

10 Qualifications of a Church Planter

By Scott Thomas

The qualities of a successful basketball player are consistent. He or she can dribble, shoot, pass, play defense, rebound, play as a team, think, move quickly and work hard. They don't have to do all of these at the same level but all of the qualities characterize a successful player at the highest level. Church planters similarly have qualities that determine their God-given capacity to plant a reproducing church.

Chuck Ridley, professor at Texas A&M University compiled the germinal research on church planting assessments with his Church Planter Profile (CPP). Most assessment instruments start with Ridley's 13 characteristics in mind as they formulate their own church planter profiles. (Charles R. Ridley and Tweed Moore, ChurchSmart Resources). This is the most utilized profile in church planter selection. The first six on the list are what he calls "knock-out factors," meaning these are, according to Ridley, non-negotiable.

1. ***Visioning Capacity***
2. ***Personal Motivation***
3. ***Creating Ownership of Ministry/Building a Core Team***
4. ***Reaching the Un-churched***
5. ***Spousal Cooperation***
6. ***Relationship Building***
7. Commitment to a Healthy Reproducing Church
8. Responsiveness to Community
9. Gift Utilization
10. Flexibility and Adaptability
11. Builds Group Cohesiveness
12. Resilience
13. Exercising Faith

I told Chuck that my challenge with his outstanding list was that one doesn't have to be a Christian or be competent theologically or biblically to qualify. His gracious response was that a planter's sending church or denomination will have already examined that. I would hesitate to assume those two factors today.

My friend, J. Allen Thompson, PhD, is an expert in church planter assessment and regular consultant for Redeemer Presbyterian. He compiled the following list of 18 characteristics of a successful church planter. He also compiled a list for wives that will be covered elsewhere. Allen divides his categories into personal, ministerial and intrapersonal characteristics. (J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Competencies as Perceived by Church Planters and Assessment Center Leaders: a protestant North American study*, Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, 1995. To complete the profile positive and negative indicators are supplied for each characteristic.)

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. *Prayer*
2. *Spiritual Vitality*

3. *Integrity*
4. *God's Call*
5. *Family Life:*
6. *Conscientiousness*
7. *Humility*

MINISTERIAL CHARACTERISTICS

8. *Leadership*
9. *Evangelism*
10. *Management*
11. *Preaching*
12. *Philosophy of Ministry*
13. Training leaders

INTERPERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

14. *Flexibility*
15. *Likeability*
16. *Emotional stability*
17. *Sensitivity*
18. *Dynamism*

Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church compiled a list of 20 characteristics for a church planter. He divided them into eight clusters.

1. Humility Cluster
2. Love Cluster
3. Integrity Cluster
4. Spirituality Cluster
5. Nurture Cluster
6. Communication Cluster
7. Leadership Cluster
8. Mission Cluster

Although it seems a little reductionist and arrogant to make a list of what a church looks like, I humbly offer ten qualities based on evidence in the Acts 29 Network, Ridley, Thompson, Keller as well as Dr. Bob Logan and a plethora of books and articles associated with church planting. After reading this list, some men may be more discouraged from church planting than drawn to it.

Church planting is difficult for the most qualified men and nearly impossible for those unqualified. If a man does not have the essential tools for the job, he will frustrate himself and everyone around him.

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The following ten qualities are in prioritized order as the Acts 29 members rank them. We will look at all ten of these qualities over the course of a year beginning with Spiritual Vitality. It is our goal to produce small e-books covering each of the ten qualities and then produce a book length e-book that will help church planters and those developing them as they explore the mission of making disciples through the planting of reproductive churches.

1. Spiritual Vitality
2. Strong Marriage and Family Life
3. Theological Clarity
4. Missional Lifestyle
5. Emotional Health
6. Entrepreneurial Aptitude
7. Disciple-Making Skills
8. Leadership Abilities
9. Clarity and Strength of Calling
10. Relationship Building

Church Plant Stoppers

In addition to the ten qualities of a church planter, Thompson's research adds a section he calls Church Plant Stoppers/Stoppers. Acts 29 has adapted this into their assessment as well to address self-centeredness. Church leaders must find their identity in Christ's forgiveness and acceptance. When they are overly preoccupied with themselves they show signs of insecurity, pride, love of attention and acclaim and at times irritation and anger. Being eager for quick success they may cut corners and betray trust. The following characteristics may curb a church plant from maturing and reproducing.

1. **Arrogance:** displays conceited self-sufficiency.
2. **Betraying of trust:** breaks confidence placed in him by others.
3. **Unethical Lifestyle:** lives on the margins of moral standards and values.

Conclusion

Mark Dever has said the local church, in all its glory, makes the audible gospel visible [A Display of God's Glory (9marks: Washington, D.C., 2001)]. The gospel is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Jesus Christ died and rose again and ascended. The Church is His Body here on earth. The place where Jesus Christ is made visible is His Body, not just by one individual. When one meets a congregation that is "displaying God's glory" faithfully, one encounters Jesus in one sense. So planting a church is an exercise in making visible the audible gospel of the Blessed God.

What if I am called to plant a church? What if I am not sure? What do I do?

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:12-16).