6 Things That Can Cause Division in Church Leadership Teams—Especially During Times of Transition

By Helen Calder

‘Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?’ (Isaiah 43:18-19a)

Change is the signature of the Holy Spirit, for our God is the God of ‘new things.’ Growth and change inevitably go hand in hand.

However, when transition is taking place in church or ministry life, unique challenges and pressures occur in a leadership team. During these times, it is vital to guard against division.

Following are 6 things that can impact the unity of a leadership team during times of transition or fast-paced change.

1. Discouragement

Change invariably comes with a price tag. Roles are adjusted, and responsibilities are added or removed. Team members may move departments or locations.

These things in turn impact personal relationships. A significant change in an individual’s area of ministry
responsibility means that he or she has to adjust personal goals and dreams accordingly.

Some particular ways that discouragement can arise during transition include:

- Disappointment when a change is not implemented according to a personal preference (or a preconceived idea of how God is going to do something) “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov 13:12)
- Hurts arising through decisions and actions taken, or words spoken during transition (often unintended)
- Grieving that naturally occurs—change requires letting go of the past
- Real or perceived mistakes that occur during times of transition
- The natural turbulence of fast-paced change

Discouragement can be damaging if it is left unattended. Individuals may then speak out of that place of discouragement to other team members—directly affecting the unity of the group.

‘Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.’ (Luke 6:45b)

However, discouragement may also be helpful: it can be like an orange flashing light, indicating that there is something in our lives and our team that needs attending to.

_Before and during transition, be aware of the potential for discouragement personally, as well as for those you lead. Provide clear teaching on how to deal with discouragement. Provide a safe place for team members to process discouragement that is caused by change, directly with leadership. In times of extreme change, additional care may be needed. Pastoral care needs to be balanced with calling forth the best response from people._
2. Character Issues

‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.’ (James 1:3)

Transition brings increased pressure to a team. Consequently, it is the perfect character-building opportunity.

Under sustained pressure, whatever is deep inside an individual will spill out. True character shows up in extreme situations—when a person has lost his or her ability to wear a mask.

The benefit of character-testing circumstances is that weaknesses are brought into the light, where they can be addressed. This may also help leaders see where team members are best suited (or unsuited) in times ahead.

However, a danger of character weaknesses surfacing is that there can be fallout. Surrounding team members can become affected, hurt or disillusioned, potentially damaging the strength of the leadership team.

Be aware in advance of the potential for the pressures of transition to bring character weaknesses to the surface. Teach on character, its importance as a leader and its development during times of transition. Encourage individuals concerning the benefits of dealing with issues as they come to the surface. Do not minimise or excuse behaviour that is revealing a character weakness, especially when it impacts the health and unity of the team.
3. Resistance to Change

Every person has a different threshold of comfort when it comes to change. This is determined by many things, including personality, wiring, and gifts, along with past experiences.

Consequently, in a team there will be some members who thrive on leadership-led change, and others who find it uncomfortable. A few may take longer to take ownership of a transition. However, once they do, they will be loyal supporters of the change.

It is healthy to question change, and natural to need a means of processing it. This is more important for some team members than for others.

The danger lies where a team member chooses to maintain an attitude of ongoing resistance to a change that is being implemented. Should this take place, two visions are now at work within the team—the leadership-led vision for change, and one team member’s vision for ‘unchange’ (the status quo). If others on team have definite opinions about alternative ways the transition should take place, a fracturing of vision can occur.

Lead team members through a process that enables them to take ownership of the changes. They especially need to feel as though they have been heard and listened to.
Define the compelling purpose for the change and express it well and often.
Recognise that some team members need time to adjust—but be firm about what is expected of them in terms of honouring leadership and maintaining unity throughout the change, both between team members and in front of outsiders.
Questions or struggles with transition should be addressed directly with the leader(s) in oversight.
Provide teaching on the challenges of change to team unity, how change can impact individuals and the Godly response to change.
4. Differences in Prophetic Vision

During transition, a church or ministry leader (or governing leadership) is directing changes.

At the same time, those within a team may have their own personal prophetic dream from God. They may have a belief concerning the way their current and future role on the team fits within God’s greater call on their lives.

Team members who are leaders themselves, may also have a conviction about what God intends for their particular ministry area.

Consequently, when a pastor or leadership team makes changes that suddenly shift the horizon of where they believed God was leading them, their perspective is challenged.

This can be disorienting for a time.

On the positive side, transition is an opportunity for team members to put their trust in God’s faithfulness. God is sovereign and well able to fulfil the dreams He has put on their hearts, in His time.

Challenges can arise, however, when individuals have difficulty releasing their own preconceived idea of what God intends for their personal role or ministry.

This can be further complicated where there is an unhealthy, or ‘Old Testament’ view of prophecy and prophetic guidance.
An example of this is when an individual believes that he or she has the right to receive direction from God independently of authority and leadership.

Such individuals may challenge a leadership-led vision by ‘playing the God card,’ for example: “Pastor, you are doing this, but God has told me/us otherwise, therefore you are outside of the will of God.”

Healthy prophetic guidance needs to be modelled from the top down. This means that those leading change demonstrate their own accountability and due diligence in responding to God’s voice. In addition to this, team members benefit from being taught New Testament principles of prophecy, guidance and hearing God’s voice, including the importance of accountability and honouring leadership.

5. Insecurity from an Orphan Mindset

The ‘orphan spirit’ or ‘orphan mindset’ refers to a spiritual condition in which a Christian professes outwardly to know God as Father, but has a deep, internal contradiction to that belief.

An orphan spirit can be due to unhealed hurts from painful past experiences—especially with authority figures.

An orphan spirit can go undetected, until circumstances, such as fast-paced change, cause the individual’s insecurity to surface.

Some ways that an ‘orphan spirit’ can manifest in team members include:

- Fear and insecurity, mistrust
• Being protective or territorial about their ministry areas
• Competing and needing to stand out (attention seeking)
• Lacking personal confidence, therefore a need to prove their worth (performance-orientation)
• Isolation or independence, withdrawal

Those with an ‘orphan mindset’ feel uncovered and unprotected—therefore their instinct is to protect themselves and their position when change is taking place.

The spiritual orphan is unsure of his or her place in the family. In contrast, sons and daughters are secure in the Father’s love and assured of His purpose being fulfilled in their lives.

On the positive side, an orphan mindset becoming apparent provides an opportunity for the pain that is revealed, to be healed. Left unattended, however, an orphan mindset can cause damage to a team.

*Be aware that transition and change will cause any unhealed rejection or the insecurity of an orphan mindset to surface. Provide teaching or materials on the Fatherhood of God. Provide opportunities for team members to receive ministry before and during times of transition. Realise that team members need additional assurance and affirmation during transition.*

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**6 Spiritual Warfare**

God moves through change to bring growth and advancement to a church or ministry. The enemy seeks to oppose and prevent that from successfully taking place. As a result, during times of transition, a church, leadership or ministry can be a prime target for spiritual warfare.

An example of this can be seen in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was leading the inhabitants of Judah to build the walls of Jerusalem. Throughout the entire project, the enemies of Judah were seeking to distract or intimidate Nehemiah and to hinder the work.
We need to be aware, like Nehemiah was, of how the enemy is at work to distract our team from working and pulling together.

‘...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.’ (2 Cor 2:11)

When spiritual warfare is coming at a ministry from the outside, it can be relatively easy to detect and counter it.

Sometimes, however, the most potent spiritual warfare is internal, working within a team. The enemy works by seeking weaknesses in a group or individuals—commonly in any of the above 5 areas—and takes advantage of these to weaken or divide the team.

‘Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.’ (Eph 4:26-27)

It is vital that hurts and offences be addressed immediately they are recognised, and not allowed to lodge. Those who operate out of a divisive spirit (such as a Jezebelic spirit) are often those who have unhealed hurts or unfulfilled expectations from the past (or present) that have not been dealt with.

The best way to deal with spiritual warfare at work within a team is to prevent it at the outset.

*Develop a culture of honour. Foster unity and protect the team in each of the above 5 areas. Forewarned is forearmed, so if team members know in advance of the ways that demonic attack can occur during a significant time of transition in church life, they can be prepared to stand guard, supporting each other and leadership. Deal with hurts and offenses in an upfront, healthy way. Maintain the team’s worship and*
prayer life and don’t allow the busyness of change to weaken the quality of the spiritual life of either individuals or the team as a whole.

About Helen Calder

As a prophetic teacher and preacher, Helen’s passion is to be a catalyst, bringing the ‘NOW’ word of God to impart timely encouragement and breakthrough to churches and individuals.

Helen also has a unique gift of equipping in the area of prophetic ministry and prayer, with a grounded, Biblical focus that supports the local church and its leadership.

Helen is the author of Enliven Blog, an online prophetic training and mentoring resource that is now reaching thousands of people globally. She has also authored a growing number of eBooks that are available from the David McCracken Ministries online store.

About the book, ‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church’

With a ‘true confessions’ approach and disarming honesty, Helen Calder shares her experiences of grappling with change as a prophetic person in the church today.

New 2nd edition with Foreword and chapter for pastors and senior leaders by David McCracken

In ‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church’ you can:

• Receive helpful insights into the use of prophetic gifts and intercession in the current church environment.
• Navigate the ups and downs of change occurring in the life of your church
• Learn how to escape the battles of the mind and heart that discouragement in church life can bring
• Experience help and restoration in your relationship with your church leaders
• Discover the causes of division in the church and how to avoid them

‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church’ is the book that launched the ministry of Enliven Blog. Today, thousands of people around the world are receiving regular prophetic training materials through our online ministry.

Visit our online store here to view ‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church:

http://www.enlivenpublishing.com/blog/estore/

Feedback from Pastors and leaders about ‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church.’

‘The value of this book lies in its frank and honest appraisal of the frequently demonstrated inability to deal with change in the Church without being overwhelmed by discouragement, division, pride, despair and bondage. We are all tainted by a tendency to respond defensively to anything that threatens our sense of security. Helen helps us to understand that the key in successfully negotiating such times is being able to identify how we are responding, and if that response is obstructive and destructive, how to change. She illustrates this powerfully by writing out of her own experience. This is a vitally important book not only for prophetic people but for every one who loves Jesus and His Church.’

Ps Graeme Cann, Church of Christ, Melbourne, Australia

‘…my first thought was that every pastor should have a copy of this on their shelf. The reason simply being, that these are issues that pastors in growing churches are facing continually.'
Helen’s story is a tremendous backdrop for the truths that scripture presents on these issues, making it not just a theoretical work, but an inviting and sobering teaching and encouragement. It gives us clear understanding of how we can move forward, whilst safeguarding ourselves from error and deception.’

Ps Arthur Cherrie, The Winepress

‘The difficulty of processing change in church life and the 'fallout' in wounded people does have a particular application to 'prophetic' people, but it also has a much wider application ... the message of this book needs to be heard by the entire Body of Christ.
...The telling of your own journey together with the insights gained very powerfully addresses the issues of responses to change, following leaders, submission to authority, etc.’

Kevin Forlong, Kevin Forlong Ministries

Other responses from pastors:

‘Your willingness to tell a story against yourself is not only courageous but also more important. It makes the book much more powerful, acceptable and interesting. Note: Our Church was recently almost destroyed by conflict; lost 90% of its membership. I would like to use your book as a leadership study.’

‘Your portion of the book on authority is very good, solid and uses a lot of scriptures. I think that you have satisfied the need today of answering specific questions, with practical answers that are wise, and biblically sound.’

‘Sister Helen, I hope you'll remember me, I translated into Spanish your book ‘Prophetic People In A Changing Church’... When I translated your book, my church was going to division, but thanks God, He used your book to stop it. Only two families left, and they started another church. But our church was kept together, and in peace.’

‘You can speak with authority because of personal experience. I think it’s very helpful to people in the church these days.’