

PURPOSE: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

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SORRY!:

NO QUICK FIX TO BECOME A THRIVING CHURCH

Ever notice how many buzz words there are around those who want to fix your church? “Church growth,” “transformation,” “renewal,” and the big one lately, “church revitalization.” Oh yes, and my title, “thriving church.” So many are on the band wagon for the hottest new title. The real fix is in a totally different direction.

We get a hint from Dan and Chip Heath in their new book on change, *Switch*. I’m dealing with this subject of change and the church in my next issue of the *Church Doctor Report*. This hint, however, will help this discussion now. Heath and Heath say that to really understand change, you have to look at the process in three parts: the elephant, the rider, and the path.

Kent Hunter leads a growing number of consultants, spiritual architects, church leadership coaches, and diagnostic analysts who are the Church Doctor Ministries team. Church Doctors consult churches, parachurch ministries, Christian corporations, and coach Christian leaders.



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Let’s start with the rider. That’s the rational side. Do you want your church to grow? People to grow? Impact the community? Great. A lot of people want, intellectually, to lose weight...but don’t. Then there is the path—clear direction. This is the program side of church consulting—making recommendations. Not bad, just not enough. Most consultants don’t focus on the elephant. This is the feeling side. The rider might really want the church to become “revitalized” and the consultant might arrange a clear path, but no matter what good intentions the rider has, if the elephant wants to go a different direction, at six tons, it is going to go the way it *feels* like going. That is why there is no quick fix. However, it can happen, if you are focused on *changing the culture of the church*. In this discussion, that is the elephant in the room. But first, let’s look at the dismal long-term failures of most church consultations.

MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

- ▶ The *Church Doctor® Report* is provided at no cost. Forward it to those in your network of influence and add value to their lives!
- ▶ Forward it to staff and leaders in your church, denomination, network, or fellowship.

MOST CHURCH CONSULTATIONS DON'T WORK

Hartford Institute for Religion Research recently reported a study called “Do Church Growth Consultations Really Work?” by respected researcher C. Kirk Hadaway. Hadaway analyzed 208 churches that participated in church growth consultations from 1983 to 1986. The sampling was limited to Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ).

Bottom line results? Consultations worked, a little, short-term, but not for long. Enthusiasm wanes. In other words, in Hadaway’s research, consultations don’t revitalize, transform, or lead to healthy churches.

Here are some general observations, from my perspective:

- If you are looking for a quick fix, don’t waste your time.
- If you see transformation as an event, don’t waste your money.
- If you see revitalization as a process, you are beginning to get it.
- If you use a consultation process that deals with culture, you are investing well.
- If you think that it is more expensive and takes longer, you are right.
- If you understand that using an outside specialist, the dynamic of intervention (consulting) is a key catalyst, you are wise.

Think of it this way. We, consultants, make dozens of recommendations based on thorough diagnosis, respectable research, prayer, and divine guidance. Think of those recommendations as seeds. Now, think of the culture of your church as soil. Culture is key!

GOOD SOIL, GOOD SEED, GOOD RESULTS

Consider this:

- Good soil + bad seed = poor results.
- Bad soil + good seed = poor results.
- Good soil + good seed = good results.

Most church consultants come up with some good ideas. This is especially true of those who do a good job of diagnosis—research—to really understand your church. That research is hard work, takes time and expertise. It costs you money. Consider that research as the cultivation of the soil. That adds to the equation:

- Good cultivation + good soil + good seed = very good results.

However, you can cultivate good soil, or you can cultivate bad soil. Cultivation (diagnosis) doesn’t make the soil good. To press the agricultural metaphor further, soil can be enriched. (I will overlook all the church and manure jokes—with some restraint). Those who enrich soil use lime or fertilizer or both. In order to determine the correct formula to choose among hundreds of calculations, you have to first take a soil sample. In the church, this is a sampling of the culture. This is where most church consultants fail to help churches achieve lasting results that can be described as “revitalization” or “transformation.”

When I started Church Doctor Ministries, God gave me the vision for this mission statement, which guides our consultations: “...to help Christians and churches through transformational change, toward

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~ Senior Pastor, Ohio

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the effective implementation of the Lord's Great Commission....” The definition of “transformational change” is best expressed when, 18-months after a consultation, a member or leader of the church will spontaneously say, “Since we worked with Church Doctor Ministries, we are a different church.” Though I didn't realize it in the beginning, this lens of results has driven us, over the years, to focus relentlessly on what really provides lasting vitality in a church. This focus led us to capture, with clarity, the key ingredient of church culture.

CHURCH CULTURE: THE KEY INGREDIENT

Your church has a culture. Every church has a culture. Every church culture is shaped by key elements. Unfortunately, most church cultures are primarily shaped by neglect. Without intentionality, the culture of many churches is a hodgepodge of influences from within, outside, some biblical, secular, helpful, or divisive. Culture, sometimes called (or related to) ethos, includes these elements:

1. Values—what we consider important.
2. Beliefs—what we consider true.
3. Priorities—what we most often would do first.
4. Attitudes—what we feel about various aspects of the church.
5. Worldviews—how we understand the world of our church and the way our church works.

The sum total of these elements represent the soil. Whatever you preach, teach; whatever program you propose; whatever recommendations your consultant offers—the lasting impact

KEY RESOURCES	
📖	Alvesson, Mats. <i>Understanding Organizational Culture</i> . Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, LTD, 2002.
📖	Church Doctor Ministries. <i>Healthy Churches Thrive: Measurable Results for the Local Church</i> . Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2010.
📖	Deal, Terry and Allan Kennedy. <i>Corporate Cultures</i> . New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000.
📖	Hunter, Kent R. <i>Catalytic Efforts to Transform Churches into Mission</i> . (Audio)
📖	Hunter, Kent R. <i>Discover Your Windows: Lining Up with God's Vision</i> . Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.
📖	Hunter, Kent R. <i>Your Church Has Personality: Find Your Focus—Maximize Your Mission</i> . Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 1997.
📖	Lewis, Robert, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird. <i>Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out</i> . Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
📖	O'Donovan, Gabrielle. <i>The Corporate Culture Handbook: How to Plan, Implement, and Measure a Successful Culture Change</i> . Dublin, Ireland: Liffey Press, 2007.
📖	Schein, Edgar H. <i>Organizational Culture and Leadership</i> . Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

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toward true revitalization, real transformation, depends on this: to whatever degree you can accurately diagnose (sample) the culture, and shape it in a biblical way.

The New Testament church was a dynamic movement, not only because it had truth (divine, rational input)—the rider, but also it had a clear path: to follow Jesus, to make disciples, to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, to care for widows and orphans, etc. It was also a changed culture, so shaped by Jesus it had to be called a new wine and required a new wineskin. If you want your church “revitalized” or “transformed,” you are asking for new wine—a revitalized, transformed culture.

This is not impossible to achieve in the thorough process of a consultation. We see it all the time. The following table represents nine categories that reflect cultural benchmarks that lead to transformational change. Growth in these areas occurred within six months of the consultation process. Research was conducted through anonymous questionnaires given to everyone in worship: a) before the Church Doctor Consultation Process and b) six months after the Church Doctor Consultation Process began. The churches measured include every church consulted by Church Doctor Ministries in 2008 and 2009. They represent several different denominations, fellowships, and independents. They include large, medium-sized, and small churches located throughout the U.S. in various preconditions of health. The table has three categories: 1) cultural element; 2) description; 3) six-month increase (see chart to the right).

These nine categories do not exhaust the cultural issues that are important to each church, but represent areas that impact long-term, sustainable change toward healthy churches. With this type of soil preparation, tangible results like worship attendance, membership growth, and community impact are more likely to follow.

Remember, if you don't move the elephant, and you want long-term results, you are wasting your time. The good news is this: the elephant, the culture, can be cultivated. The result is transformational. Healthy churches thrive!

9 CATEGORIES FOR TRANSFORMING CHURCH CULTURE

Category	Description	6-mo. Increase
Spiritual Health	As a result of this church's ministry, my spiritual life is growing faster than before.	+13%
Bible Study	I attend a regularly scheduled Bible study either at church or in a home.	+15%
Proportionate Giving	I choose to give financially to my church as a percentage rather than a dollar amount.	+15%
Tithe	I give 10% or more of my income to the work of the Lord in my church.	+13%
Ministry Involvement	I volunteer regularly, or once in a while.	+16%
Purpose of the Church	I view the primary purpose of the church as "making disciples."	+34%
Open to Innovation and Change—Early Adopters	I believe the greatest era in the history of the church will be the next ten years.	+28%
Positive Attitude about Church	I strongly agree I have a positive attitude about this church. I would recommend it to my friends.	+15%
Ownership	I strongly agree I feel like I am a part of this church.	+23%

Source: Church Doctor Ministries, *Healthy Churches Thrive: Measurable Results for the Local Church*, 2010.

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