

## Summaries by Mark R. Elliott\*

### *Hit the Bull's Eye*

Paul Borden

What I see that is very different about his context:

1. His perspective is from that of a denomination in serious decline. We are not there today, but unless we make some changes we could be in 20 years.
2. American Baptists have over the years moved to a stronger hierarchical entity than Southern Baptists—their ordination process and their resume clearing house are two significant examples. (35, 122, 15) “In our Baptist setting with autonomous congregations that are **mostly** free to do as they decide, we could not demand accountability. We needed to lead people to embrace it for themselves.” (47) The way he set up pastoral candidate interviews for congregations (117)
3. The churches he “inherited” were for the most part also in serious decline and more open to consultation and outside intervention.
4. The timing was good in one sense, in that the area had already fought the battle over homosexuality (56) and the historic Biblical perspective had won—they were then unified in that sense and did not have to fight that battle that the Kansas and Nebraska area churches are fighting today. Obviously the battle over women’s roles in ministry fell on the more contemporary side of the line.
5. Their multi-million dollar reserve they used to implement their new strategy
6. the area was ready for change as his predecessor had been their 25 years (56). Their willingness to set aside their by-laws and structure are evidence of that (76)

What I agree with whole heartedly

1. Not all growing congregations are healthy ones. However, all healthy congregations are growing. (16)
2. The key ingredient needed for change is leadership. (17) He used their monthly cluster meetings for ongoing training and accountability (51) Leadership defined on page 57.
3. Denominations will not be reformed from the top (27)
4. The local church and its mission must be at the top of the organization chart (31)

5. Their mission is to Grow Healthy churches using the following purposes: catalyst for reproduction, transformation, and channeling missions dollars— (I would say of the latter cooperation for maximizing resources) (31-32)
6. Principles behind their strategies: fruitfulness is as important as faithfulness; what we count we value; accountability is a basic requirement for change and must be based upon objective measurement.
7. They asked pastors to forget that they were pastors and think of themselves as missionaries and leaders (38). Leaders are defined as people who actually had other people following them.
8. DoMs should be catalysts for growth and viewed as such (41)
9. His 8 strategic principles on page 63.
10. Doing whatever it takes to attract quality pastors
11. You turn a region (association) around one congregation at a time.
12. Elements that create a uniqueness for each congregation (83)
13. I like his consultation process (87-97)
14. Great ideas in moving churches and pastors from competition to cooperation
15. Finding the right balance between truth telling and grace giving (112)
16. The best time to work with a congregation for change is during the interim (113)

Where I would have some further discussion with him

1. He seems to only see the negative aspect of the two major metaphors he uses: shepherd and family. Admittedly his context was only modeling the negative aspects, but in my opinion you don't throw out the baby with the bath water
2. His definitions related to conflict mediation. I think I would agree with him, but his semantics get him tripped up a bit. "We as a region, do not promote or conduct conflict mediation" (33) and yet their actions say differently (45, 49, 65, 72). I do agree that unless you get at the real root of the conflict, you leave the situation worse than it was when you began.
3. His stated large church bias—how would our very rural areas be viewed in that context?
4. "Any congregation regardless of location, size, history, or context could become a large one." (63)
5. His recommendation concerning the make up of a pastor search committee (118)
6. His section on polity and summary points 141-142

## Where we will have our greatest struggle

1. Accountability
2. Calling of new staff (association and state) based upon a track record of growth and ability to serve as a consultant vs familiarity and availability
3. Not every voice carries equal weight (61)
4. Finding good folks to deal with day-to-day administrative areas thus freeing the DoMs to serve as visionary leaders and catalysts (great quote on bottom of 75)
5. Balancing grace giving and truth telling in consultation process
6. The honesty to admit what he says on pages 114-115 about ministry candidates might have some truth to it.
7. Polity issues as we balance authority, responsibility, and accountability

## *Direct Hit* **Paul Borden**

### **What I agree with whole heartedly**

- Among many reasons why churches are in decline and inward focused the book focuses on two: leadership is unwilling to lead transformational change or do not see themselves as leaders, or they do not have a developed strategy. Only God grows the church; however it is also true that God usually works through leaders. (17)
- A congregation grows in proportion to the number of leaders that are being developed every year (18)
- Barriers to Leading Change (20-21)
  - Most pastors do not see themselves as the leaders of congregations
  - Many churches reward faithful endeavor not fruitful results
  - Many churches are led by a handful of people who have gained the position by default because of a long line of ineffectual pastors
  - Church structure and polity keeps it small
- To be willing to lead a congregation through change requires great courage (33-35)
- There are no good excuses for not growing (42-43)
- Vision does not necessarily start with the pastor. However, most pastors who arrive to lead congregations that lack vision, hope, and morale will find that if they do not generate vision, no one else will. (45)
- Until someone can convince them (an entrenched church) that the status quo is unacceptable, people will not change, no matter how compelling the new vision might be. (54)
- Most dysfunctional congregations do not attract healthy leaders (60)
- Healthy congregations are defined by sacrifice...Dysfunctional congregations, on the other hand, despite all their rhetoric about sacrifice, exist more for those who already rule the congregation than for those who are on the outside. (68)

- Despite all the rhetoric, most congregations do not want to pay the cost of change. They usually want the results of change but are unwilling to do what it takes to get the results. The price is too high (96-97)
- Many competent pastors live under condemnation because of the incompetent pastors who came before them (98)

### **Fresh insights or interesting pieces:**

- The vast opportunity pastors, staff, and even lay leaders have to communicate change (pg16-17)
- Story about group who came to visit region and left with two insights and their resignations (29-30)
- As effective ministry becomes more and more a bottom-up endeavor that reflects the calling and gifts of more and more believers, ministries will take on the personality of individuals in the body more than the pathology of the leader. (36)
- Development of three teams during the prep period (71-79) EXCELLENT SECTION
- Intervention Model: Big Picture (102-108) ANOTHER EXCELLENT SECTION
- Running with Purpose (111-123) ANOTHER EXCELLENT SECTION

### **Where I would like some further discussion with him:**

- More congregations die than are started each week in North America—source of this stat? (36)
- How do you accomplish this: Wise leaders guide but do not overrun sheep. They never ask more of their sheep than they are willing to do as leaders. However, they are also honest with those sheep that do not want to be Missional. Such sheep are given the opportunity to participate in the core mandate (making disciples), but if they do not want to participate, they are not given voice or authority in how the mission will be accomplished.” (40)
- He talks in terms of two time “zones”. Prep which may take up to five years and implementation of systemic change (46-47). If that is the case how did they circumvent the five year prep period in the early days of their turnaround?
- It sounds like you are slipping over an ethical boundary: “the pastor may ask emerging leaders on Teams One, Two, and Three to put some dollars, over and above their regular giving, into savings accounts in order to have funds available in the future to hire new part-time staff members or provide resources to develop new disciples” (88)
- Expand on your statement: In my experience of supervising pastors, perhaps 10-15% of pastors have the leadership skills required to produce such change, should God work through their ministry...The good news is that most pastors, who do not have leadership talents and gifts, can learn and practice effectively the leadership behaviors that will prepare a congregation for systemic change. However these pastors will need help—special help—when the time comes to produce the actual change. (98)
- Expand on this one as well: “Few consultants are skilled interventionists. Identifying these interventionists is difficult because some observers are not sure that performing intervention is the job of a consultant.” (101)
- Elaborate (are you talking complete leadership turnover?) A third thing that must be accomplished during the first year is the establishment of new leaders for the congregation.” (112)

## **Where we will have our greatest struggles**

- Acknowledging the sacrifice that this kind of turnaround takes. He talks about the challenge during the prep time to live a double life: “a chaplain and a leader. This is one major reason why change is so difficult and why most pastors decide, often unintentionally, not to pursue it. The job is just too demanding.” (51) **also** a pastor must do the basics so as not to lose influence... The “doing ministry game” is one the pastor plays not to lose, knowing that in most cases it will not help him to win (84) **also** “do not go down this path of leading congregation from dysfunction to health if you are not ready to work hard, perhaps lose the battle, and experience great pain in the process of winning. Of course leading dysfunctional congregations also produces pain but it comes in smaller doses. (93)
- Taking the step of confrontation: “As we work with dying congregations, we often tell the people that their congregation is not merely dying, but also disobedient. We explain how the congregation has for years believed an urgent message but lived for itself, making few if any new disciples and failing to fulfill the mission that Jesus had designed for his Church. Our first recommendation in this type of situation is a day of prayer in which clergy and lay leaders alike lead the congregation to confess the sin of complacency (56) **also** “The tragedy in most congregations is that those in positions of leadership have gained significance in possessing these roles and are not only unwilling to sacrifice them for health and growth but will also fight tooth and nail to prevent change. (70)
- Impatience: “understand that the battle should never start until there are enough allies to provide a possible chance of winning. NO engagement this serious will ever be won without significant spiritual resources. That will foreshadow defeat if not marshaled well” (69)
- We try the easy fix, but “Structure never changes first” (112)
- Issue of accountability: “All staff members must accept three major goals. The first goal is the number of new disciples that will be brought to Jesus Under their respective ministries... The second goal is the number of new people that each staff member will train to be involved in his or her ministry each year... The third goal is specific numbers or percentages by which the staff members ministry will grow during the year. (115)

## ***Winning on Purpose*** **John Edmund Kaiser**

### **What I agree with whole heartedly**

- The basic assumptions that underlie his book:
  - God wins on purpose and wants His church to do the same
  - We win by using God’s gifts for God’s purposes—When we reach a critical mass of foolishness by neglecting God’s mission and squandering God’s gifts, we should not be surprised when Christ builds His church through some other congregation instead of through ours. (19)
  - Groups cannot normally be expected to lead or be held accountable
  - The concepts are adaptable to a wide range of contexts
- “If you believe that mission happens naturally in congregations through business as usual, the only kind of pastoral leadership you need is operational leadership: someone to preach the Word, conduct services, oversee programs, and keep the campers happy. If, however, you

believe that mission happens only through the courage to continually realign an organization's culture with the values of Christ, then you need something more in a pastor. You need transformational leadership." (28)

- We can either say that the church is an organized organism like a body (each part with a function distinct and related to the others), or an organic organization like a family or an army (a matrix of living beings). Either way the church is not a spiritual invertebrate. Nevertheless, from time to time there are movements seeking to point us back to "New Testament Christianity" in a way that casts suspicion on formal organization. When this impulse is carried too far, it creates a particular set of obstacles for the congregation trying to achieve its mission. (33)
- Without a structure for accountability, the most dysfunctional people often shape the life of a congregation. Healthy congregations are magnets for healthy people and are medicine for needy people. Needy congregations are magnets for needy people and medicine for no one.(33)
- If you want an outward focused ministry, you don't call a pastor whose agenda is to create a fortress for the defense of a theological system you don't select board members who want to play devils advocate (the devil has enough advocates already), you don't hire staff who can't manage their ministry for outreach, and you don't receive members who won't agree to support the purpose of the church. (82)
- There are pastors and boards that avoid consultation and training...functioning in isolation is not the way of the winning team. (84)
- What can members do if the pastor is not leading the congregation to succeed and if the board will do nothing about it? If the situation is that bad, there is a more honorable alternative: simply leave well. This act will be a true service to the cause of Christ, to the congregation, and to family and friends. Leaving well means that a person a) does his or her homework to make sure the leadership is not on a road to winning b) tells people the truth about why he or she is leaving, and c) finds a growing congregation whose leaders he or she can support. (93)
- If pastors don't employ their gifts to serve the mission don't tithes their income to fund the mission, and don't schedule their time to accomplish the mission they should not be surprised if calls to commitment from their pulpits go no further than the notebooks of their people." (102-103)
- Even with the freedom and support of the Accountable Leadership strategy over a reasonable period of time—and neither the congregation nor the pastor is willing to make room for a new leader, then no organizational system will help. The problem is one of courage and integrity rather than strategies and tactics. (104)
- **The underlying premise is that congregations will succeed or fail in the long term based on effective pastoral leadership more than any other human factor. (108)**
- Allowing top-level staff or their immediate family on the board creates dysfunction. (124)
- Individuals who serve on a board using the Accountable Leadership strategy must be chosen and trained with utmost care. Board members who enter the room with a casual, mystical, or managerial expectation of tinkering with anything in the congregation that grabs their attention—or the attention of their spouses—cannot govern well. Instead they must understand the mission, vision, values, and structure of the church, and they must understand how to provide the governance piece of that structure in alignment with the mission, vision, and values. [Table 13.4 gives an outline for a Pastor's Training Course] (153-154)

- Insiders of the emerging leagues are aware that a certain amount of pain and anger fuels a part (and only a part) of the passion to reject all things Boomer and Modern. Leaders hurt or disenfranchised by established churches translate a portion of their pathology into missiology. There is more than just a philosophical or theological difference at work, broken relationships figure into the equation. Therefore a third benefit that the Accountable Leadership strategy can bring to emerging leagues is creating common Missional ground between “moderns” and “postmoderns” to get past the anger and into fruitful partnerships for the gospel—without compromising values. (166-167)

## **Fresh insights or interesting pieces:**

- Excellent illustration on doing what has to be done from the movie *Untouchables* (17)
- Great sections on the challenges of various church polities (36-39; 158-168)
  - Elder rule in an autonomous church may well be the least accountable polity of all (37)
  - It is common for higher levels of denominational office to be filled with individuals who never did grow large Missional congregations at the local level instead they ascended the ranks through institutional loyalty and personal connections. (39)
- I gained some ammunition on an area of personal emphasis, multiplication. He stats that, “From the original calling of the first disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew, Jesus made it clear that multiplication would be the goal of their discipleship. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’” (54)
- I liked his insight on a passage often used by those in the “social gospel” circle (Mt 25), he broadens the discussion to the Olivet Discourse in chapters 24-25. “Compassion for the vulnerable is presented as an evidence of righteousness in Matthew 25. However, there is not one criterion for judgment presented here but rather three criteria in parallel images: wisdom, illustrated by the ten virgins (vv 1-13), productivity, illustrated by the talents (vv 14-30), and compassion, illustrated by the sheep and goats (vv 31-46) The criteria of compassion, wisdom, and productivity, fall within the ‘everything I have commanded you’ portion of Jesus’ commission to the disciples. It may not legitimately be recast as an alternative to the explicit imperative to make disciples.” (56)
- One reason that job descriptions for church staff have limited value is that they emphasize plays over wins...compensation and benefits are linked to activity but not productivity. (58-59)
- Excellent illustration on page 61 comparing travel in the former USSR and in Nebraska. He points out that navigating the rules of some churches would be like traveling in Russia.
- Jesus commissioned His church to make disciples of all nations, not to make decisions on all notions. (62)
- He does a good job of distilling the “How We Keep Score” component into two pointes: 1) were the intended ends achieved? And Did the means employed to achieve the ends fall within the guidelines? (72-73)
- Gene Getz book *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* has a chapter entitled *Elders and Leaders* in which he makes the point that a primary team leader is needed.
- The Board—plays governance
  - They serves as trustees for Christ who is the head of the church
  - They follow “a living set of Guiding Principles designed to ensure that the mission of the Owner is carried out within parameters acceptable to the Owner.

- They keep score and call penalties based on the Guiding Principles
- They support the pastor as leader
- Great illustration from the Steve McQueen movie: “You can’t take that away from him that’s his rice bowl.” (117)
- Staff are trusted people who manage the work of gifted people to serve the needs of precious people who need a personal relationship with the Lord of all people. (120)

### **Where I would like some further discussion with him:**

- Under “The Rules of the Game” he states that “a short list of wise boundaries actually creates the conditions required to enjoy freedom.” (42) I would ask, “How do you keep the rules from expanding?” or “How do you keep 10 commandments from becoming volumes filled with minutia explaining how to keep the commandments.”
- Under “How to Keep Score” he states that “We can honor neither the mission nor the pastor with a system that says ‘Everybody has been effective, and all must have raises.’ Without keeping score there are no real winners.” (43) I would ask, “How do you fight the tendency to do across the board % increases?”
- I suspect it is a semantics issue, but since one of my values is “balance” I was interested in his comments to open chapter four that “balance will kill you” and “equilibrium is death.” (51)
- Weaknesses I see in the Board as Governance:
  - What will keep the pastor from “stacking the Board?”
  - How does the board “balance” holding the pastor accountable and supporting the pastor? when you say that balance kills?
  - What happens if a weak non-confrontational chairperson leads the Board?
  - What happens if you end up with two weak or two strong personalities are in place (board chairperson and pastor)

### **Where we will have our greatest struggles**

- Right where he warns us about the “two distortions of the Accountable leadership strategy” (61-62): pastors attracted to a system that grants them great authority (a typical attitude among SBC pastors is that I am accountable only to God) and controlling/spiritually immature laymen attracted to an oversight board
- Confronting those who cannot be trusted with authority: 1) Someone who will abuse legitimate authority and 2) someone who will fail to utilize legitimate authority (100)
- Understanding that no model, method, minister, etc. is “the answer.” Even with the freedom and support of the Accountable Leadership strategy over a reasonable period of time—and neither the congregation nor the pastor is willing to make room for a new leader, then no organizational system will help. The problem is one of courage and integrity rather than strategies and tactics. (104)

\*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.