



# Developing ownership

**TN161** Training Notes series: Communication

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**There are times in any church's life when regular events, church groups, structures/systems or any activity can become somewhat tired or stale. Perhaps things have not changed for many years and what was challenging or supportive 20 or even five years ago now feels dated and lacking in creativity. The original passion for it has been lost.**

**The need is to refresh the profile and build ownership.**

**But closely linked to this issue is the new event, group, structure/system or any activity which leaders want to focus on in church life. It needs people to understand and become enthusiastic about it.**

**The need is to sell the new idea and build ownership.**

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In both cases there is a need to enable everyone to understand the issue and to want to properly engage with it. One notice in a church service is not going to be sufficient.

But the same notice copied every week is not going to work either. The stale event or structure needs a new look. The new activity needs to catch everyone's attention so it becomes talked about and applied. Both types need an enthusiastic, creative approach.

What to do? Here are some principles to work to, followed by two practical examples I have recently been involved with.

The first example is a structure that needed to be renewed. The second is a new idea that needed to be sold. In both cases the aim was to build enthusiastic ownership across the church's membership.

## Refreshing a tired activity

Examples of existing activities or issues that might need a refresh:

- a congregation (yes!): helping them to understand what being church is all about;
- small group structures (see the worked example further on);
- personal evangelism or a beginners group/course of some kind;
- a regular activity such as an annual global missions weekend;
- financial giving, both means and teaching;
- *think of an example that might apply in your church today.*

## Suggested principles

### 1 **Pray**

Enough said!

### 2 **Ask whether the event should stop or the group close down**

This has to come first. Has this activity run its course? Can we praise God for all it has achieved but agree that we need something different rather than a simple reworking? There is no point in refreshing a profile of something that needs to come to an end. So be brutal and ask this question first of all. Ask those not specially involved too so you do not get a biased reply from your core enthusiasts.

See Training Notes TN34, *Closing down a church activity*, on this website for more on this.

### 3 **Find a wise enthusiast with passion for what you want to refresh**

You may need to form a group, but what you really need is one wise enthusiast for what you are considering. They then lead the process. They need to be 'wise' because they can be too much of an enthusiast and put everyone off. But they need to be 'enthusiastic', a possibility thinker with plenty of energy to bring life to the task.

Do not appoint a committee to help them, find two or three key people to do the job. The Trustees can act as a safety net but this small group may need one or two risk takers on board. There needs to be real passion for what you are refreshing with those who can think outside the box.

See Training Notes TN90, *Put someone in charge*, on this website for this point.

### 4 **Rethink the foundations including purpose and vision**

If something has gone stale, the chances are it's forgotten its purpose, or the purpose is no longer appropriate, and there is little vision for what it could become in two or three years' time or further ahead. So go back to basics and define what the purpose is and then dream of what God might do with it for its future. In other words, why do we have this and how might God bless it?

Read Training Notes TN48, *Let's get purpose statements right*, and TN32, *What do you mean by 'vision'?* for these ideas.

**5 Question and rethink every current means to reach vision**

Look at what you call this activity. Would something new be more appropriate? Look at how it is structured. Is a change overdue? Check out all its elements. Do some need to be dropped and others replaced? Look at its leaders. Is it time to thank them for their service but explain gently that a new team now needs to take over?

See Training Notes TN103, *How to encourage creative thinking*, for more on this.

**6 Get the key decisions ratified by the appropriate decision-making group**

Now you need authorisation for what you are going to put across so get the decision-makers on board. If you fail to do this your ideas are unlikely to catch on.

By now you have clear plans for a refreshed activity or group. Now consider communication.

**7 Put this over to the congregation**

- Use as many means as you can consider to communicate all this, draw in creative people.
- Be careful in your enthusiasm not to overstate your case or unnecessarily hurt people who have invested much in the present activity.
- Don't keep repeating one means of communication, variety is key.
- Give prayer idea lists to help people pray for the idea.
- Challenge people – don't make it too easy.
- Use testimony (excuse an old fashioned word!) – people sharing how they have benefited from this activity or structure.

Then keep these points current as you transform what you are refreshing because this is only the start. The job is not done yet.

**Illustration 1**

One church I have been involved with needed to raise the profile of their home groups.

Home groups were still very much part of the church structure but they no longer had a high visibility in the life of the church. Here are some of the actions taken which led to increased take-up and a higher profile for the groups.

- A new Home Group Co-ordinator appointed with a clear mission to place groups within the central area of church life.
- A meeting of all group 'leaders' led to the idea of a new name: 'Connect Groups' with the thought of connecting with God and with each other.
- Explanations of this in church services giving a higher profile to the overall Co-ordinator and the new name.
- Individual groups having their own 'Co-ordinator(s)' rather than being known as 'leaders'. It is easier to find people to fulfil this role.

- Membership promotion through a printed slip for everyone offering a response of interest in joining a group.
- Connect Groups articles in every issue of the monthly in-house newsletter, including powerful 'testimonies' (why I value belonging to my group) and reports of meals, joint meetings and special events.
- Groups allowed to choose study topics but most opting to seek to apply the previous Sunday's sermon to daily life.
- An annual Sunday church lunch hosted by the Connect Groups, with stories from individuals and brief news from each group.
- Groups and their Co-ordinators promoted on the video screen displays in the church foyer and on a revised church website.
- Connect Group news and details in the monthly church prayer leaflet and in regular prayer gatherings.

This led to the formation of two new groups within two years and new members of some of the other five groups. Over 70% of the regular congregation are now members of a group.

For further ideas about structuring home groups, see Article A48, *Organising your small groups*, on this website. Note the decision was taken not to shake up all the groups so people had to join a new group. This was felt to be too harsh and there were no groups that had got stuck in their way and were refusing to change.

## **Building enthusiasm for something new**

Now we turn to the same issue with a new activity rather than replacing a tired one. Examples of new activities or issues include building:

- an identity for a new congregation;
- an idea for a community fun day;
- ownership of a year focusing on spiritual renewal (see example that follows);
- a new church focus for creation care;
- enthusiasm for a building project;
- *think of an example that might apply in your church now or soon to come.*

## **Suggested principles**

They are very similar to those for a refreshed activity.

- 1 **Pray**  
Enough said!
- 2 **Find a wise enthusiast with passion for what you want to achieve**  
As principles for refreshing a tired activity
- 3 **Define the foundations including purpose and vision**  
As principles for refreshing a tired activity

**4 Take a creative approach on means to reach vision**

You are starting with a clean sheet but the need is to come up with imaginative means to reach the vision.

**5 Consider all means for communicating this to the congregation**

As principles for refreshing a tired activity

**Illustration 2**

Here is how one church gave prominence to the idea of a 'year of seeking spiritual renewal'. This came about because of concern at the previous church annual meeting at falling membership numbers at a time of great challenge for a building repair project.

The church Trustees felt that the priority should be to address the spiritual state of the church before attention to the building, whereas up until then the focus had been on funding for the building.

The following ideas were worked through to give this special year (currently part-way through and so this list is incomplete) a high profile in church life.

- The year authorised and fronted by the Minister with much of the organisational work and ideas in the hands of one enthusiastic Trustee.
- Choice of two Bible verses (Romans 12:1,2) to anchor the whole year and explain the idea of spiritual renewal.
- The first task to create a Bible bookmark with these verses on it; this was promoted and distributed to the congregation.
- Writers of the monthly prayer diary and leaders of the two monthly prayer gatherings encouraged to showcase these verses.
- The preaching team encouraged to relate their passages to the year's theme (the first series was already chosen on Ezra/Nehemiah but this fitted the theme well).
- Within the year there was a sermon series on each section of the theme verses.
- The coming of Lent gave an opportunity to encourage church members to fast and pray each Thursday 8.00 pm. to 6.00 pm. on Fridays.
- An A4 sheet of ideas of prayer topics for the year produced and made available.
- 24 hours of prayer organised from Maundy Thursday evening until Good Friday evening with church members encouraged to tick a listing of hour slots (so names not involved) including through the night. (It was felt unwise to ask people to come to the church building for this as this might leave individuals in an unsafe situation during the hours of darkness.)
- The church annual meeting to focus on responses to the theme inviting members to suggest other ideas for action.
- Encouragement for church members to testify to the impact of the theme on their lives in a special time in Sunday services.
- By now the year's theme had enough profile for this to be self-promoting with everyone recognising the idea and talking about it.

You cannot organise God's work of course – this church are very aware of this. But you can offer opportunities for prayer, you can let God's word challenge people and you can focus people's minds on the challenge of discipleship. You can also communicate vision and excitement. The year is still in progress so the list above is incomplete and the outcomes are not as yet certain.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN161. See also other resources mentioned in the text.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN161 under Communication (with a link to Planning)...

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