

Study Guide for Leading Change: Church Leadership Amid Turmoil With Dr. Peter Steinke

Welcome.

This series was filmed before a live audience, during a presentation by Dr. Steinke. *Leading Change* is an introduction to systems theory, the congregation as an emotional system and the role of leadership and anxiety's effect on all of these things.

Dr Peter Steinke is student of Dr. Murray Bowen and Rabbi Edwin Friedman and has adapted their systems theory to the ways in which congregations function. He help found the Bridge Builder Network, which provides training and resources for troubled congregations. He established the Healthy Congregations initiative, provides resources and training for churches wishing to stay healthy. He is a consultant to congregation, judicatories and other church-related organizations.

Leading Change: Church Leadership Amid Turmoil is developed around two components: video presentations and study guide for leading group discussion. Feel free to add other material that might be helpful. This resource can also be used in retreat or training formats.

Preparation

This resource will provide helpful information and stimulate discussion for your congregation. We encourage you to watch the video and read through the study guide before each session. Remember to make appropriate arrangements for to show video, making sure participants can clearly see and hear the video.

Leading the Sessions

At the start of each session, welcome participants. Introduce yourself and give them information that will help them feel comfortable (bathrooms, coffee, seats, view the screen, ending time, length of session etc.). Introduce the topic for the session and share a couple ideas that should be kept in mind while viewing the video and participating in the discussions. Begin with prayer before starting the video. Watch the video session. Use the questions provided for each session to lead discussion. Invite the participants back for the next session and share the topic and title. Thank them for coming.

Session One: Systems Theory

Overview:

- Introduction to systems theory and congregation as emotional system;
- Role of anxiety in emotional systems;
- Triggers of anxiety for systems like congregations;
- Dealing with anxiety;
- Maturity of leaders in the face of anxiety;
- Immaturity creating emotional fusion or emotional cutoff.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Emotional systems in human relationships;
- anxiety;
- maturity.

Play Session One (28 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. Pete Steinke, the host, asserts that the congregation is an emotional system. How have you seen that played out in your congregation or organization?
2. How have you experienced that anxiety is infectious?
3. How many of these triggers of anxiety have you experienced?
 - a. Money;
 - b. Sex and sexuality;
 - c. Pastor's leadership style;
 - d. Harm to or death of a child;
 - e. Major trauma or transition;
 - f. Conflict between staff members;
 - g. Space, territory, building construction;
 - h. Lay leadership style;
 - i. Failure of the change process;
 - j. Internal/External.
4. Edwin Friedman is quoted as saying, "The mark of a smart leader is to delegate anxiety." How do you understand that?

5. Do you agree with Dr. Steinke that maturity is the capacity to be a self and be connected to others? What happens if one of those is missing?
6. Have you experienced a mature leader who has a good repertoire of responses? What did that look like?
7. Have you experienced immature persons who tend toward, either emotional fusion, or emotional cutoff? How did you handle that?

Session Two: A Self-Differentiated Leader

Overview:

- Characteristics of a self-differentiated leader;
- Knowing difference between me and you;
- Comfort with differences;
- Major ways humans connect, bond and relate.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Mature leaders are self aware;
- Comfortable with differences;
- Connect or bond with others in relationship;
- The role of play in human relationships.

Play Session Two (18 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Steinke states that self-differentiated persons:
 - Use "I" statements
 - Take "I" positions
 - Have a goal
 - Know if they're operating out of reactive brain

Have you tried that? What happens? Would you add any other characteristics to this list?

2. If it's true that play is elemental to human relationships and bonded relationships can more healthfully survive anxiety, what do you think of the statement: "A church that plays together, stays together"? Has that happened in your congregation? Your family?
3. Dr. Steinke observes that people bond through:
 - Play
 - Touch
 - Nurture
 - Food
 - Mirroring

What is your experience about the power of these activities to connect people? What does that look like in your life?

4. In the discussion of mirroring, Dr. Steinke tells the story of ignoring the couple for which he had hard feelings. Have you experienced that yourself? How did it work? What did you notice?
5. Congregations have to deal all the time with respect, civility, and recognition of differences. How's your congregation doing in this, or not doing this?

Session Three: Functioning Position

Overview:

- Functioning position is position in emotional system;
- Emotional systems like stability and homeostasis;
- Relationship between over-function and under-function;
- Relationship between Pursuer and Distancer.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Concept of “functioning position” or the role one plays in an emotional system (family, congregation etc.);
- Emotional systems resist change;
- Equal and opposite reactions: over/under function, distancer and pursuer.

Play Session Three (12 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the “functioning position” play itself out in your family? In your congregation or small group?
2. Have you experienced the over-function/under-function dynamics in a relationship before? How did it work? What happens in a church when the over/under function gets lopsided? Can you describe what happens to the work at hand when either the pastor OR the lay members become lopsided in functioning?
3. Have you experienced the pursuer/distancer dynamic that Dr. Steinke described? What does it feel like to be pursued? To have someone distance him or herself from you?
4. Share about a time when you realized that you were in a system (or regular way of functioning with others) that needed to change. Was it hard to change? How did you help change it?

Session Four: Functioning of a Leader

Overview:

- Roles or functioning position of a leader:
 - a. Be calm;
 - b. Challenge the system;
 - c. Promote change;
 - d. Create focus.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Roles a leader plays in an emotional system:
 - a. Calming presence;
 - b. Challenging the system for growth;
 - c. Promoting healthy change;
 - d. Focusing on mission.

Play Session Four (18 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. The leadership function position should provide a calm presence amid turbulence. How have you experienced that? What difference does it make?
2. The leader's role should include challenging the system. Dr. Steinke said that challenge should be more about growth than comfort. Why is this important?
3. Promoting change is one function for leaders. In your experience what happens if change is not promoted (or even avoided) by leadership?
4. Focusing on mission is a function of leaders. Share your thoughts about the ease or difficulty of a system being mission-minded without the help of leadership.=
5. Have you or another leader held a functioning position with these four roles? How hard is it to do this?
6. Anne Lamott says, "If there's change, buckle up!" Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

7. Dr. Steinke says, "Change should be grounded in mission-mindedness." How does mission-mindedness help in the change process?

Session Five: Change

Overview:

- Concepts of change;
- Relate, repeat and reframe to bring change.
- Hope, or making a difference, is a necessary motivator

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- To create change:
 - a. Relationships with others
 - b. Repeated over until a pattern is created
 - c. Reframing emotional instincts
 - d. Hope and the believe that actions will influence the outcome

Play Session Five (10 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Steinke lists three “F’s” that were previously thought of as catalysts for change:
 - Facts
 - Fear
 - Force

Does this ring true in your experience? How do these words motivate? Now, instead, three “R’s” for change are introduced:

- Relate
- Repeat
- Reframe

Have you tried to use these? How do you see any of these at work to make change? Share an example.

2. Alan Deutschman wrote, “The key ingredient to change is to build up hope.” Have you employed a sense of hope in your change process? Does it make a difference to have hope when faced with change? What happens when you hear that you will have impact, make a difference when asked to change?
3. What role does urgency make in decisions for change? When did this effect your decision making process?

Session Six: Conflict

Overview:

- Conflict:
 - a. People may be more interested in winning than reconciling
 - b. There must be a process and a structure to deal with conflict
 - c. Leaders in conflict often deny and work harder on the same things, blame others or look for saviors
 - d. Sabotage happens when things go well

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Leadership in a conflict:
 - a. Know that people may want to win more than reconcile and aggressive behavior, lack of boundaries, lying may result
 - b. Create a process for dissention, structure for conflict resolution
 - c. Should not deny, blame, look for magical answers or keep doing the same thing
 - d. Expect sabotage when things are going well

Play Session Six (18 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

- a. Dr. Steinke believes that the Biblical story of exile is similar to the ways we respond in conflict.
 - Denial
 - Despair
 - Look for magic

Do you recognize these responses in you or your congregation?

- b. Do you recognize these responses?
 - Deny
 - Do the same thing only harder
 - Blame
 - Look for saviors
- c. It was asserted that leaders supply immunity for the organization. How do you understand that?
- d. Anxious people and viruses have these things in common:

- Have poor boundaries
- Don't respect boundaries
- Must have it their way
- Don't learn from their experience

Can you relate?

4. How might the guidelines for leading a conflicted meeting be helpful?
 - Two minutes to speak
 - Use "I" statements
 - Cannot scold, blame or attack
 - Audience cannot boo or cheer
5. Structure corrals anxiety. Have you experienced that? How does that work?
6. Sabotage of leaders can happen anytime, but seems most prevalent when things are going well. Do you agree with this?

Session Seven: Roles of Leaders in Conflict

Overview:

- Role of leader in conflict:
 - a. Dealing with issues;
 - b. Ability to delay gratification or regulate instincts is maturity;
 - c. Calm reflective-ness can spread and catch on in groups;
 - d. Holy tissue or prefrontal cortex enhances relationships.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Role of leader in conflict:
 - a. Deal with issues;
 - b. Ability to delay gratification;
 - c. To regulate instincts (maturity);
 - d. Calm reflective-ness can spread and catch on in groups;
 - e. Value of prefrontal cortex.

Play Session Seven (17 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. The roles of leaders in conflict are to:
 - Provide immunity;
 - Tell the truth;
 - Provide a non-anxious presence.

Are there other roles you believe need to be added to this list? Have you taken on these roles? What was the result?

2. "Calm reflectiveness can be as contagious as reactivity." Have you seen this happen?
3. The left prefrontal cortex is called "holy tissue" because it allows humans to claim:
 - I can stand back and observe (self awareness)
 - I can see that others have needs (relational)
 - I can think and be imaginative (problem solve)
 - I can put brakes on primitive brain (self control; Fruit of the Spirit)
 - I can think about the future (Christian faith)

Have you ever thought of that part of the brain to be a special gift from God to humans? Can you remember times when you didn't employ that part of the brain? What happened?

Session Eight: Conclusion

Overview of conclusion:

- Change happens best through adventure;
- It's hard to do new things, seek new realities;
- Anxiety can be triggered by change or sense of change or loss;
- When anxiety goes up, people act out of lower brain;
- A leaders job is to move people into the upper brain.

Welcome and Introductions

Prayer

Key Concepts:

- Change happens best when adventure is sought;
- It's can be hard for humans to see new things, seek new realities;
- Anxiety can be triggered by change or sense of change or loss;
- When anxiety goes up, people act out of lower brain;
- A leaders job is to move people into the upper brain.

Play Session Eight (16 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree that what will most provoke or create change is adventure?
2. How do you think that works? When does the idea of movement as a method of learning, work well?
3. Consider these two assertions:
 - "...the mesmerizing effect of what we know and its deadening effect on our wonder."
 - "New discoveries can be liberating or frightening."

Is this a comment on our reluctance to learn new things to open our eyes to new possibilities? Is it true in your personal estimation? In your experience as a congregation?

4. Anxiety triggered by:
 - Sensing that something is different;
 - Feeling threatened;
 - Feeling trapped;
 - Experiencing change, loss, separation;
 - A state of disorientation.

Do these issues sound familiar? Do you look behind the anxiety to sense where it's coming from?

5. Dr. Steinke quotes Rabbi Edwin Friedman: "The dual possibilities always exists that new discovery can either be liberating or frightening. 'Better to attend the known than to risk the anxiety of the not known', says the fearful heart. The courageous soul says, 'What if something will be different, what if something will be new?'"

How do you respond to the possibilities of change? How do you want to respond?

6. Leaders:
 - appeal to people's upper brain
 - help others imagine
 - display faith
 - create a vision of hope

Bonus Session: Narcissism

Play Bonus Session (4 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. Narcissists are described as “people of the charm”. Have you ever met a person fitting this description? What are your thoughts on this description?
2. Narcissist characteristics:
 - Feel special;
 - Entitled;
 - Overly sensitive to criticism;
 - Lie;
 - Positive feedback welcomed;
 - Negative feedback shunned;
 - Weak self protected by grandiose;
 - Charming.

Narcissistic leaders can be quite powerful. Have you experienced a leader who functions like this?

3. “All disease processes are enabled”. How have the people around narcissistic leaders enabled that person? How do these leaders gain power?