

“Christian community would be so much better if it weren’t for people.”

Like our own family members, everybody in our Christian community makes us crazy sometimes. Today we’re going to consider the ones who make us crazy all the time – those who drive people crazy, drive people apart or drive people away.

Let’s think about the human immune system. Broadly speaking, it copes with invaders through resistance and a set of reactions called ‘the immune response’.

A microorganism trying to get into a healthy body has to crawl through a minefield – this is resistance. Do we have a group that is resistant to unhealthy disruption? Some of our groups are chronically subject to disruption because our resistance is low.

Once the barriers have been compromised the immune system mounts a response. Do we have a group that knows how to resolve problems with decisive grace? If the leadership is afraid of conflict, the one who isn’t afraid will lead the group into conflict – be it good or bad. Sometimes, when the leadership is unafraid of conflict, they may nonetheless be so rigid and autocratic that the resolution is always the same, “Leave.”

In a sense, resistance & response are features of a well led group. So, a course on leadership could go a long way toward dealing with those who disrupt community. But, trying to nail down such a comprehensive treatment in 1 ½ hours is a little like trying to fit a horse into a suitcase. There’d be a few things left sticking out. Let’s treat our subject like an internet article - a short summary with links to additional material.

Once we run through the summary. Let’s use it as framing the rest of our time together when we discuss the difficulties you had in mind when you came here today.

RESISTANCE

[Reflect on Acts 20:26-35]

Keep your conscience clear

1. **Moral integrity** - 2 Corinthians 4:1-2

Examining Paul’s response to disruption is very instructive. In every case, he asks the members of the group to recall and assess his moral character.

2. **Ministry integrity** - 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

One important quality of those with ministry integrity is that they know themselves. Each of us needs to understand the nature and limitations of our own personalities.

Each of us need to leverage our strengths and lean against our natural weaknesses in our leadership.¹

Agitators

Some of us are all about change. We are aggressive and focused on driving change – whether it’s changed attitudes, behaviors or results. We are the agitators in the group. We are not afraid of conflict nor are we aversive to loss. Our motto is “Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way,” usually with the “Lead” part crossed out.

The down side of this kind of leader is their tendency to play ‘king of the hill’ with the members of the group. Sometimes potential leaders are suppressed or driven away because of their dissent.² Disruptors are lost more often than they are won because the agitator leader just forces them out.

Another down side may be a tendency to want to “do something, even if it’s wrong.” That is, we may not have the right solution for a particular problem or need. We haven’t thought

¹ Ask God to show you your limitations as a leader and then ask your friends & co-workers to do the same thing. Consider how you might recruit people with strengths in your areas of weakness to lead with you and learn to value the approach & perspective they bring to the team.

² Collins chapters on humility & looking in the mirror are helpful here.

things through very well – either the problem or the solution. As a result, we either change directions so often that our own erratic behaviors produce dissent or we keep driving our wrong-headed plan in spite of the fact it doesn't appear to work.

Analysts

Some of us are all about insight and reflection. We carefully focus on understanding and planning. We are the steady, patient and wise leaders of the group. We are not afraid of complexity and do all we can to preserve & sustain our group. Our motto is "Slow down, let's figure this out and then we can go forward," usually with the 'Go forward' part crossed out.

The down side of this kind of leader is there tendency to encourage the *status quo* in the group. They tend to be very motivated to understand and plan and then get distracted from driving the plan – driving change.³ Many times, the disruptor is the first to notice that the group is getting stuck but the analyzer leader fails to leverage that insight, instead providing reasons why things are 'not so bad' and 'getting better.' Actually, this kind of leader can be just as hard on the disruptor as the agitator leader because they tend to use passive aggressive behaviors to isolate and drive them out.

Another down side may be a tendency to merely observe and react to people. That is, we may have a very good insight to share but we keep it to ourselves and are amazed that the problem people don't change. If we are merely reacting to people, we will be aimless and ineffective.⁴ In the course of reacting to people we fail to attend to our responsibilities before God.

Lead the workers

A poorly led group invites dissent and disruption whether the group is led by an agitator or an analyst. A group with bad internal discipline can be a hotbed for dissatisfaction and dissent amongst its members. Again, we cannot be comprehensive today but I hope you will continue to pursue leadership maturity & mastery, without which you cannot hope to avoid frequent and painful dissonance.⁵

I would just suggest a few key areas of leadership that we must keep focused on. Community becomes disrupted whenever confidence in God, the unity of the body or the mission of the church is undermined. If these features are not present and growing in your group then someone will step into the vacuum and agitate for change. Often this agitation is destructive.

1. to persistently pursue a godly mission⁶

Wrong mission - No mission - Theoretical mission

If you don't have a goal, someone with a goal will take over. If you aren't progressing toward your stated goal, a self-interested agitator will try to take over the group.

Our community exists largely for the benefit of its non-members. God's love for us, our love for one another and our love for the lost belongs at the heart of our mission.

Can every regular member of your group articulate the mission of your group...do they all say the same thing?

³ Collins chapter on the flywheel principle is helpful here.

⁴ Notice that the servant who hid his money was merely reacting to the perceived threat of his master. A study of Nehemiah can be very useful. Notice how he handled the disruptors of the rebuilding project. He had to react to the threats and dangers but not at the expense of moving forward on the project. He was able to distinguish the issues requiring a response from the ones requiring no response. Notice the role of prayer/faith in his responses.

⁵ See the leadership books in the bibliography; and the Christian Leadership classes on the Xenos web site (i.e. Christian Leadership 1, 2, & 3)

⁶ http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu4_ministry.htm & http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu3_bodylife.htm

When a group has no meaningful mission, the mission becomes 'let's be nice,' leading to the worst kinds of superficiality.

The difference between having a mission and driving the mission is huge.

2. to help with weakness & sin⁷

Troubled - Carnal - Evil

To some extent we all disrupt community because we all are inclined to sin – to please ourselves at someone else's expense or at the expense of God's mission.

Troubled – There are some with such distorted perspectives on themselves & the world around them that they have difficulty advancing in their walk. There is often a substantial moral element to their behavior but the emotional damage is so significant that it's difficult for them to move forward with Christ.

Carnal - There are some who are so self-absorbed that their drama distracts everyone from love and mission. There are others who are so self-absorbed that they ignore the great commandment to love.

Evil - There are some who are malignant narcissists. Who so fully pursue their own agendas that they use others ruthlessly (e.g. gossip, slander, unrighteous recruitment, division).⁸

3. to love the unlovely⁹

Socially odd – Physically & Mentally limited - Mentally ill

We're all odd in different ways...this is where discussion of diversity is needed.

4. to cultivate healthy conflict¹⁰

Conflict is good for groups when the conflict is over important issues related to the mission and practices of the group.

A well led group is trained to think critically about many things, including the group itself. Critical thinkers are learners who are excited about opposing points of view.

A well led group is confident enough in God that the momentary disruption of conflict does not rattle them. They believe God instructs through conflicts and they are enthusiastic to hear His voice. Those with weak faith are fearful and are much more likely to react inappropriately to conflict.

Many times it's the disruptive person who, while perhaps being carnal, is also the member who recognizes a legitimate problem in the group. That is, the person whom you see as disrupting community may be a future leader if someone will work with them.

Response¹¹

A well led group is prepared to move toward those who disrupt community. So, really this material almost completely overlaps the previous material on resistance. What's different here is that we will look more closely at some issues we glossed in the earlier section.

[Reflect on 1Thessalonians 5:12-24]

Move toward the disruptive person

Sometimes the biggest struggle we have is the fear of having conflict with the disruptive person or a lack of knowledge about the best way to have a difficult conversation. There are many resources

⁷ http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu3_encourage.htm & there is a fair amount of material pertaining to this topic at <http://www.xenos.org/CLASSES/servanthood2/index.htm>

⁸ *The People of the Lie*, M. Scott Peck; 2Tim.3:1-13; Romans 1

⁹ *ibid*; concerning pastoral counseling & mental illness

¹⁰ <http://www.xenos.org/classes/christianleadership2/pastoralcounseling/cl2PCw4lecturenotes.pdf>; affective vs. issues conflict

¹¹ *ibid* & *Satanology - Covert & Overt Tactics and Response: Part 2* http://www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu4_satan_3.htm

concerned with difficult people that you will find very helpful.¹² But, one thing is critical: move toward the difficult person in grace. If we won't move toward the conflict, we let people get hurt, including the disruptive one. If we won't walk in the Spirit (grace), we handle conflict in the way our flesh likes best and everybody gets hurt.

When we will not personally and directly speak to someone, we often end up throwing 'bank shots' and hoping the disruptive person 'gets it' and/or gossiping/recruiting others to our perspective without every having given ourselves or them a chance to mature.

I return regularly to a few things that help me move toward people in grace.

1. Remember that God is very big

- God permits difficult things for good reasons (Romans 8:28; 12:1-2)
Paul said that he was content with all his hardships so that God's power would manifest itself through him (2Cor.12:10; Phil4:11-13; Heb.13:5-6).
- Take your worries to God
Manage your expectations - they will probably be defensive.¹³
We're often afraid to tell the truth to God and so we stuff truth in the cracks of our confidence but God already knows our concerns and not giving voice to doubts doesn't make them go away. Voicing anger, doubt, fear & anxiety opens us up to God's leadership.
Read through Psalm 42 & 43. Notice 42::2, 3, 7,9,10 & 43:2
- Anchor your hopes in God rather than your ability to manage people's attitudes or behaviors.
If you want to please people, you will not be able to please God or lead his people (1Thessalonians 2:2-4; Galatians 1:10-17). This is true whether we're trying to please the disrupter or the ones who are offended by the disrupter.
Read through Psalm 42 & 43. Notice 42:1,2,5,11 & 43:1,3,4,5
Read Psalm 121:1-2; 118:6-9; Proverbs 29:25; Isaiah 51:7-8

2. Gracious listening is very important

Some of us are so resistant to critique of ourselves, others or our group that it's a wonder we ever learn anything. Part of walking in grace is a kind of calm expectation and joy that God will correct us in various ways, including through the criticism of others.

Active listening is a skill we should develop and it should infuse every encounter with people.¹⁴ Delaying your perspective doesn't mean caving in to their perspective. If they don't feel heard then you'll get stuck.

- **Ask what they've noticed**
Ask them to limit their critiques to things they have actually seen and heard.
Ask them to restrain themselves from conflating their speculations about the motivations of others with actual observations.
- **Ask what they think & feel about it**
- **Ask what they think should be done about it**

3. Gracious honesty is very powerful

¹² See the 'Resources' section of the appendix under the category, 'Difficult Conversations'

¹³ See the 'Defensive Techniques' section of the appendix.

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening; <http://www.studygs.net/listening.htm>; Motivational Enhancement Therapy suggests techniques that help people express the frequent ambivalence they feel (see Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S., (Eds.), *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change Addictive Behavior*. Guilford Press: New York, p. 53, 1991).

If I am speaking with a believer, they have the Spirit. It is the part of them what wants to do the right thing that I speak with; not the flesh – that part that rebels against God. If I decide, in advance or while I with them that no part of them wishes to follow God – I cannot address them in grace.¹⁵

Active listening is a skill we should develop and it should infuse every encounter with people.¹⁶

- **What I've noticed**
 - It's better to share what I have personally observed.
 - It's better to send the one who has personally observed the problem to the 'offender'.
 - If I am forced to bear the bad news, I need to be very tentative about whether it is true or not.
 - I must rigorously avoid speculating about the 'offenders' motivations privately, with others or in front of them.
- **What I think and feel about it**

Sometimes we express thoughts & feelings but fail to reveal the reasons for the thoughts & feelings. This isn't very helpful to the person we're in conflict with. It forces them to react to our behaviors by responding to what they surmise is driving us. Then we can get outraged by their reactions or the conclusions they've drawn about the motives that we failed to honestly express (i.e. an example is needed here).

 - About the things you're bringing to their attention.
"On the one hand, I can understand your anger. On the other hand, the way you handled it made things even worse"
 - Before & during the conversation
It is remarkably disarming to say to someone, "I'm very nervous talking with you." OR "I really did not want to have this conversation." OR "What you just said is hard to take." OR "I'm finding myself very confused."
- **What I'm considering doing about it or what they should consider doing about it**
"I could do _____ or _____. Truthfully, your reaction makes me think I need to do _____."

Move the disruptive person toward resolution¹⁷

1. Keep appropriate tension on the issues

2. If they will not resolve, you must be decisive¹⁸

Don't say you intend to do something that you will not really do. An empty threat will produce no results other than fomenting more disruption. An empty conciliatory offer will do the same thing.

¹⁵ *Revolution Within. A Fresh Look at Supernatural Living*, Dwight Edwards.

¹⁶ *op cit*

¹⁷ Matthew 18:15-20; <http://www.xenos.org/classes/servanthood2/chrchdisc.htm>

¹⁸ Titus 3:10; 1 Tim.1:20; 1Cor.5:5; Mt.18; Rev.2:2; 2 Jn.4:1-11

Bibliography

Leadership

Jesus Driven Ministry, A. Fernando

Effective Pastoring, W. Laurence

Cell Group Explosion, Joel Comisky

How to be a Great Cell Group Coach, Joel Comiskey

From Good to Great, Jim Collins

Courageous Leadership, Bill Hybels

Transforming Discipleship, Greg Ogden

Xenos Christian Fellowship resources

- *Christian Leadership 2*, <http://www.xenos.org/CLASSES/servanthood2/index.htm>
- *Christian Leadership 3*, Dennis McCallum; <http://www.xenos.org/classes/leadership/index.htm>

Dealing with conflict & church discipline

Bold Love, Dan Allender

Difficult Conversations, Stone, Patton & Heen

Telling the Truth to Troubled People, William Backus;

Peacemaker, Ken Sande

Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change Addictive Behavior, Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S., (Eds.), Guildford Press: New York, p. 53, 1991 (i.e. while this was developed for addiction counselors the techniques are very useful for dealing with 'stuck' people).

Xenos Christian Fellowship resources

We have many resources on this topic but the following are typical of the perspective we have about discipline. The aforementioned web sites on leadership also have many resources relevant to this topic.

- *Admonish one another*, Gary Delashmutt; <http://www.xenos.org/teachings/topical/community/gary/community-4.htm>
- *Practicing Church Discipline in Xenos Christian Fellowship*, Dennis McCallum; <http://www.xenos.org/classes/leadership/appdis.html>
- *Loss Aversive Leadership*, Dennis McCallum; t10547, Servant Team Meeting, March 2007
- *Cultivating a Tender Heart. The Paradox of Toughness and Tenderness*, Dennis McCallum, http://www.xenos.org/essays/tender_heart.htm
- *Conflict in the Home Church*, Dennis McCallum; <http://www.xenos.org/classes/papers/conflict.htm>

Defensive strategies that people use

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concealing wrongdoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicating that, "It's just the way I am"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taking offense (i.e. being thin skinned) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being highly critical; blaming others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Playing dumb or acting confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counterpunching; backstabbing; gossiping; recruiting others to your side
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Needing to be right/ wanting the last word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flooding with information to confuse or convince; endless explaining and rationalizing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attacking physically or verbally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a sudden onset of illness or fatigue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Playing the victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acting crazy or eccentric
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching or preaching back in response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intellectualizing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being too rigid and inflexible (when hell freezes over) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public self-deprecation & self-loathing; Private self-vindication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being in denial (there's no problem) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being saccharine sweet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Withdrawing from relationship or from negotiations; suddenly having many things needing your attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selective listening or selective exaggeration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cynicism/sarcasm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bitterness/grudge holding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trivializing the concerns w/ humor/ making fun of the one who raises the concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pretending to already know something rather than opening up to what they have to say.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expressing sour grapes ('I didn't want this anyway'; 'I don't care what you think') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refusing to listen