



# Living the Resurrection

## Leading Change: Theory and Strategy

Contrary to Borg wisdom, when it comes to change, resistance isn't futile. Nothing stops a new idea like a complaint. Sometimes, just the idea that Mildred won't like something, is enough to keep it from happening. And no one bothers to ask Mildred.

Following the process in this document will help you minimize resistance so the future can be better than the present. The process moves from communicating intent to a strategy for recruiting a team and working with the congregation. Finally, you will find an action plan template.

### Communicating Intent

"It's been in the bulletin for weeks and in the newsletter too! We even made announcements during worship! Yet, Mildred maintains that she didn't know anything about it. Why does this happen?"

The methods mentioned are all part of "mass media." Newsletters, bulletin blurbs, and talking to a group are effective means of distributing *information* but are only *persuasive* for about 10% of the population.<sup>i</sup> Here's the maxim behind the reason why Mildred never knows what's going on.

Mass media *informs*, relationships *persuade*.

More than 10% of the congregation will retain the information shared, but informing people is not the same as persuading them.

Here's an example of how this works in many congregations: Lena was leading VBS this summer, as she had for years. She had an article in the newsletter and a blurb in the bulletin. She made a plea for helpers at the announcement time in worship. Her goal went beyond informing people, she wanted them to sign up. She wanted to get some new people involved, but the only folks who responded were the same ones that always help. Lena was frustrated and felt undervalued. Then she decided to try a new tactic. She stood in the lobby after the worship service and talked to new people she thought would be great for VBS. She asked them to sign up, and many of them did! Everyone knew she needed help, but the information was not persuasive until she made it personal.

The smaller the congregation, the more important relationships are to persuasion. We tell people that they matter and that we are to love and care about one another. Members of small congregations take that personally. In the example above the thought

process goes something like this: “Lena is at it again. We’ve been friends forever I’m sure that if she wants my help, she’ll ask me.”

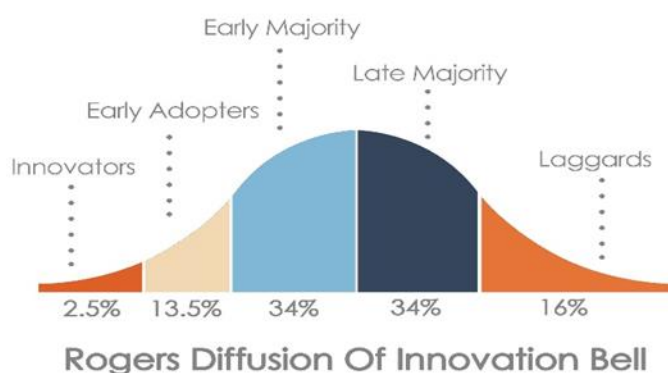
To minimize resistance, you’ll want to use both mass media and relationships to talk to the congregation about considering your idea. Don’t use the word “change,” even “innovation” can be scary. Try “tweak” to current practice or “transition” toward something else - if that’s appropriate. Make it clear that it’s a process you are starting, not the “tweak” or “transition.” If word gets out that you are plotting some change, but people are unclear about what it is, and whether they’ll have a say – you will add to the anxiety of the congregation and increase the resistance to your plan.

## Recruiting for Innovation

With the start of the process announced – recruit your team. When you want to move a congregation from point A to B – no matter how close those two points are, you need a team. Leading change is not a solo venture. Not just anyone can be part of this team, this is no time for “warm body” volunteerism. Here are a few things to keep in mind when you think about whom to recruit to help lead something new.

## Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Everett Rogers studied how innovations moved through a population. He used a bell curve to explain what percentage of the population adapted to innovation and when.<sup>ii</sup>



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Roger’s work may seem like old news but don’t discount its continued relevance. His original study was published in the 1960s, in his most recent version (2005) Rogers explained the traits of folks in each of these categories using the story of the introduction of the iPhone.

Prior to its release, Apple planned to spend millions of advertising dollars to target just 3% of the population. They were after the innovators. These are the people who recognize and accept change quickly. Apple knew that once the innovators purchased

and started using the iPhone, 13% of the population in the early adapters category would come into play. These are the folks who noticed the ads but didn't run to the store. They waited until their innovative friend had one. After looking at it and asking their friends a few questions, they often decided to buy one too.

The next group makes up about 34% of the population; they waited longer. Middle adapters noticed their innovator friend's new gadget, then later recognized a few more in the pockets and purses of their acquaintances. They might get an iPhone, or something like it in the next year or so. Late adapters, who are another 34% of the population, take even longer to venture into the smartphone world. The remaining 16% are laggards, they won't buy a smartphone until their old flip phone dies.

The timeline from when the innovator buys the first iPhone, to when the laggard buys any kind of smartphone, is about 6 years.<sup>iii</sup> Let that sink in. It will be six years before Mildred accepts the change you and your team make today. Make it anyway and involve Mildred.

You'll need to recruit a diverse team of early, middle, and late adapters. Keep in mind, if your congregation has been slowly declining over the years, there may not be many innovators or early adapters among its members. Innovators and early adapters lose patience with people who continually resist change. You might have a group of middle to late adapters, with a few laggards sprinkled in for good measure. However, in my experience, when an innovation aligns with their values, a group of middle and late adapters will embrace a process that leads to a better future.

### Change that aligns with values isn't threatening.

My Dad bought a TV with remote control the first second they were on the market. He wanted the power to mute commercials. He was 90 when Toyota introduced the Prius, he bought one because he was intrigued by the technology. However, he was not generally innovative, usually hovering between early and middle adapters. He had the same stereo forever. Individuals are not fixed in their place on the innovator→laggard bell curve. Instead, they respond to a new idea based on their values. My Dad valued a life without advertisers hawking their wares, so muting the commercials was a huge incentive to adapt quickly to this innovation.

Think about the latest changes in society and consider how various leaders in your congregation have responded to them. Who has adapted relatively easily? Who accepted the change a bit reluctantly? Those could be your people. Before you approach them, think through what you want to accomplish. Put it in the language of values and goals.

It will help your success if you can fill in the following question stems:

Because we all treasure (shared value in the congregation),

And we want to (existing goal),

I would like us to try (new thing) or something like it, on a trial basis.

Would you like to work with me on this?

Once you recruit a couple of folks, you can brainstorm together about a couple more folks and develop a team of 4-6 people. Hopefully, you can create a team of early/middle and late adaptors.

Before you present anything to the congregation your team will want to work together to fill in the following question stems.

Because we all treasure (shared value in the congregation),

And we want to (existing goal),

We would like our congregation to try (new thing) or something like it, on a trial basis.

We will evaluate our trial run before committing to anything more permanent.

## Communication Strategy

Once you have your team, and you've agreed on the basics about the new thing you want to try, it's time to think through the relationship network in your congregation. Before you engage in any further mass media efforts, you'll want to get buy-in from some key people. This strategy will take you through how to figure out whom to talk to, and who should talk to whom by when.

### Influencers and those they influence.

Every group of people is made up of people who influence others, and the folks who listen to them. Influencers may or may not be an authority on any given topic; their power can come from personality, longevity, status in the community, or something else. Folks listen to them because they respect their position in the community. Often there are one or two influencers of whom folks are a bit afraid. When Mildred is unhappy, everyone knows. However, the success of each innovation depends on the opinions of your influencers.

Influencers deserve to be heard. You and your team will benefit from listening to them. If you listen to them early in the process, you honor their position as someone who is important to the congregation. They'll recognize that and often that is enough to turn them favorably toward your efforts. Those who are favorable, you can recruit to help spread the word. Those who raise concerns, you can learn from and perhaps modify your efforts.

### Charting the Network of Relationships in your congregation.

It's common for folks to be uncomfortable labeling their friends as "influencers" or someone who is influenced by another. Yet, people always know where the power lies,

and who listens to whom. Wise leaders know that they need the support of the existing social network to persuade their congregation to act. Every change process you undertake will go more smoothly if you identify and talk to those who may support what you're trying to do, as well as those who may have concerns about it.<sup>iv</sup> The goal is to include everyone, to learn from everyone, but not to surrender veto power to anyone. That last bit is important. No single person should be allowed to hold the power to veto an idea. The group may decide to amend or abandon a project, but not an individual.

Acting on the Theory

To get your whole congregation involved, you and your team will need to identify an Influencer that represents each "group" in your congregation. With your church directory at hand, name each influencer and identify the people that s/he might influence.

Some people are influencers regardless of the topic, others have areas where they are influential but aren't sought out on every topic. Considering the change you and your team want to move toward, identify the Influencers who will have an opinion about it – then name whom they will influence. They could be immediately enthusiastic about the idea, or they may raise concerns that could be constructive in how you talk about and implement your process.

Please note influencers you think will **enthusiastically support** the idea by putting a \* sign by their name, and those who may have **constructive concerns** about this process by putting a + sign by their name.

Influencer: \_\_\_\_\_ \*/+ \_\_\_\_\_  
influences \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Influencer: \_\_\_\_\_ \*/+ \_\_\_\_\_  
influences \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Influencer: \_\_\_\_\_ \*/+ \_\_\_\_\_  
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Influencer: \_\_\_\_\_ \*/+ \_\_\_\_\_

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Influencer: \_\_\_\_\_ \*/+ \_\_\_\_\_

influences \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Check your church directory to make sure that most, if not all, members are accounted for on this relational network.

Looking at your Influencer/Influenced chart answer the following questions:

- To whom did you assign a \* ?
  
- To whom did you assign a + ?

To prepare to reach out to the possibly concerned influencers, think about what might give them cause for concern.

- Is it something about how the innovation might be implemented?
  - Listen because they could be right! There could be ways to do this better.
- Sometimes the concern masks something deeper. Something they might not recognize about themselves or want anyone else to think about either.

- For Example: maybe they feel like they need to be consulted because they are important to the congregation and if you don't talk to them or if they feel overlooked.
- Decide what to request from each Influencer.
  - From \* influencers:
    - Some level of involvement
    - Use their relationships to help folks get excited.
  - From + influencers
    - The opportunity to listen to their concerns.
    - Cautious support for the process.

#### Action Plan/Timetable

We want to start informing the congregation of our idea by \_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_

Our next team meeting will need to be: \_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_.

Influencer meetings need to be done by: \_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_.

Influencer	Team member who will meet with influencer

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<sup>i</sup> Rogers, 35.

<sup>ii</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 281.

<sup>iii</sup> Rogers, 281.

<sup>iv</sup> Clinton, *Bridging Strategies: Leadership Perspective for Introducing Change*.