

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Passing on Leadership to the Next Generation (with Carlos Cardenas) - Episode 314

Empowering Next Generation Leaders (Part 3)

The more leaders in the church can work together and learn from each other, the more opportunity grows for effective multi-generational ministry.

In this episode, we're joined by Carlos Cardenas, the Executive Pastor at [Christ Fellowship Miami](#), a multi-generational, multicultural and international church meeting in multiple locations across Miami, the Caribbean, Latin America, and online. Carlos is a gifted Millennial leader who has benefited from a seat alongside leaders of other generations and has an insightful perspective on passing on leadership to the next generation.

Interview with Carlos Cardenas

Christ Fellowship Miami may be the largest church I know of where the majority of the leadership team are now Millennials, including the lead pastor and executive pastor. The previous leadership team was made up primarily of Baby Boomers. How did that generation of leaders prepare you, Pastor Omar, and other younger leaders to step into your current roles?

CARLOS: First it began with building relational equity. I think it's so imperative for the older generation of leaders to spend time with the younger leaders. One of the things that my predecessor and his leadership team did well is that they would spend a good amount of time with us through meetings, lunches, coffee, etc. and there was a lot of relational investment that took place. So I would say the first stage is relational—getting to know the younger leaders.

And the second thing is that they gave us opportunities to lead and make decisions. They gave us a seat at the table and even when we were not part of the lead team, there were some meetings that were open to us and they would allow us to speak into the decision making process.

Likewise, how did the previous leadership team prepare *your church* for this handoff to the next generation of leaders?

CARLOS: First, our predecessor Rick allowed both Omar and I to preach. I think that when you allow someone to have a voice on the weekend it's a big statement—you're entrusting and allowing that person to preach for a reason. So once it was decided that Omar would be Rick's successor,

that was ramped up in a way that kind of indirectly told people that we were going to be stepping into these roles.

Secondly, there was a lot of empowerment from Rick. Because Omar was going to be his successor, Rick really became Omar's greatest encourager and cheerleader. Pastor Rick had been pastoring for 23 years, so people were very loyal to him. If he says something, they're going to follow his lead. So when they see that the lead pastor is affirming, it's validating and encouraging. That's why one of the biggest things that the older generation can do is really publicly affirm younger leaders, because your voice carries so much weight, especially if you're the senior pastor.

As you reflect back on your leadership development before stepping into your current role, is there anything you wish you would have done differently?

CARLOS: I think my predecessor did a great job of exposing me to a lot of sides of ministry that I needed to be a part of. Of course, it's one thing to know it and another thing to do it. There's always conflict and decisions that you have to make that you can't anticipate.

One thing I would recommend is to spend time with other leaders who are in your current role (or the role that you're going to step into) but not at your organization. Omar and I attended Unstuck's Multisite Leader Cohort and it was both encouraging and challenging to be with other leaders who are leading at a higher level than us and to pick their brains.

As a Millennial, do you think you approach leadership differently from previous generations?

CARLOS: With Millennials and younger generations, there's more of a draw towards team leadership. They desire to foster a culture of collaboration, so it's not so much of a hierarchy where there's one person in charge making all the decisions. For example, we sometimes invite student directors or campus teams from different campuses to join our Directional Leadership Team meetings and give us feedback. We'll ask them questions like: "What are we doing well? What are some things that we need to improve on? What are some of the challenges that you guys are facing that we don't know of?" So what I would say when it comes to Millennials, there's more of a collaborative culture when it comes to leadership.

From your perspective, what are some of the biggest misconceptions of leaders in your generation?

CARLOS: I've seen older leaders have the perspective that if you're not in the office from 9-5, then you're being lazy and your work ethic is questionable. However, Millennials and Gen Z desire more flexibility and remote working because they know that being in the office doesn't equate to more productivity or hard work. A lot of people on our staff want flexibility because they know they work better at night or at odd hours of the day, and they're just as productive (or more) as those who are in the office.

So I think there are still some challenges around those older ways of thinking. The truth is that Millennials do work hard, they might just fix a problem in a different way than you would fix it. But if the outcome is the same, then there shouldn't be such a stigma around it. I think Millennials just want to find and discover ways to get things done faster and smarter and to take a different approach than how it's always been done.

What are some best practices you would recommend to Millennials and Gen Z to prepare for stepping into key leadership roles within the church?

CARLOS: There's always a process and patience is a fruit of the spirit. We often want instant gratification and don't appreciate delayed gratification. For example, Omar and I had been at Christ Fellowship for 14 years before our current positions. I'm sure there were moments in those years where we felt discouraged or doubted whether we were in the right place. Maybe we felt overlooked or like we were being undervalued. But it's all too easy to fall into the comparison trap, especially with social media, and to just want things to come easily for us. We don't always give ourselves enough time to get rooted in our current context.

If you're a younger leader who is under an older leader, share your frustrations with them. Even if they don't ask, be honest with them. Share how you feel rather than just packing up your bags and leaving. When we become impatient and we feel like our gifting is not being used, it's very easy to just leave and move on to another ministry. *Sometimes* you need to do that, but that's not always the answer.

Key Takeaways

Keep learning! Don't get comfortable. Keep asking questions. Stay curious. Continue to pursue opportunities to be around other leaders who are outside your church.

Embrace all 3 components of development: (1) share your wisdom (teach), (2) model the way you hope younger leaders will engage ministry and leadership (give them a seat at the table), (3) give them opportunities to put it into practice while you are at their side to coach them through it (teaching, leadership, etc.).

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