

A Day with Gil Rendle

“Accountability in Ministry”

On May 19, 2009, conference and circuit leaders gathered at the Marshfield United Methodist Church for a training day with consultant Gil Rendle. He focused on three critical issues for congregational effectiveness: leading change, focusing on clearly defined outcomes, and accountability for leadership.

Highlights from the day include:

Change

- Churches tend to operate in ways that avoid change. Our congregations know more about who they were than who they are. Often, they move into the future by trying to hold onto, or recover, their past.
- Systems theory teaches that any organization – including churches – resist going anywhere that they are uncomfortable. Change makes people uncomfortable, therefore resistance to change is normal and to be expected.
- The role of the leader is to make change – therefore leaders need to depersonalize the response to change. People resist the change, but focus their displeasure on the leader.
- Good leaders keep one foot “outside the system,” – learning and connecting to “the real world,” the world beyond the church. This gives perspective to the leader, and keeps the leader from getting “stuck.” (Another way of thinking outside of the box.)
- There are four key characteristics about change in organizations that church leaders should keep in mind:
 1. When changes occur, it is normal for the system to try to do what it knows best. When faced with change, we hold fast to what is familiar and comfortable.
 2. When changes fail, the tendency is not to ask “what went wrong, but who went wrong?” Blaming individuals (leaders) is easier than doing the hard work of making change successful.
 3. We tend to adopt changes that really don’t change anything; instead of making significant changes, we rearrange what we know, like, and are most familiar with. We like changes that require the least sacrifice and discomfort.
 4. Any change invites resistance. Systems seek equilibrium. The inertia of the status quo (normal) is greatest whenever leaders attempt to initiate change. Resistance is feedback, which is important to know when change is being felt. Positive feedback tells us to move ahead (speed up, increase change); negative feedback tells us to review and reconsider (slow down, make adjustments).

- Working harder to force change doesn't work. Analyzing feedback helps leaders know what changes to make, and how to make changes more effectively.
- Resistance to change is often not about the change itself, but about the sense of fear, loss, uncertainty, or insecurity people are feeling.

Outcomes:

- Systems are made up of linked processes that have three basic parts: inputs, throughput, and outputs – all aligned to produce outcomes. Inputs are what go into a process; throughput is what happens to the inputs to change them; and outputs are the results of the changes. These things should align with specific outcomes we hope to achieve.
- When we don't know what outcomes we want to produce, we tend to focus on our inputs and throughputs. In the church, when we don't know what we want to accomplish we focus in on resources, programs, or projects (inputs) or teams, committees, training (throughputs), but we don't have good ways to measure effectiveness.
- Without clear outcomes, we measure inputs – attendance, contributions, membership, etc.
- Without clear outcomes, people work very hard, but only hope that what they do will make a difference – ***you cannot hold people accountable for outcomes if the outcomes are not clearly defined and understood.***
- We focus too often on what we are not, what we lack, what we cannot yet do. This scarcity mentality makes it difficult to define reasonable outcomes, and makes it unfair to leaders to try to do the unreasonable.
- We need a vision of sufficiency – making the most of what we have, and being reasonable about what we can do. We need to seek ways to grow, to expand, and to improve.
- We often fail to set clear outcomes because we fear failure. We avoid risk and do what we have always done – setting marginal outcomes instead of missional outcomes. We need to stretch to do new things, things we are not already sure we can accomplish.
- We look for simple, specific answers (technical solutions) to increasingly complex and demanding problems (requiring adaptive solutions).
- We should not just try to achieve outcomes we know we can do, but those that are demanded by our mission and purpose.
- All organizations are founded on three types of groups:
 1. Study – authorized to study and recommend, but with little or no authority to act
 2. Action – authorized to study, develop, and act.

3. Standing Committee – authorized to monitor and (generally) keeps things steady and preserve the status quo.
- We tend to manage the status quo rather than create new and alternative realities. The management functions of leadership consume and displace the creative and innovative functions of leadership. We tend to continue doing what we have always done.
 - Leaders need to negotiate the appropriate outcomes that focus the organization on its mission and purpose – even when these outcomes require change.

Supervision, Coaching & Accountability

- How do we measure what needs to be measured to be an effective church? We often measure the wrong things, and hold people accountable to things they cannot control, change, or improve.
 - Annual conferences are caught between local churches that are trying to do things differently (aligned with mission) and a General Conference trying to maintain the status quo. Preserving what “is” is always in tension with what needs to be.
- Quantitative metrics measure different outcomes than qualitative metrics – nonprofits (especially churches) need to be able to *describe* what they are accomplishing, instead of simply counting inputs.
- Pareto's Law fits most organizations – 80% of the results are caused by 20% of the inputs. (In our churches, generally 20% of the participants conduct 80% of the ministries and programs.)
 - We often dedicate 80% of our resources to the 20% of the people who are least likely to be changed. Those who resist change in a congregation tend to be a minority, but they get their way most of the time. Leadership needs to shift focus off the sources of resistance and apathy, and focus the rest of the congregation on the mission and purpose.
- Many of our congregations waste valuable resources doing remedial work – focusing on the people least likely to grow and develop. Conferences often spend an inordinate amount of time and money on congregations least interested in fulfilling their mission and purpose.
- A key role of leadership is supervision – helping people set specific goals every 3-6 months, and holding them accountable to these goals.
- Helping people understand what motivates them is more valuable than trying to manipulate them. People need to set goals that help them become who they truly want to be in the future. No one can set goals for someone else, and expect them to be motivated to achieve them.

- Without accountability, people are not likely to reach their goals; the organization is not likely to engage in real change.
- Work with the people who are most highly motivated to change, to grow, and to help the organization reach its goals.

The leadership of the Wisconsin Annual Conference will continue to explore ways we can help our circuits and congregations lead effective change, set clear and measurable outcomes aligned with their mission, and develop accountability processes to generate effective and lasting improvement at all levels of our ministry together.