

Seven principles for every project

by Rick Warren

As a pastor, you need to be able to put together projects efficiently and effectively. Whether you are starting a new church, planning a new ministry, opening a new building – or just preparing for next weekend's services, you need to mobilize people on a common task. That's leadership in a nutshell.

“God can overlook almost anything in a church, but God will not overlook disunity.”

Rick Warren

Nehemiah, a great biblical model of leadership, had a monster project on his hands when he returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the wall of his ravaged city, Jerusalem. And he did it. How he tackled that project can give us insight on how to handle our own ministry projects. When we look at his rebuilding plan, seven key principles he adhered to become clear.

1. The principle of simplification

Nehemiah kept his plan simple. He didn't randomly assign jobs; he didn't create a whole new organization; and he didn't force any complex charts.

He kept his plan very simple. He organized around natural groupings of people already associating together, such as the priests, the men of Jericho, and the sons of Hassenaah. The point is: don't create an organization if you don't need it. If an organization already naturally exists, try to work through it and with it. Sometimes a new leader comes into a situation, and the first thing he does is start changing the whole organization. Think: *If it ain't broke, don't fix it*. The simplest organizations are strong organizations.

2. The principle of participation

It's a pretty simple rule: work with those who want to work. Amazingly, a lot of leaders never learn this principle. They spend all their time trying to corral the lazy and the apathetic, instead of working with those who want to work. I call that *corralling goats*.

Look at what Nehemiah did. He got almost everybody involved in the building of the wall. He had the clerics, the goldsmiths, the perfume makers – men and women, city and country folk. Everybody was moving bricks and making mortar.

But there was one exception. "Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to help." (Neh. 3:5 NLT)

Nehemiah's response was to ignore the shirkers.

In every situation you're going to have workers and shirkers. Nehemiah just ignored the latter and focused on those who were willing to work. He didn't lose sleep, get bitter, or waste time trying to corral them. If you're a leader, don't worry about people who don't want to get involved. Focus on those people who want to get involved.

When I first started Saddleback, I didn't know this lesson. Every time we planned a project, a work party, or an event, people would show up, yet I would still be disappointed by all the people who didn't show up. God finally showed me that I should get excited about those who came!

3. The principle of delegation

When you're organizing, you should make specific assignments. Think about what would have happened if, after Nehemiah's pep rally when he got everyone excited, he then said, "Just go start working wherever you want to work." That wouldn't have worked!

Instead, Nehemiah divided the wall into sections when he did his midnight ride. He kept it simple, and then he delegated specific assignments.

When you delegate:

- **Break down major goals into smaller tasks.** When we started Saddleback, I made everybody a committee of one. Each of us had assignments. One person managed the printing of the bulletins while another set up the nursery. Everybody had a specific task.
- **Develop clear job descriptions.** Your workers deserve to know what is expected.
- **Match the right person with the right task.** The wrong person in the wrong task causes chaos. It causes all kinds of motivational problems. Delegating is more than just passing off work. You need to understand what the task is all about and what the person is good at, and then get them together.
- **Everybody's responsibility is nobody's responsibility.** Somebody needs to assume specific responsibility.

4. The principle of motivation

When you organize any project, help people "own" it. In Nehemiah, you see again and again men making repairs near their houses. If you lived in Jerusalem, where would you be most interested in building the wall? Probably by your house!

Allowing for ownership in a project helps increase motivation. I think Nehemiah is also saying, "Make the work as convenient as possible." Nehemiah allowed people to work in their area of interest. That's a key principle of organization – good organizations allow workers to develop their own areas.

5. The principle of cooperation

B.C. Forbes, the man who founded *Forbes* magazine, said, "You spell success: T-E-A-M-W-O-R-K." Cooperation is a key principle to good organization. I read recently that geese can fly 72 percent farther when they're in formation than when they fly by themselves.

When we cooperate together, when there is teamwork, there is great growth. Cooperation is a greater motivator than competition, and it lasts because you feel like you're together on a winning team.

Good organizations provide a supportive climate of trust and teamwork. In the Bible, when referring to Christians in the church, the phrase "one another" is used 58 times. It's as if God's saying, "Get the message! Help each other!" There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christians. We are together in this. We're a team. There is tremendous power in cooperation.

God can overlook almost anything in a church, but God will not overlook disunity. In the first 10 chapters of Acts, 10 times it says, "they were of one accord ... of

one heart ... unified." When you have unification like they did in Acts, you'll have the power of Acts.

Snow is a beautiful demonstration of what God can do with a bunch of flakes. Snowflakes are pretty frail, but if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic. Alone, I couldn't have made much of an impact on the Saddleback Valley, but together, the Saddleback Church family has touched tens of thousands.

6. The principle of administration

Even after you delegate, you must supervise the work. Nehemiah walked the line, inspecting the work. Tom Peters, in his book *Passion for Excellence*, calls it MBWA - Management By Walking Around.

Nehemiah knew which part each man built because he went out, checking up on people. This also allowed him to find out what was going on.

Good organizations establish clear lines of authority. People do what you inspect not what you expect.

7. The principle of appreciation

Good leaders give recognition. For instance, Nehemiah knew the names of those working on the wall, and I think that's a mark of a good leader. He even listed them in his book, and now here we are thousands of years later, and pastors across the world are mispronouncing the names of Nehemiah's helpers. He cared enough to recognize these men and women for their work.

Do you know who's doing a good job in your organization?

If you do, are you telling them they're doing a good job?

Nehemiah had a huge task in front of him when he organized people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Yet he did it. God gave Nehemiah a plan with these seven principles for a reason - they work.

What project can you use them on?

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rick".