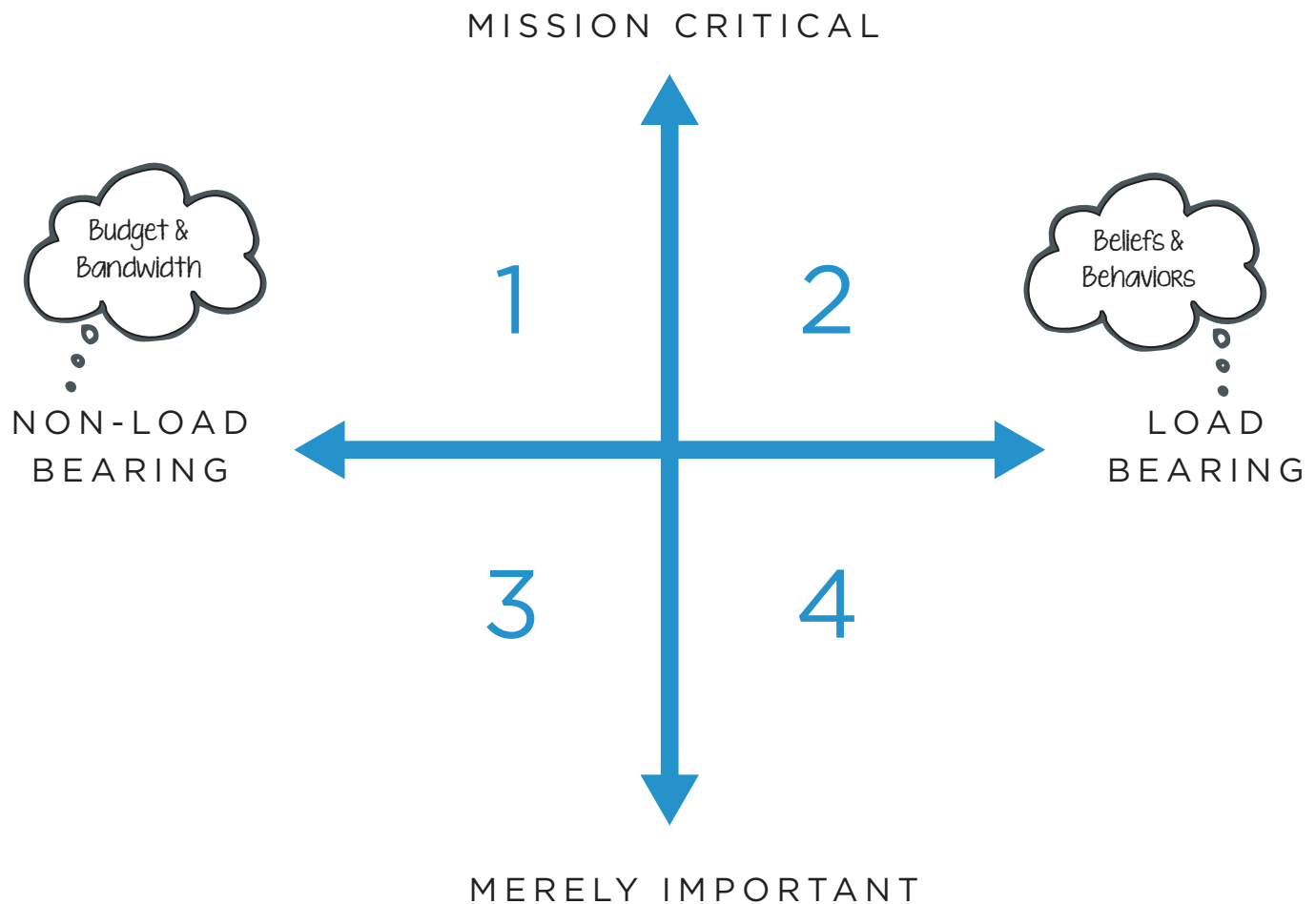
Of course, change is never easy, and even the best and most loving efforts can be resisted. However, some leaders have created unnecessary difficulty for the church because they failed to consider the “weight” of the changes they attempted to bring. Some changes are simply greater than others and they require greater care, deeper relationships, and slower steps than others.

*Can you think of change efforts that failed because the leader moved too quickly or didn't appropriately care for relationship? Share these to illustrate the need for wisdom, effective pace, and genuine concern for others—not as criticisms of leaders who failed.*

In his book, *Recalibrate Your Church*, Troy Jones provides a look at Four Quadrants of Change. This tool can help us better understand the best approaches to be taken, depending on the nature of what we seek to change.

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# 4 QUADRANTS OF CHANGE



## QUADRANT 1

MISSION CRITICAL,  
NON-LOAD BEARING

- ✓ Essential changes
- ✓ Significantly impacts your mission
- ✓ Budget (money) and bandwidth (time and energy)
- ✓ Little to no resistance
- ✓ Earns credibility for the leader
- ✓ Start here! Don't wait!

## QUADRANT 2

MISSION CRITICAL,  
LOAD BEARING

- ✓ Essential changes
- ✓ Significant impact on your mission
- ✓ Beliefs and behavior must be changed
- ✓ Resistance is normal
- ✓ Requires skill and credibility
- ✓ Carefully make these changes

## QUADRANT 3

MERELY IMPORTANT,  
NON-LOAD BEARING

- ✓ Non-essential changes
- ✓ Doesn't negatively impact your mission
- ✓ Not necessarily worth the budget (money) or bandwidth (time and energy)
- ✓ Little to no resistance
- ✓ Only make these changes if credibility is needed

## QUADRANT 4

MERELY IMPORTANT,  
LOAD BEARING

- ✓ Non-essential changes
- ✓ Doesn't negatively impact your mission
- ✓ Beliefs and behaviors must be changed
- ✓ Resistance is normal
- ✓ Put these changes on the back burner