

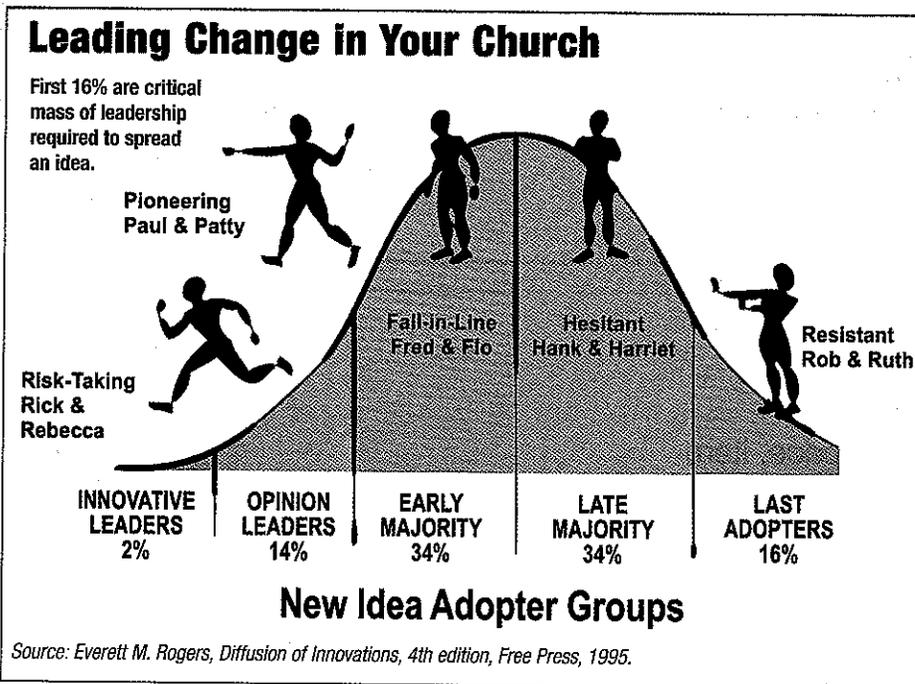
The response to new ideas differs among members

By Charles Arn

One of the rude awakenings for many seminary graduates taking their first position in a new church is the response they receive when they introduce their first terrific idea for improved ministry. It seems reasonable, they believe, that most members will (1) recognize a good idea when they hear it, and (2) support the idea and get behind it. If only it were so.

Innovators are the dreamers and visionaries in your church. They usually delight in the church's future and its goals, rather than the church's past and its accomplishments. Innovators are not generally acknowledged or respected as leaders or policy makers. Many have the spiritual gift of faith.

Early adopters know a good idea when they see it. Their



opinions are generally respected by others and they are influential in moving the church in new directions. Early adopters often receive credit for ideas that were not originally theirs. Many have the spiritual gift of wisdom.

Middle adopters make up the majority of your congregation. They tend to react to the ideas of others rather than initiate their own. While these people are reasonable in their assessment of a new idea, they are more inclined to maintain the status quo, and more easily influenced by those opposing change than those supporting it.

Late adopters are the last in a church to endorse a new idea. In congregational and committee meetings these people often speak and vote against proposed changes and new ideas. They may never verbally acknowledge acceptance of a new idea, but will eventually

Business studies on the "diffusion of innovation" show that there are predictable responses when a new idea is introduced to a group of people. These insights are helpful to pastors (new or current) in understanding what happens when a new idea is introduced in a church, and more importantly, how to increase the likelihood of the idea becoming a reality.

How will your congregation respond to your initiatives (or anyone else's, for that matter) and ideas for change? Church members fall into one of five groups in terms of their response to a new idea: innovators, early adopters, middle adopters, late adopters and never adopters.

go along if the majority agrees to support it.

Never adopters are resistant to new ideas. Their commitment is to the status quo and the past. They often sow discord after the change is adopted, and will eventually leave if they don't get a following.

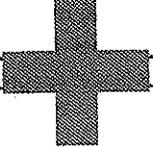
Here are some suggestions when you introduce your next terrific idea:

Realize that not everyone will be happy. Innovators are on a collision course with never adopters. Early adopters are frustrated by late adopters. Middle adopters may even encourage disagreement to adequately consider both sides. Despite these differences, it is important to articulate opinions

Schedule Synergy

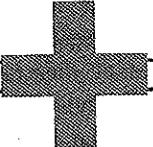
Event Scheduling

Schedule simple meetings or complex multi-date events quickly and efficiently—weekly services, classes, weddings and community programs.



Online Calendar

Publish event information for members to view from any computer with an Internet browser. Option to accept online requests for space.



Resource Management

Manage and track any physical space, item inventory or service including outdoor areas, catering, A/V equipment and vehicles.



APPLY FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE VISITOR FOLLOW-UP

Four simple, but very important, principles that will help your church increase the number of visitors who eventually become an active part of your church:

Time principle: Contact visitors within 48 hours of their visit to your church.

The first two days after the visit is the best time to contact visitors. The longer you wait after that, the fewer number of visitors will return the next week. Your follow-up contact should be via telephone. The caller should introduce him/herself, thank the person for attending, and answer any questions they may have about the church. The call should conclude with the caller sharing some particularly outstanding aspect of the church's ministry.

Purpose principle: The goal of the follow-up is to see newcomers return.

Our research shows that the likelihood of a visitor becoming a regular attendee nearly doubles every time that visitor comes back. A person who attends your new service two times over several months is twice as likely to become a regular attendee as a person who visits only once.

Personnel principle: Laity should make the follow-up contacts.

Visitors' return rate to your new service doubles when a layperson makes the follow-up contact rather than a pastor/staff member. An equally true statement, though somewhat more humbling for clergy, is that when the pastor makes the call the return rate drops by half. Why? When newcomers are contacted by church staff they know that person is being paid to do it. But when a visitor is contacted by a lay-

person, the conversation is considerably more believable.

Entry path principle: Create opportunities for newcomers to get involved.

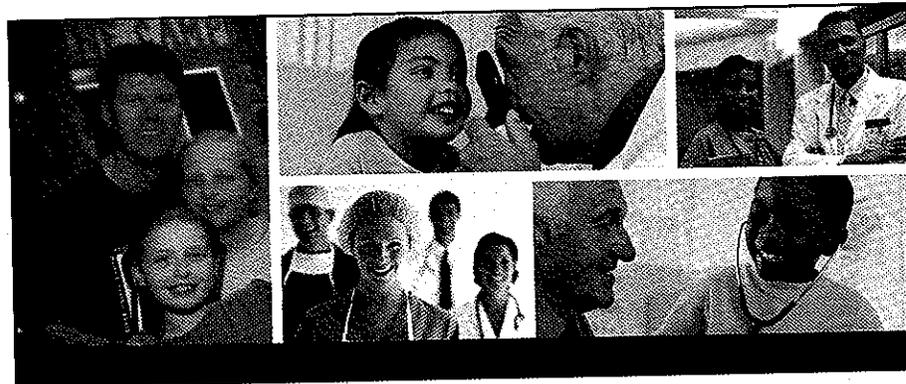
Growing churches provide ways for outsiders to become insiders. This happens when newcomers become comfortably involved in church-sponsored activities and start building relationships with other members. These are called entry paths. An entry path is a small group, a special class or an ongoing activity in which newcomers become participants, not just observers. Research indicates 75-90 percent of today's church members joined because of a friend or relative they already knew in that church.

— Charles Arn

early because if they're not expressed at the front end of a discussion be assured you will hear them later at a less desirable time.

Some members will leave. Don't think that avoiding controversy (such as introducing a new worship service style) will avoid the loss of disenchanted members. David DeSelm, in the video, *A Church for the 21st Century*, observes that "you're going to lose people even if you don't change." He's right. You will lose dissatisfied members whether you add a new service or not. If you add the service, some folks from the right side of the bell curve will leave. If you don't, some visionaries from the left side will leave.

The battle is for the middle adopters. You won't need to work very hard to convince your innovators and early adopters of the value of your new idea. The late adopters will not be convinced before the idea actually becomes a reality. But if you can convince the majority of middle adopters to support the initiative, you're on your way.



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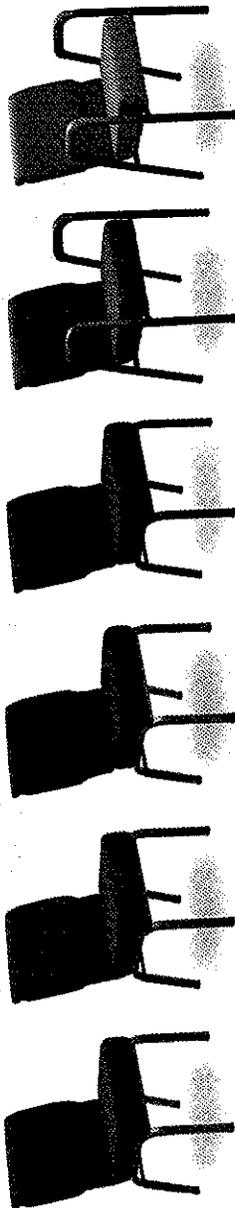
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Make early adopters your allies. Generally they are well respected in the church. Their words are given serious con-

sideration and their leadership is usually followed. First, make a list of these people. Then solicit their active support. Ask them to endorse the new idea in formal meetings and informal discussions. Explain that it is often conversations in the halls and on the telephone that influence middle adopter members more than anything else. And in board and committee meetings let them know that it will be their support that may make the difference between adoption and rejection.

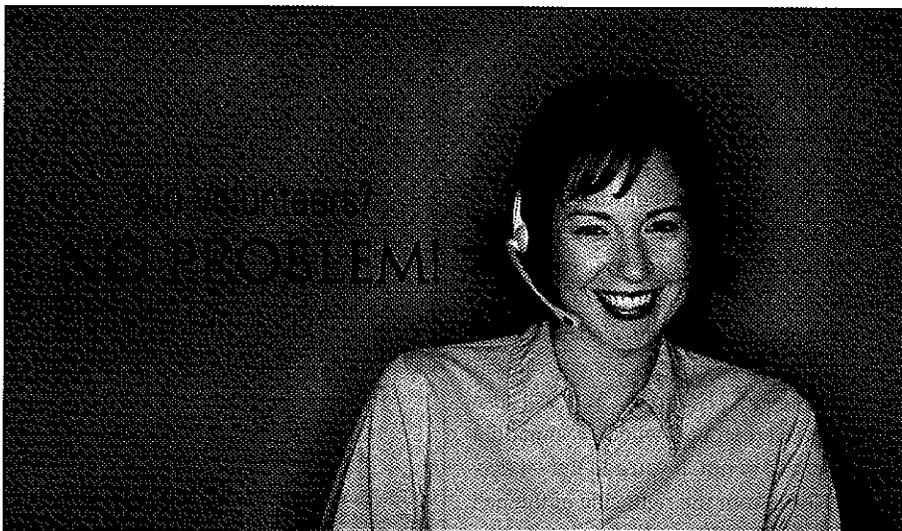
Leading a church through the process of change is one of the great challenges pastors face in their career.

Leading a church through the process of change is one of the great challenges pastors face in their career. Pastors who

master this process find their ministry years to be much more fulfilling and rewarding. Those who don't, eventually conclude that the price of change is not worth the cost, and they remain in a stagnant situation. It is well worth a pastor's time to learn and apply the principles of successful change.

Dr. Charles Arn is executive director of Church Growth Inc., Monrovia, CA.

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