



Becoming a Tribe of Remembering Encouragers

By Marc Brown, Kathy Ashby Merry, and John Briggs

Just as the congregation of Israel was composed of twelve tribes, today's churches have different voices that are heard in their communities of faith. Transformational pastoral leaders understand the importance of each tribe. Leading into a future that is different than the past, they understand that these voices, or tribes, need to be heard since they may either give permission or opposition to ministry plans. Rather than viewing the tribes as competitors for their church's vision, they understand the value of hearing each voice as they influence the present and future opinion of their congregations. Some of the tribes or voices that may be heard in many churches are the following.

The Tribe of the Good Old Days

This tribe is primarily concerned with memory preservation of the perceived past glory days of a congregation. It sees the church as a place that harbors the security of past memories in the midst of a changing world. While this tribe is not opposed to new people in the church, it is understood that these new people's primary role is to support the church's present ministry structure and not to rock the boat. We hear the voice of this tribe through such questions and statements as: "I remember when our pews used to be filled and our Sunday school rooms were overflowing with children"; "Why can't we do things like we used to?"

The Tribe of Forgetting the Past

This tribe is primarily concerned with living into the future without understanding how the history of the church affects its present and future ministry. This tribe understands tradition as a roadblock to the future. Its members cherish their roles of rocking the boat. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions and statements as: "The past is the past. Let's move on"; "Times have changed."

The Tribe of Control

This tribe is primarily concerned with power. Members of this tribe believe that they are responsible for running the church. Within this tribe, preservation of control is a primary concern, even though the language of the tribe is cloaked in words of concern for the overall life of the church. This tribe sees its role as preserving the church for future generations, often at the expense of the present generation. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions and statements as: "I am responsible for this ministry"; "This is my job"; "You don't understand."

The Tribe of Spiritual Elitism

This tribe is concerned with judging the spiritual vitality of the congregation by its own values of faith. Members of this tribe are defined by their adherence to specific doctrinal beliefs that give security to their lives or by personal experiences that give validity to their expressions of faith. This tribe believes it is responsible for determining the credibility of other people's leadership by its self-imposed standards

of spirituality. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions and statements as “You’ll understand one day”; “God will make it clear to you.”

The Tribe of Business Values

This tribe is concerned with judging the vitality of the church by its own values of business life. Members of this tribe are defined by their adherence to specific business practices that give security to their businesses. This tribe believes that the church must be run like a business if it is going to survive. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions and statements as “We need to run the church like a business”; “What’s the bottom line?”

The Tribe of Apathy

This tribe is concerned with giving the appearance of not being concerned. Members of this tribe care about the church, but they have detached themselves from voicing an opinion because they realize they are not valued by the other tribes within the church. This tribe believes the church can survive with them or without them. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions or statements as: “Whatever”; “Don’t ask me”; “Do you really want to know?”

The Tribe of Remembering Encouragers

This tribe believes the church exists for one reason: to glorify God. Members of this tribe care about the church, understand the importance of faithful remembering, and persist in their faith. Like Joshua and Caleb, in the story of Israel, they are concerned with helping their congregation live into the promise of God’s faithfulness. The voice of this tribe is heard through such questions and statements as: “I hear what you are saying”; “God is with us”; “I really want to know”; “Why haven’t we done it that way before?”; “Where is God calling us as a community of faith?”; “How can we move forward together?”

Transformational pastoral leaders are members of the Tribe of Remembering Encouragers. Connecting the story of their congregation’s life to the larger story of God’s faithfulness, they speak the language of hope. The focus of transformational pastoral leadership is helping tribes to see beyond their individual concerns as they listen for God’s voice and answer together the questions that are facing their congregations.

Marc Brown, Kathy Ashby Merry, and John Briggs are authors of the congregational planning resource *Does Your Church Have a Prayer?*, Discipleship Resources, 2009. This material is adapted from the leadership guide and used with the authors’ permission.

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