

OVERCOMING THE GREATEST COVOCATIONAL CHALLENGE

The single greatest challenge for covocational leaders is time. There never seem to be enough hours in the day to accomplish everything. When a church leader is working 30, 40, or even 50 hours a week in the marketplace, it is difficult to create and maintain proper rhythms between family, vocation, ministry, and health. I want to share five words that can help summarize a few steps that a covo leader can take to better align multiple aspects of life. These words are *calendar*, *priorities*, *distractions*, *margin*, and *team*.

Calendar

A calendar can be a powerful tool for effective time management. However, whenever it is possible, *you* must be the one managing your calendar. Take a serious look at your calendar to examine what an average week looks like. In the book *Time Traps*, author Tom Duncan argues for a time budget. The idea is like a financial budget; the only difference is that you plan how you will spend your time rather than money. Just as you would with your finances, identify where you spend your time. Are you overloaded? Does your calendar cause you anxiety? Are you trying to squeeze too much into a small space of time?

Perhaps before saying “yes” to the next meeting request, examine your calendar and determine if it is a good fit for that time and day. And remember you don’t have to say yes to everything. Saying no is not just a good idea—it has now become a mathematical necessity. If there are 15 good things to do today and you only have time to do 10 of them, you will need to say no five times. “No,” says author Anne Lamott, “is a complete sentence.” You must embrace your limits. Use your calendar to help set those limits.

Priorities

One of the most important aspects of time management is setting priorities. We all have a limited amount of time, and we must use it wisely. By setting priorities, we can identify the most important tasks and ensure that we are devoting our time and energy appropriately. This can involve making to-do lists, breaking down larger tasks into smaller, more manageable ones, and identifying deadlines and timelines for completing tasks. This also involves making choices about which activities to focus on and which ones to put on hold or delegate to others.

One strong recommendation when considering priorities is to start with family and personal health. Your commitment to family relationships and the care of yourself (physical, emotional, and spiritual health), must be of first priority. This may mean that you place these commitments on your calendar like any other appointment, and when someone asks if you are available, you can tell them that you have a prior commitment. If either your family or personal health fails, whatever “success” you experience at work or church means nothing.

Distractions

Another important aspect of time management is eliminating, or at least minimizing distractions. With the advent of smartphones, social media, and other technological advancements, distractions are everywhere. There are several simple steps we can take to ensure we minimize distractions and focus on what is truly important. This can involve turning off your phone or notifications to social media apps. Limit or even eliminate social media platforms. Consider taking regular breaks from all social media. Be mindful of the content you consume. Unfollow or mute certain accounts that cause stress or attempt to pull you into foolish arguments.

Margin

When attempting to manage our time around different aspects of life, it is important to have common language that speaks to the challenge. In the book *Margin: Restoring Balance to Busy Lives*, author Richard Swenson provides

an excellent metaphor when discussing time management. He asks the questions: How ridiculous would it be if the pages of a book had no margin? And what would be your opinion of a publisher who tried to cram the print top to bottom and side to side so that every blank space was filled up? The result would be aesthetically displeasing and chaotic—much like many of our lives.

He goes on to say that *margin* is the space between our load and our limits, between vitality and fatigue. It is the opposite of overload and, therefore, the remedy for our troublesome condition.

Margin is this space that guarantees sustainability. It is in this space where healing occurs, where our batteries are re-charged, where our relationships are nourished, and where wisdom is found. Without margin, both rest and contemplation are but theoretical concepts, unaffordable and unrealistic. We do not follow two inches behind the next car on the interstate—that would leave no margin for error. We do not allow only two minutes to change planes in Chicago—that would be foolish in the extreme. We do not load boats until they are nearly submerged—that would invite disaster. Why then do we insist on leaving no buffer, no space, no reserves in our day-to-day?

This metaphor is helpful when considering the balance of family, work, and ministry and church because it provides common, shared language that we can use when discussing time. When examining our calendars, or talking with our families or other church leaders, we can ask and hold each other accountable on margin, or lack of margin in our lives.

Margin is not something that just happens. You must plan for it. In a culture that applauds ambition and perpetual activity, you will have to fight for it. It is rare to see a life prescheduled to less than 100 percent. But if we want to live relationally connected, healthy lives, we must learn to plan our lives at less than full capacity.

How serious is lack of margin in your life? Consider making a list of the areas in your life where you know you are currently lacking margin. Ask a family member or close friend to give you feedback on the list. Introduce the concept of margin to your church and encourage people to use the language when discussing how they are creating healthy margin in their own lives.

Team

The inability of a covocational pastor to develop a team is the single greatest contributor to a lack of time margin. A covo leader who is working in the marketplace has no other option than to lead with a team that shares in the ministry responsibilities. But how do you foster team dynamics to develop a healthy church that is effectively engaging its context?

When considering the development of a leadership team, most people think of ministry categories. In other words, we think about the need for a worship leader, youth pastor, children leader, perhaps even an executive pastor. However, if as a covo leader you desire to lead a church out of your own personal gifting, you should consider team dynamics that are informed by the five-fold APEST typology of Ephesians 4.

If you are not familiar with APEST, it is simply an acronym that stands for Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, and Teacher. Let's look at a simple overview, then discuss a couple of key aspects of this passage, and its implications for team development.

How do we understand each of these gifts?

Apostle

The word "apostle" literally means "sent one." The Latin form of this word is *missio*, which is where we get our English word "mission." The apostle is the one most responsible to activate, develop, and protect the missionary "sentness" of the church. This sent quality gives the apostle's life a catalytic influence, often playing the role of an entrepreneur at the forefront of new ventures.

Prophet

The prophet is the one who questions and reforms. Those with a more prophetic gifting are sensitive to what is important to God. They often have a sense of what truth needs to be emphasized for a particular time and place.

They're quick to recognize the gap between "what is" and "what should be" — not only within the church but also in how the church ought to be engaged in the city's brokenness. They like to question the status quo.

Evangelist

They are the recruiters to the cause. Evangelists communicate the message of the Good News in joyous, infectious ways. They are avid communicators of ideas and often share their thoughts and feelings in convincing ways. As people who are bearers of good news, they have an attractational quality to their ministry.

Shepherd

They protect and provide. Shepherds have a natural instinct to protect the community from danger and provide for its needs, on both an individual and communal level. They often notice when people are alone or hurting and feel drawn to nurture the spiritual and communal health of the church.

Teacher

They love to understand and explain. Teachers find great satisfaction in helping people learn truth and wisdom. They grasp complex truths and then help people understand. They ensure the truths of Scripture are passed along from generation to generation.

Now, with a basic understanding of each of the gifts, let's consider a couple interesting aspects to this passage.

First, historically we have interpreted this text as a leadership text, or perhaps you could say we have interpreted it as a *clergy* text. In other words, these gifts were given to the clergy to equip the saints for the work of ministry. However, this passage is not primarily a leadership text, it is a *body* text, or you could say a *ministry* text. These are gifts given to the entire body, so we can all be involved in the equipping of the saints.

A second key aspect of this passage is that these are not roles or offices; instead, they are gifts or callings given to the body. But perhaps the most important aspect of this passage is that Paul states that if all five of the gifts are not to being exercised in the body, the church will not reach maturity. In fact, he says the church will not experience the *fullness of Christ*.

But practically speaking, how do you go about incorporating APEST into the development of a leadership team? One way to frame this conversation is by sharing four sequential points:

1. The pastor or church planter needs to first understand their own gifts regarding APEST because it will influence where they focus much of their ministry. (i.e., if a teacher, they often focus on the Sunday gathering so they can teach; if a shepherd, they will lean towards the gathering community; etc.)
2. The pastor or planter needs to understand the makeup of their team and recognize what gifts may be missing. If you are a gifted shepherd, then you need to ensure you have someone more apostolic on your team or you will never start something new. But likewise, if you are highly apostolic or prophetic, it is important you have a shepherd on your team or you will likely push people too hard and run the risk of burnout.
3. The pastor will need to determine how each gift will have equal input into the mission and ministry of the church. Remember: A key aspect of the passage is that the church will not reach maturity unless all five gifts are activated and exercised. How will you make sure each gift is being listened to?
4. The team will need to determine how to ensure the equipping of the saints. In other words, how will the church encourage and empower those with the gift of teaching to equip other teachers? How will those who have an apostolic calling fan the flames of other "sent ones"? How will the gifted evangelist equip others who have the evangelistic calling?

Remember, a church that can bring together, encourage, and capture the gifting of a fully functioning team will succeed in whatever it is seeking to achieve. Each of the APEST vocations adds a necessary ingredient to the overall missional fitness and maturity of the church, but each vocation needs to be informed and shaped by the others to anchor the church in the fullness of Christ's nature and mission. This should also allow you, as a covocational leader, the opportunity to lead out of your own personal gifting and allow others to do the same.

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