

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

What's Working In Large Churches Now - Episode 285

Unstuck Webinar Replay

Does it feel unclear what “works” in ministry on this side of the pandemic? We know the majority of churches of all sizes feel like they are stuck with a playbook that no longer works.

Every church is different, and **no one has all the answers**—but we're better when we work together. In this episode, we're sharing the replay of a recent webinar conversation where Tony and Amy sat down with lead pastors Chris Hodges from Church of the Highlands, Omar Giritli from Christ Fellowship Church in Miami, and Miles McPherson from Rock Church to discuss what's actually working in their large churches now.

Part 1: Reaching New People

AMY: We're hearing from several large churches that there are many brand new people in their churches over the last few years. Pastor Miles, have you experienced that at the Rock Church as well? What do you think is driving that?

MILES: I think over the last few years, a lot of people are looking for hope, and people who normally wouldn't go to church are seeking church. I think one of the reasons that we and other churches might be reaping that harvest is because of what we sowed before, as far as our reputation in our area and what people heard about us serving our communities during Covid.

AMY: Pastor Chris, where are you seeing results when it comes to reaching new people and helping them take steps toward faith and church?

CHRIS: I think the weekend service still matters and I would encourage pastors really to take that whole experience up to a very strong level. Barna recently released research that showed 74% of all Americans want to grow spiritually, and I think they get that not only through Biblical teaching, but also through worship experiences where they know the presence of God is real. What I'm noticing is that the more I lean into the word of God and what it says, even as it relates to culture and not being afraid to speak openly and truthfully, the more people respond. People are looking for real answers.

On top of that, we saw tremendous fruit this past year in our kids and teen ministry. I did some research with our parents and found that our young people probably suffered the most through the pandemic, so we spent about six months doing research on how effective our youth ministry was and made major changes to meet the current needs of our children and our students. I did an entire message on it called “Fighting for a Generation” and gave the plan of the things that we were going to implement to do better at taking care of their students, and we saw 30% growth overnight. So I honestly believe one of the best things we can do right now to reach people is to lean into the needs of children and students.

Part 2: Increasing Engagement

AMY: Pastor Omar, I think there’s a consensus that people are attending services less frequently. Because of that, I know many large churches are focused on other strategies to keep people engaged? What does that look like at Christ Fellowship?

OMAR: I agree 100%. I've noticed that people who used to come every week come every other week, and people who used to come every other week come once a month. So I think we've entered into a new season of ministry. In regards to engagement, we did a series recently about how to get unstuck in your spiritual life post-Covid and how to move forward in your walk with Christ. It was a four week series where we outlined our discipleship process, which is “Connect to God, others, ministry, and the mission.” Every week, I challenged people really strongly about attending in-person, joining small groups, and serving in a ministry, etc. We’ve become super intentional about giving clear next steps after everything we do and it's been really working.

TONY: Pastor Chris, I think engagement is an area of ministry Church of the Highlands is really known for. Will you unpack Growth Track & how it’s designed to engage people?

CHRIS: Omar is exactly right: The key to getting people to take next steps is clarity. I think we have done well in making the spiritual journey clear in a language people can understand: know God, find freedom, discover your purpose, make a difference.

Once a person finds Jesus, our growth track helps to get them in a group and discover their spiritual gifts/redemptive calling. From there, we help them to live that out through serving—because people say the local church is the hope of the world, but it’s not. The local church **mobilized** is the hope of the world. After people find God, they find freedom, they find their purpose, and then they’re out there doing something that makes a difference.

AMY: Pastor Miles, you call them “outreach ministries,” and your church is known for them in your community. Are those ministries more about the people you serve or the people serving?

MILES: When God redeems me, calls me, cleanses me, and comforts me, I need to now go back to where I came from and go pull somebody out from where I was. We need to go back and be a part of delivering somebody else. We say God is a very efficient God: He gets two for one all the time. So our philosophy is “count, walk, love.” Count is about taking a numerical assessment of the pain in the community. Walk is to go to them. And then you love them. Going outward as a church blesses the people who are giving and it blesses the people who are receiving. God is glorified and it's a win-win-win.

Part 3: Multisite Strategy

TONY: Pastor Miles, when you look back at the history of Rock Church, how has multisite strategy played into your success?

MILES: The reason to go multisite is not to help you grow, but because you're already growing. One of the reasons we started our first multisite campus and continued to expand is because of our “Do Something” culture. We had a campus where 30% of people were coming from 15 minutes away, and wondered, “How can we best serve that community? That mayor, that police chief, that school district?” It's not going to be from people that don't live there, so we planted there because we wanted people in that community to be able to be there and go to church there and serve their community.

Part 4: Developing Culture

TONY: Pastor Omar, Christ Fellowship recently navigated a transition in leadership. As the new senior pastor, you inherited a culture from your predecessor. How are you reinforcing the established culture, and how do you hope to put your own fingerprint on it?

OMAR: In regards to our staff culture: For several years now, we've done an anonymous survey of our staff to see where our team is healthy and where it isn't. No one likes to look at the mirror, but it's been very healthy for us to know where we are so we can adjust and do better. We as pastors and leaders need to know the reality of our staff and how they're feeling, because sometimes they won't tell you unless you make those avenues possible.

One of the things that has strengthened the culture of our church and put my fingerprint on it is a series we did last year where we tackled controversial topics in society. People were appreciative that we were clear on where we stood and spoke with compassion, but unapologetically stated what God's word says. I think that series solidified people's commitment to our church because they know we will preach God's truth even when it's not popular.

AMY: Pastor Chris, Church of the Highlands appears to have a strong, healthy culture. How do you establish that strong culture?

CHRIS: Probably one of the best leadership lessons I ever learned in my life was on culture, and here it is: You can't create one. You can only be one. You have to be it to get it. You can't ask for a worshipping church if you're not a worshiper. You can't ask for a praying church if you're not a prayer.

And, as is true with anything you really desire as a leader, you'll have to clarify and define it. I have around 20 different cultural values and codes that we have for our team. Here are some that have really served us well:

1. Love God. We ask every person who steps on our volunteer teams to be passionately in love with God.
2. Love people and value them.
3. Do it with excellence. (We'd rather do fewer things extremely well than do a lot of things not well.)
4. Attitude. We make the choice to live out and express a joyful attitude. Serve the Lord with gladness.

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Sometimes, as leaders, we think there's no way someone could do the job as well as we can. It can be easy to feel like we have to have our hands in everything for our organization to succeed. But as we all know, that couldn't be further from the truth. No one accomplishes anything great alone—Great leaders delegate.

If you feel like you're overwhelmed trying to do it all, [BELAY](#) can help. BELAY, a modern church staffing organization with fractional, U.S.-based Accounting and Virtual Assistant services, has helped busy church leaders do just that for more than a decade.

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