

Have you been forgetting to "pay the rent"?

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COACHING 4 CLERGY
Empowering Today's Spiritual Leaders



When You're Making Big Changes to Improve Your Church, Don't Stop Paying the Rent!

"I don't know what happened, everything was going so well."
"It looked so easy when the other church did it."
"I thought they would come around when we got into it."
"If we don't try something new, we'll have to close the doors forever."

Do any of those phrases sound familiar? You're not alone. Many pastors and other church leaders jump too quickly into change, tempted by the solution that they see is working for another church. But you can't compare the external results of another church with the internal workings of your own church.

If you do, things will start falling through the cracks, and you will lose connections with the people around you. And when that happens, trust is lost. People begin asking, "What about us? Whose agenda is this?"

The truth is that change works best when it begins at the grassroots level and stems from the actual needs and desires of your own congregation; when you've earned their trust, they're catching your vision and they're excited about where you're taking them.

And then it's about continuing to earn that trust, even while you're putting new solutions into place. My father called this, "paying the rent," only he wasn't talking about the mortgage or utilities.

Paying the rent: Stay connected by getting back to the basics

Here are 5 ways to keep paying the rent, every month, so that your new solutions will take hold and bring about the change that you need:

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1. Be available. Post regular office hours and stick to them. Return emails and voicemails promptly. Receive unexpected communications as opportunities and gifts. Nurturing relationships is your real work, not an interruption of your work. In #3 below we'll talk about setting boundaries around this.

2. Be visible. Get out of your office and walk around. Poke your head into meetings and events even when you're not expected. Pick up the phone and find out how each group or committee is doing, at least once or twice a year.

3. Practice self-care. Most pastors work 60-80 hours a week taking on multiple roles, to the point where being in ministry is having a decidedly negative impact on their lives. The better you take care of yourself, the better you can show up for others. So set boundaries that ensure you get the rest, nutrition, support and fun that you need to be effective. And yes, that means sometimes saying no and NOT being available at the exact moment someone asks.

4. Acknowledge others. Nancy Klein, author of *Time to Think*, writes that we need to hear five positive acknowledgments to repair the effects of hearing one negative criticism (real or perceived). Ministry is not about solving problems or fixing what is wrong – that is a medical model. The real work of ministry is to develop people and tap into their greatness. What is your ratio of acknowledgment to criticism? Commit right now that you will deliver at least one acknowledgment in every single interaction with an individual or team.

5. Take your time. Instead of being in so much of a hurry to throw out the old and build up the new, allow for the natural timing of things. Give people a chance to respond, ask questions and understand, so they can ultimately buy in with full confidence. Keep the big picture in your own mind, but don't get too far ahead of your congregants. Show that you are still within arm's reach. Use milestones to reach for and celebrate your progress, but not as hard and fast deadlines that create unnecessary stress or urgency.

You have the best intentions in wanting to breathe new life into your church – indeed, its very survival. But are you forging so far ahead of your congregation that you risk losing them completely? Did you stop paying the rent?

When you keep paying the rent on an ongoing basis, you and your congregation can work together to realize your vision of a flourishing and sustainable church that will be the living legacy of your passion and commitment.



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