

“Everybody Gets to Play”

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I grew up in a conservative Christian family attending an Evangelical church that was relatively healthy. The Pastors taught the Bible verse-by-verse and the people were pretty loving and kind. I was befriended by the Youth Pastor that became my first mentor. Even with such a healthy upbringing, I became a critic of the institutional church – first, as a rebellious teen growing up in the Sixties, and later, as a committed “Christ follower” who values the local church while longing for it to live up to its potential.

Some critics of the local church in the West see it much like a football game: 22 players on the field desperately in need of rest and thousands of spectators in the stands desperately in need of exercise. The statistics about church leaders burning out, blowing out, and plateauing is staggering! J. Robert Clinton and his students at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA) have studied over five thousand case studies of church, mission, and para-church leaders and have discovered that only about 1 in 3 of them finished well in life and leadership. This is not good!

Church leader burn out, blow out, and plateauing is caused by personal, worldview, and cultural dynamics. There are many complex issues involved in this that I will not address in this article, but one issue that concerns me is the profound influence that “dualism” has had on how the church and its leaders view ministry. In the two-ear worldview of dualism where some are “called” to vocational ministry (and most are not) there is a profound “system flaw” that puts major pressure on a few while frustrating many who want to play. For our purposes here, let’s take a look at a few aspects of this “system flaw”:

1. **Clergy-Laity Dichotomy** – the flaw that some are called to “full-time” Christian ministry (while others are mere lay people). Every believer is called to FULL-TIME ministry is a variety of different roles and spheres of influence. There are great opportunities to impact pre-Christian people as blue/white-collar workers in the communities that we live in.
2. **Vocational-Marketplace Dichotomy** – the flaw that “real” ministry takes place in a church building, by vocational ministry people (with a little help from “committed” lay people). Every believer is a VOCATIONAL minister in a variety of roles and settings. Serving in the marketplace in our increasingly “post-Christian” culture may be increasingly strategic as it is outside the walls of the church building that most pre-Christian people hang out.
3. **Building-Community Dichotomy** – the flaw that you are not a “real” church unless you have a building. Buildings are great, especially if they are paid for and you have enough resources to maintain them. Many churches that are “building

focused” are in debt while underutilizing their facilities. You need someplace to meet, especially as a church grows larger, but a church that becomes “building focused” can begin to care more about facilities than people. Establishing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships is pretty important if the church is to have an impact in our impersonal culture where people are desperate to be loved and valued.

4. **Control-Releasing Dichotomy** – the flaw that clergy does all/most of the ministry (while lay people get to support them and donate money for their salaries). This creates a double-edged dilemma: 1. Control of resources (people, money, facilities, etc.) and 2. Control of creativity (vision and entrepreneurship in lay people). The role of “equipping” gifted leaders (Ephesians 4:11) is to “prepare the people for ministry.” There are amazing resources and creative enterprises available through training, releasing, and supporting lay people “for the work of ministry.”
5. **Evangelism-Discipleship Dichotomy** – the flaw that evangelism and discipleship are separate aspects of a Christ follower’s life – i.e. “you can be saved but not a disciple.” Discipleship is for the “committed” that are “called to full-time ministry.” Evangelism is extremely important and salvation is the first step in the journey of discipleship. This is not an “either-or” but a “both-and” reality for true Christ followers.
6. **Program-Relationship Dichotomy** – the flaw that people grow best in discipleship programs (i.e. “12-steps to Christian maturity”). There is nothing wrong with good programs that are facilitated by loving, maturing Christ followers. Information is important for growing in discipleship, but “transformation” (becoming like Christ) is the goal of discipleship and this usually takes place in the context of healthy relationships and community.
7. **Excellence-Real Dichotomy** – the flaw that “ministry” has to be done with excellence (whatever that is). Life is messy and so is “ministry.” That does not mean that irresponsibility and inefficiency is excusable, but most of us don’t “get it right” the first time (or most of the time). It is OK to be real and learn along the way. That does not mean that some are suited for certain roles while others are not. Part of leadership is helping others discover where they can serve most effectively.

In closing, let me quote John Wimber: “In our church we do not view that paid professional staff as the ones who do the ministry. The staff’s job is to train other people to minister. As they are trained and released to minister, they in turn train others, and the progression is endless and very effective.” (p. 124, *Everyone Gets to Play*)