

## Coaching Church Planters – Lessons Learned about Best Practices

### Gene Wilson

#### *Coaching Church Planters*

What is coaching? Coaching usually takes place between a coach and a player, an experienced person and a novice, or a supervisor and a worker. It is coming alongside someone else to help them grow and succeed in what God has called them to be and do.

**Coaching is helping others discover God’s plan for their life or ministry and cooperating with the Holy Spirit to see that plan become a reality. Bob L. Logan**

We should make a distinction between mentoring and coaching. In mentoring there is direct guidance in a common environment like a small group and there is frequent contact, usually several times a month. In a mentoring relationship there is close, ongoing contact and informal feedback.

#### **Biblical Basis**

What is the Biblical basis for this approach? The Greek word *katartidzo* is translated equip, train, prepare and mend (nets) (Eph 4: 13; Luke 6: 40; 2 Tim. 3: 16-17). The meaning is a contextually appropriate preparation for a ministry (Elliston 1993). This ministry is more than a task; it involves not only *doing* but *being* and *relating* to others.

Equipping is a broader term than training. Its aim goes beyond the cognitive and behavioral domain to the affective (relating to emotions, attitudes and values) domain. It must produce church planters with well-rooted Christian convictions and values. "Effective ministry emerges out of the quality of character - not out of technical competence. Until the Lord has shaped the vessel, it will not serve His purpose." (Elliston 1993, 165).

In the Scriptures we see this worked out in the preparation of elders. A reading of first and second Timothy and Titus shows that equipping touches the whole person and is done in the context of relationships. It is moral, doctrinal and practical. Paul writes to Timothy, "The things which you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2Tim 2:2)

Although I hesitate to call the apostle Paul a coach, I would argue that he saw this as a part of his vocation. He adopted more and more apprentice missionaries as he progressed in his missionary work. His relationship with Timothy, reflected in Acts and in the prison epistles, illustrates this dimension of his apostolic ministry. He did not want to continue a mentoring relationship with John Mark, Barnabas’ nephew, during his second missionary journey but he later takes him back on his team and finds him very useful (Col. 4:10, Philemon 24, 2 Tim. 4:11).

Paul learned coaching in ministry from the best – Barnabas, his first Christian friend.

Barnabas is a coach “par excellence.” He took Paul in when others were afraid of him and adopts him as a son in the faith (Acts 9:26-30). His trustworthiness is shown by the fact that twice he serves as a delegate from the Jerusalem church and twice as a delegate from Antioch.

His real name was Joseph, a Levite from the island of Cyprus, but he was renamed Barnabas or “son of encouragement” by the apostles (Acts 4:36). He was known for his compassion and generosity, setting an example of sacrificial giving (Acts 4:37) and helping to administer a relief fund (Acts 11:27-30, 12:25).

He was willing to take risks to strengthen believers in their faith, returning with Paul to Lystra, Iconium and Derbe where they had just faced severe persecution and remaining there until they established elders. He mentored Paul, Titus and his cousin Mark. He was willing to stick it out with Mark, over Paul’s cries of protest. Some argue that it was because of their blood kinship. His life pattern indicates to me that he was motivated more by his compassionate nature, gift of encouragement and calling as an equipper than by family loyalty. He was a mentor and a coach. We would probably learn that he took many other young men under his gentle wing, but he takes a back seat to others and disappears from the pages of Scriptures. He leaves however a rich legacy through the lives of those he mentored.

### **Formal and informal coaching**

A coaching relationship does not require a common environment, but it does require regular contact. Coaching can be a more structured relationship that is determined by roles and responsibilities or an informal relationship like peer coaching. Formal coaching relies more on initial teaching and training followed by periodic observation and debriefing. In informal coaching, coachee and coach have a common goal of growing and becoming more effective in ministry and meet regularly to discuss challenges, rejoice in victories and pray over struggles. The coach serves as facilitator but is also benefiting from the coaching relationship.

Effective coaching requires accountability. The new church planter is often under the authority of the mother church and receives some financial help. It is like an internship, but the ministry of the church-planting apprentice is outside of the church. He would have the assignment of beginning evangelistic activities in a designated community leading to a Bible study group. If the pastor of the mother church has church planting experience, he may serve as coach. Otherwise a coach should be found outside of the local church. Church planting coaches should have the following qualifications

- They need not be experts or have great success, but they must have proven experience in church planting.
- They should have a spiritual gift mix that includes several of the following: Teaching, encouragement/exhortation, wisdom, evangelism, faith
- They must be passionate about church planting and love church planters
- They must be humble servants seeking the success of others more than their own
- They seek to develop not only the work but also the workers
- God’s call to this ministry should be evident to them and others

- They must have the support of organizational leaders
- They must have adequate theological training and a well-developed philosophy and praxology of church planting
- They must have access to the resources necessary to the task (books, travel, etc...)

Now we will look at the ministry of a church planting coach. That ministry is shaped by the giftedness and personality of the person. However certain dimensions of a coaching ministry are particularly significant. We will look at the place of mentoring, teaching, training, team building, tracking, supporting and challenging.

### **Best Practices for Coaching Church Planters**

*The foundational skills are empathetic listening and asking reflective questions*

There are probably two or three root issues in the person or family life of a church planter that will make or break his/her ministry. Most conversations with supervisors are about mechanics and surface issues. Coaching has to get beyond the surface to the deeper issues. Tom Landry once said that **“Coaching is getting someone to do what they don't want to do, in order to become what they want to become.”** That requires trust but also skills – especially the ability to observe non-verbal messages, to empathize, to listen for what isn't said, to ask questions that probe deeper, and to peel off layers of fear and pride to get to the real issues.

Coaching is telling others how to improve or how YOU did it. Its helping them discover who they are, what God wants them to do, and what they must change to be the godly person and effective servant they want to be down deep. Bob Logan has developed a five step process – built on relating, listening and debriefing skills that he calls the 5 Rs (Coaching 101).

1. **Relate** - Take time to connect and get caught up at a personal level. Show that you care.
2. **Reflect** – Using open-ended questions help them reflect on where they want to go and what is in the way. Ask follow-up questions to get to the deeper issues, the whys.
3. **Refocus** – Ask for options to overcome obstacles and move forward.
4. **Resource** – What book, training, experience, or further help is needed to go to the next level?
5. **Review** – Discuss next steps and set up the next appointment

A simpler way to describe this coaching process is to help the person, after reconnecting, to recall where he/she wants to go, what is in the way, and what can be done to overcome the obstacle and get there. The key is self-discovery. Mature people make lasting changes because they have new insights into things, not because of others' expectations or demands. A coach must develop the relating, listening, observing and debriefing skills that will help them move their leaders along through this process of self-discovery. The good news is that this is learned behavior if we check our natural tendencies to problem solve, share OUR experiences or make evaluative judgments about what others SHOULD do. It requires the firm conviction that the

Holy Spirit will do His work in His time.

*Coaching Church Planters often begins with a Trusting Relationship*

Trust requires a solid relationship. Mentoring will be an important component in the preparation of church planters. Although church planting coaches cannot personally mentor all the church planters with whom they work, they can foster and facilitate mentoring relationships between experienced church planters and novices. They may be able to personally mentor a few church planters who live in close proximity, but they will want to see that each new church planter is involved in a mentoring relationship.

What is mentoring? Mentoring relationships are learning partnerships in which an experienced church planter serves as guide and the less experienced apprentice seeks to learn from the mentor's experience. The mentor shows the apprentice how to do things and provides guidance and encouragement on a regular basis.

The term mentor comes from a character in Homer's *Odyssey* (800 BC). Before setting off for the Trojan Wars, King Odysseus of Ithica left his royal household in the charge of his trusted companion, Mentor, and instructed him to raise his young son Telemachus. This meant that Mentor had to be a father figure, teacher, role model, approachable counselor, a trusted advisor, a challenger, an encourager, among other things to the young Telemachus in order that he become, in time, a wise and good ruler. (Carruthers 1993: 9)

Caldwell and Carter (1993) give several other mentorship models from various settings. Not all the principles apply to church planting but, in my opinion, the following do:

1) A mentoring relationship, or dyad, is mutually beneficial and should be established to meet the developmental needs of both parties.

2) The best mentoring occurs when the dyad mutually choose each other. At times a third party can suggest a dyad as long as both parties feel comfortable in the relationship.

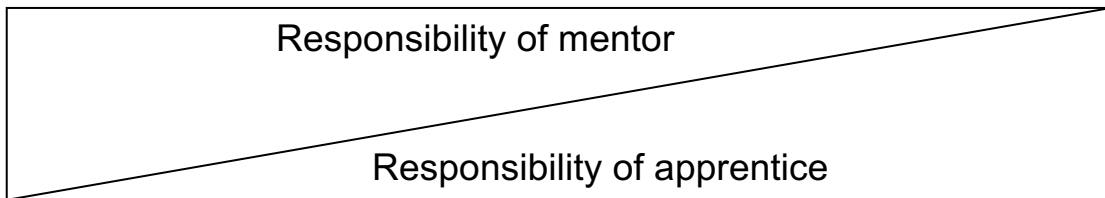
3) The mentorship is formed around a common interest or task but extends beyond that to a relationship of affection and trust.

4) A mentorship evolves through relational stages. Initially the relationship is *formal*, in the eyes of the apprentice; than in stage two it is *cautious*. The third stage is a *sharing* stage; the fourth stage an *open* stage; and finally the relationship extends *beyond* the end of the official mentorship (Carruthers 1993).

5) Excessive emotional dependence by either party is detrimental. Mentoring relationships across gender lines often have sexual or romantic overtones, which get in the way of the objectives of the mentorship. Same sex mentoring is preferable for this reason.

6) Much thought should be given to the selection of mentors and apprentices and to the mentorship program. The preparation and orientation of mentors and interns contributes to the success of the mentorship.

7) There are role changes with regard to the task. The mentor begins in the dominant role and progressively takes a back seat to leave place for the intern. The transfer of responsibility is progressive as illustrated below.



*Coaching church planters includes teaching new concepts*

**Ken Blanchard calls coaching: “teaching and practice focused on taking action, with celebration when things go well and supportive redirection when things go wrong (Blanchard 1999: 159).**

Church planters need a biblical and theological knowledge base to deal with situations that arise in ministry. In an urban church-planting context, the teaching component is particularly important. Most people the church planter will work with do not have a consistent biblical worldview. Many have never taken a basic doctrines course. In our cosmopolitan centers such as Lima or Mexico City, we can expect elements from rational humanism, Catholic theology, and Eastern mysticism to be present in the mental grid of new believers.

The context of teaching is important. Teaching is most effective with a small number of church planters. Coaches can use weekend retreats effectively because they provide a controlled environment, extended time together and good opportunities for team building and practice. Our experience is that ten to twenty people attend most equipping weekends. Coaches can also do some follow-up teaching and review in a leadership community meeting and in debriefing sessions. What makes this type of teaching effective?

Effective teaching is audience-centered and connects with the group. It is important to remember that people listen selectively. A dedicated and competent psychology professor conducted an experiment to find out what his students were thinking about during his lectures. Without a warning, he would fire a starter pistol and make the students write down what they were thinking of at the time the pistol went off. Here is what he found.

20% were pursuing erotic thoughts or sexual fantasies.

20% were reminiscing.

20% were worrying about something or thinking about lunch.

8% were pursuing religious thoughts.

20% were reportedly listening but unable to recall what the professor was saying.

12% were able to recall what the professor was talking about (Beebe 1991).

Effective teaching is purposeful and focused. It is estimated that after twenty-four hours, listeners will recall only 50% of what was said and less than 25% after forty-eight hours. The content needs to be packaged for retention. Repetition, illustration, and interaction help. A good teaching device is to conclude with a review of the main points of the teaching in an encapsulated form (Beebe 1991).

Effective teaching aims to produce lasting change: change not only in attitudes and beliefs, but also in values. Values are harder to change than beliefs. Values are that which we consider good or valuable; they are deeply ingrained. Beliefs are changed by evidence. To value something differently we have to look at it from a new perspective. We call this a paradigm shift. For example, in order to get people seriously involved in prayer events and intercessory prayer, the average church member needs to see prayer differently. Telling them they should pray or how to pray does not accomplish this.

### *Coaching Church Planters must include Practical Training*

Coaches are catalysts and coordinators of skill-oriented training for church planters. They may not be able to do all the training themselves, but they will develop or finding the best tools and prepare others to use them.

Practical training implies learning for use in a predictable situation. Some equipping programs have training as their primary focus. Elliston and Kauffman (1993) review compelling evidence that leadership training *alone* does not produce leaders. Training does not change values, character, or relationships. Foundational character and commitment requirements must be in place before much time is invested in skills. If it is, the training will reinforce these qualities. Although it is not foundational, training is nevertheless indispensable.

The type of training we have found most useful to accomplish these objectives is *in-service training*. Bill Hull has identified six steps in Jesus' training of his disciples (Hull 1988). He has carefully documented this equipping process and convincingly demonstrated Jesus' intentional use of this process.

"Tell them what."	The gospel of the kingdom
"Tell them why."	God's redemptive purpose in Christ
"Show them how."	The first year of ministry
"Do it with them."	Christ's Nazarean ministry
"Let them do it."	The disciples' Nazarean ministry in Matthew 10
"Deploy them."	The commissioning at His ascension

As we have already seen, effective training is *learner-centered*. The following diagram shows the training process from the learner's and from the trainer's perspective. Hull (1988) has underlined that Jesus called the apostles to "Come and see" (John 1-4) before he called them to "Come and be with me" (Mark 1: 16-20; Matt 4: 18-22; Luke 5: 1-11). This is why the following training process begins with observation rather than instruction.

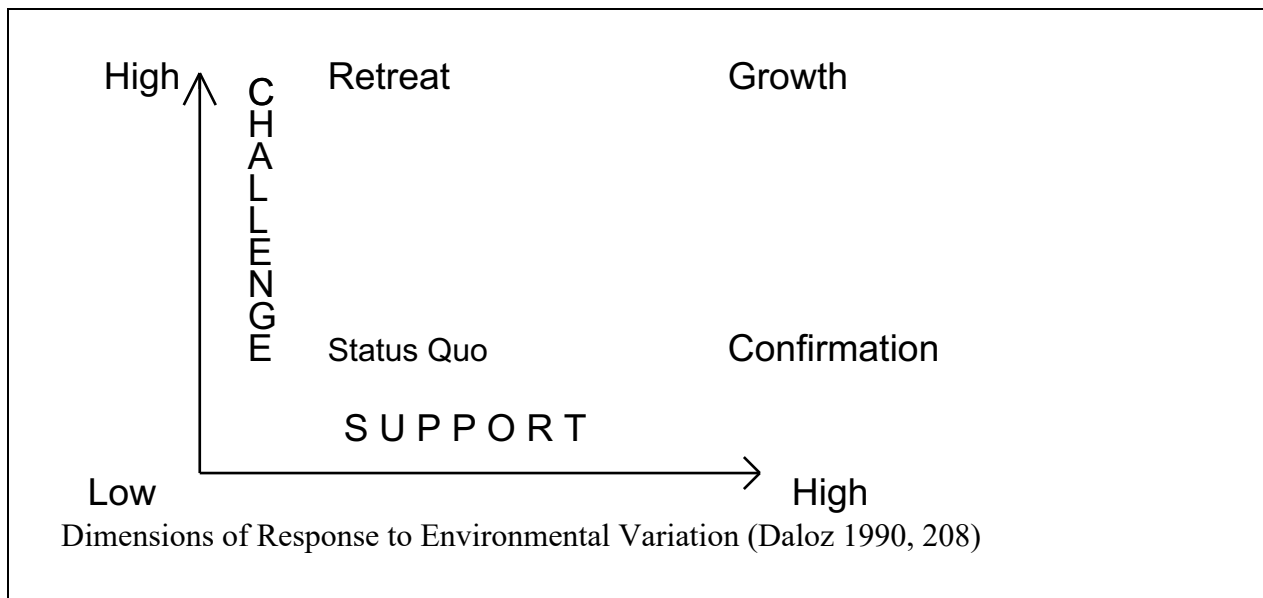
Training experiences should not be selected artificially or randomly. The basic objectives of the training must come from the basic roles church planters are called to fulfill.

Here are some examples.

- *Leading others to Christ & guiding them in their spiritual growth*
- *Leading a small group in worship and Bible study*
- *Effective cross-cultural communication*
- *Organizing an evangelistic outreach*
- *Training others in evangelism*
- *Providing basic pastoral care to members*
- *Guiding a core group to personal growth and preparation for service*
- *Discerning spiritual needs and Satanic influences*

### **Coaches Use Support and Challenge**

According to Daloz (1990), there are three primary ways to facilitate the growth of leaders: supporting, challenging, and providing vision. The chart below illustrates that support without challenge hinders growth and that challenge without support creates relational distance between the supervisor and leader.



*Supporting* is affirming others in their present ways of being and doing. It is expressed by words of encouragement, by listening to understand, by providing needed resources and information, and by providing appropriate structure and timely constructive feedback. These are ways of saying, "I am on your side; we are in this together". Effective coaches express positive and realistic expectations and underline what is done right before they bring up what is done wrong. They also pray for those under their care and encourage profusely.

Spending adequate time with the church planter is a form of support, as are listening and affirming gifts and potential. The wise coach will not only look at the performance of church

planters, but also at their effort and progress.

Coaches use *challenging* along with supporting in order to provide guidance. One of the most difficult but most beneficial interventions a coach can make is to challenge the church planter toward more appropriate behavior adaptations. "Sponsors make their best contribution when they help their sponsees break out of negative patterns of behavior..." (Neighbour 1995, 42). Challenging requires that the supervisor provide specific feedback that may bring out faulty assumptions or unclear expectations.

When verbal confrontation is needed it should be followed by an open discussion of root causes. This takes skilled probing through non-threatening questions. Challenging is not always accomplished through confrontation. It is also accomplished by involving the learner in increasing responsibilities. These changes should be discussed with the learner. Other options include:

- \* Design tasks to promote change or growth (assignments).
- \* Explore options and discuss alternate plans.
- \* Provide an alternative perspective or interpretation.
- \* Help learners identify assumptions and think through consequences.

A third dimension of guidance is *providing vision*. Coaches should not be overly consumed with behavior; they should focus more on understanding. Daloz (1990) and Neighbour (1995) underline the coach's responsibility to guide learners through paradigm shifts as needed. Coaches can serve as "interpreters of the environment" by guiding learners into new understandings of themselves and others. "They can provide vision for students to help them see where they have been and also where they are going" (Daloz 1990, 207). One way is to provide a map, like a development plan, by which the new church planters can chart their course.

Communicating vision is a two-way street. Daloz (1990) points out that people need a positive mirror. The coach can help learners see their qualities in a new light, as well as their potential and their progress. He can also provide a new language to reinforce new perceptions. Finally, he should focus on values worth striving for and traditions worth maintaining.

It is good to ask the new church planters what vision they have and what God wants of them. Then coach and learner can pray and plan together with God given goals in sight. It takes wisdom to use supporting, challenging and providing vision at the appropriate time.

Coaches tend to naturally favor challenging or providing support. Those who are more directive must work on increasing their listening and support. Those who are naturally empathetic and have a hard time challenging need to become more intentional about challenging for change and growth.

### *Coaches keep track of the progress of church planters*

The last component of coaching we will discuss is tracking. In the world of sports a coach will keep track of a player's statistics. This is not to compare players but rather to gauge how they are responding to the training and developing as players. It measures both individual and team progress. It allows the coach to debrief with players and guide them based on real facts rather



than impressions or verbal reports.

Likewise, good record keeping allows a church planting coach to *track* the progress of church planters and *assess* their growth as well as the growth of the church plant. Few people like keeping records. In fact it would be foolish to waste time in paperwork if it did not serve a purpose. Coaches should select the records they find most useful and include instructions about their use in the training.

I would suggest two tools: a church planter self-assessment and a coach's journal.

1) The self-assessment is completed by the church planter. It is simply a list of questions that makes church planters reflect on their growth and the growth of the church plant. Basically the end result should identify obstacles to growth and critical actions point for sustained growth. The self-assessment can be sent to the church planter by email but should be reviewed in person. The debriefing interview is the most important part of the self-assessment. A sample form follows.

2) The coaching journal is simply a log or record of debriefing sessions with the church planter. It should highlight the main topics discussed, any needs or problems related to the work, progress or victories to celebrate, personal growth needs and prayer requests. The journal is useful only if it used between meetings for prayer, reflection and to prepare the following debriefing session.

We have talked about teaching, training, mentoring, team building and tracking. Coaches will develop these skills over time. However, the discernment of how to apply them in the lives of individual leaders can only come from God. The coach must walk with God and receive specific direction through his times of prayer for new church planters. This work is also accompanied by great joy.