



5 SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE PRACTICES

That Fuel the Development of the People You Lead

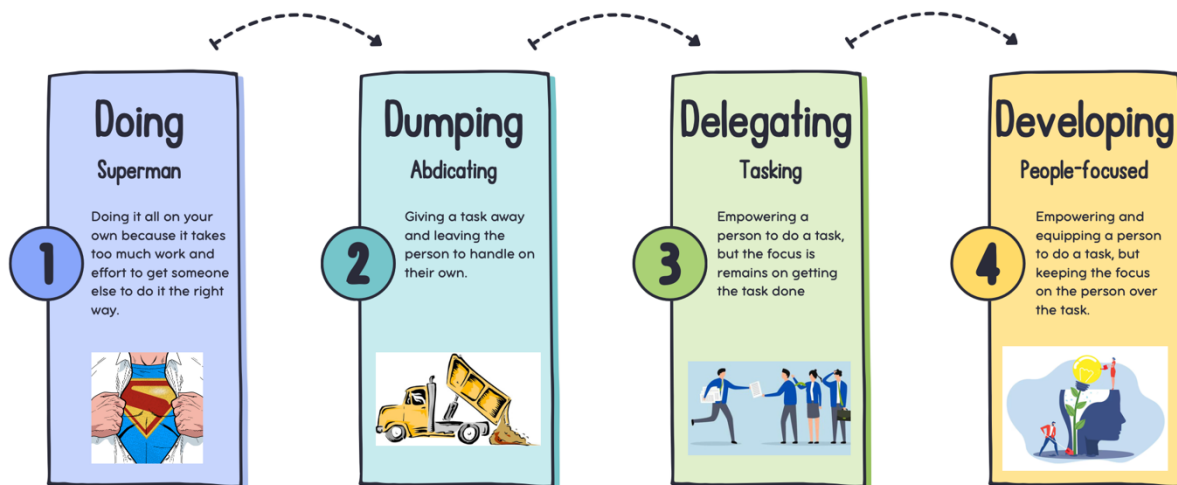
Overview

Most church leaders know how to get things done. We've even mastered the art of delegation, assigning key tasks to trusted people. But somewhere along the way, we can miss the bigger opportunity in front of us: every ministry task is a chance to grow a person. Development is where leadership and discipleship meet.

The Sharing Leadership Continuum

To put it visually, most leaders get stuck somewhere on this continuum:

Doing it themselves → Dumping assignments → Delegating tasks → Developing leaders



The first three approaches still center on the task. Only development centers on the person. When you develop people, tasks still get done, but something better happens too: people grow and leadership multiplies.

This tool helps you:

- Shift from task-centered to people-centered leadership
- Create a culture where growth happens in everyday moments
- Build leaders instead of just managing workers
- Develop sustainable rhythms that multiply impact

Whether you're leading a church staff, a volunteer team, or an emerging leader, these five practices help you invest in people through the work you're already doing together.



THE FIVE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING PEOPLE

1. INTENTIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

What it is

Specific, timely affirmation that highlights a person's growth, character, and unique contribution.

What it's NOT

It's not generic praise ("Great job!") or empty flattery. It's observant, personal, and tied to something real you've witnessed. The goal isn't just to make someone feel good, though that's a nice byproduct. The goal is to help people see what they can't see in themselves: how they're growing, where their unique strengths are emerging, and what God is doing in and through them.

Why it matters: Most people receive feedback only when something's wrong. Intentional encouragement fuels confidence and clarifies what to keep doing.

The Pattern:

- "I noticed..." (specific observation)
- "That shows..." (connect it to character or growth)
- "It matters because..." (name the impact or value)

Ministry examples:

After a team meeting: *"I noticed how you took time to check in personally with each team member before the meeting started. That kind of relational awareness shows you're developing as a leader who values people, not just productivity. It created a sense of safety that let everyone contribute more freely."*

Following a difficult situation: *"I saw how you responded when that parent raised their concerns after service. You didn't get defensive or try to explain it away. You listened well and validated their feelings first. That's emotional maturity, and it's something a lot of leaders take years to develop."*

After a creative contribution: *"The way you reimagined our welcome process was brilliant. You didn't just tweak what we were doing, you thought deeply about what a first-time guest actually experiences. That shows you're growing in empathy and strategic thinking."*

Who on your team could use a word of Intentional Encouragement from you?

What specifically could you encourage them about?

2: CATALYTIC QUESTIONS

What it is:

Thoughtful questions that provoke reflection, self-discovery, and new insights.

What it means:

Instead of telling someone what you think or what they should do, you ask questions that help them figure it out themselves. The word "catalytic" matters here. You're not just making small talk or gathering information. You're intentionally sparking something, a realization, a connection, a shift in perspective. These questions often feel simple in the moment but continue working in someone's mind long after you've asked them.

The Key:

The key is curiosity, not correction. You're genuinely interested in what they're learning and thinking, Your questions should open doors, they should invite exploration. Think of catalytic questions as tools that help people see what they couldn't see before. A good question can do more than an hour of advice because it puts the person in the driver's seat of their own growth.

Good Catalytic questions to ask:

- What surprised you about that experience?
- As you reflect on how you handled that situation, what did you learn about yourself?
- If you faced something similar tomorrow, what might you do differently?
- What do you think God is teaching you through this?
- What's the hardest part of this for you right now?
- How is this experience shaping the kind of leader you want to become?
- What would it look like if this went really well?
- What's one small step you could take this week?

Questions to avoid:

- Don't you think you should have...?
- Why didn't you just...?
- Have you considered doing it the way I would do it?

Ministry examples:

Following a success: *"That outreach event went really well. What do you think made the difference this time? What could we learn from this for other ministries?"*

During a struggle: *"It sounds like you're wrestling with how much to intervene versus letting the team figure things out. What does healthy leadership look like in this situation? What are you most afraid might happen?"*

When someone is stuck: *"If you could wave a magic wand and fix one thing about this situation, what would it be? What's keeping that from happening? What's one thing you actually have control over?"*

In regular check-ins: *"When you think about your growth over the past few months, where do you see the most change? Where do you wish you were seeing more progress?"*

After receiving feedback: *"What part of what I just shared resonates most with you? What feels hardest to hear? What's one thing you want to work on as a result?"*

Who on your team would benefit from a Catalytic Question from you?

What specific question will you use?

3: ON-TIME TRAINING

What it is:

Just-in-time information or resources in the context of real ministry moments when learning is most needed.

Why it matters:

It goes beyond generic up-front training sessions that try to prepare people for every possible scenario months in advance. It's the moment a person is about to do something that will stretch them that they are most motivated to devour helpful information or develop a new skill.

How to use it:

Pay attention to what's coming up for the people you're developing. Who's leading their first small group discussion next week? Who's about to have a tough conversation with a volunteer? Who just got asked to preach for the first time? Those moments are gold. Step in with a template, a few key tips, a quick coaching conversation, or a resource that addresses exactly what they need right now.

The Pattern:

- o Notice the upcoming challenge
- o Provide targeted input (not everything they could ever need, just what's helpful right now)
- o Create a feedback loop so they can process what they learned afterward

Ministry examples:

Before a new responsibility: *"I know you're leading your first team meeting next week. Here's a simple template I use for running effective meetings. Notice how it builds in time for relationship, not just business. Let's debrief after and talk about what worked."*

Ahead of a difficult conversation: *"I heard you need to give some corrective feedback to one of your volunteers. That's never easy. Here are three things I try to remember: be specific, be kind, and focus on behavior, not character. Want to role-play it together before you have the actual conversation?"*

Real-Life Story

Several team members were invited to lead training sessions for their peers. As the date got closer, I noticed the "oh crap" moment hit them. They were suddenly highly motivated to learn how to prepare a training experience really well. We didn't have them sit through a generic training six months earlier, they wouldn't have retained it. Instead, we provided templates, specific tips, and a clear feedback process right when they needed it. The learning stuck because it was real, it was now, and it mattered.

Who on your team has hit an "oh crap" moment and could use On-Time Training?

What information or resource would they benefit from right now?

4: CANDID FEEDBACK

What it is:

Honest observations about both strengths and development areas delivered with care and focused on growth.

What it's not:

It's not harsh criticism or vague suggestions. It's clear, specific, and motivated by a genuine desire to help someone become who they're meant to be.

Why leaders avoid it:

Too many leaders avoid this practice because it feels uncomfortable. But withholding candid feedback isn't kindness, it's negligence. People can't grow past what they can't see. Your willingness to speak honestly, with care, is one of the greatest gifts you can give someone. This practice alone has the best chance of accelerating development.

How to use it:

Start with relationship and trust. Candid feedback lands well when someone knows you're for them, not against them. If you haven't built that foundation, start there first. When you do offer feedback, be specific. Don't say, "You need to communicate better." Say, "I noticed the team seemed confused about the timeline for this project. Next time, it might help to send a follow-up email with clear deadlines so everyone's on the same page."

The pattern:

- o State what you observed (specific behavior or pattern)
- o Name the impact (how it affected the ministry or team)
- o Invite reflection or offer a path forward (don't just point out the problem, help them see a way through)

Ministry examples:

Addressing a pattern: *"I've noticed that sometimes your excitement for new ideas can lead to starting multiple projects without fully completing others. What if you focused that creative energy on fewer initiatives but saw them through to completion? I think you'd see even greater impact."*

Highlighting a strength with a challenge: *"You're really gifted at connecting with people one-on-one. I've seen it over and over. I wonder if you're ready to stretch that gift by leading a small group where you'd be connecting with several people at once. What do you think?"*

Addressing a blind spot: *"I want to share something I've observed, and I'm bringing it up because I believe in your leadership. Sometimes when things don't go as planned, you can get critical of yourself in a way that shuts down the conversation. The team wants to help problem-solve, but they're not sure how to engage when you're in that space. Does that resonate with you?"*

Who on your team would benefit from Candid Feedback?

What did you observe, how did it affect the team, what is their path forward?

5: STRATEGIC ASSIGNMENTS

What it is:

Low-risk opportunities designed specifically to develop a skill, test readiness, or reveal capacity, followed by intentional debrief and coaching.

Why it's important:

The assignment itself is valuable, but the real growth happens in the conversation afterward. These aren't tasks you give to get something off your plate. They're carefully chosen experiences that stretch someone just beyond their current ability, with you nearby to help them process what they learn.

How to Use It

Think about the skills or perspectives someone needs to develop, then create or identify assignments that let them practice in a safe environment. The key word is "low-risk." You're not throwing them into the deep end. You're giving them a chance to wade in while you're close by. After the assignment, the debrief is everything. This is where you ask catalytic questions, offer candid feedback, and point out things they might not have noticed about themselves.

The pattern:

- Identify a growth area for the person
- Design or offer an assignment that's relevant and appropriately challenging
- Set up clear expectations (This is practice. We're not sending it. The goal is your growth.)
- Debrief together afterward to process what they learned

Ministry Examples

Developing conflict resolution skills: *"I received an email from someone who's frustrated with a ministry decision. I'm not going to send your response, but I'd love for you to draft a reply as if you were me. How would you acknowledge their concern while also holding to the decision? Let's look at it together and talk through your approach."*

Building preaching skills: *"I'd like you to preach a 10-minute message at our midweek gathering next month. It's a smaller, more forgiving environment than Sunday morning, and I'll be there to give you detailed feedback afterward. Let's work on your outline together beforehand."*

Growing in strategic thinking: *"I'm trying to figure out how to restructure our volunteer onboarding process. Can you take a crack at mapping out what an ideal experience might look like? Don't worry about getting it perfect, I want to see how you think through the problem. We'll talk through your ideas next week."*

Developing pastoral care: *"I'd like you to shadow me on a hospital visit this week. Just observe. Afterward, we'll talk about what you noticed and how I was thinking through the conversation."*

Who on your team could grow through a Strategic Assignment?

What is the specific assignment you could give them based on their growth area?

HOW TO USE THESE PRACTICES IN REAL MINISTRY

These five practices work best when woven into your regular leadership rhythm. You don't need a special program or scheduled appointments. The most powerful development happens in everyday moments.

Start with One Person

Don't try to develop everyone at once. Pick one person this week who would benefit from your intentional investment. Ask yourself: Who's ready to grow? Who's facing a challenge? Who shows potential that needs cultivation?

Choose One Practice

Look for a natural opening this week to use one of the five practices with your person: After a meeting or project: Offer encouragement. Before a new challenge: Provide on-time training. During a coffee conversation: Ask catalytic question. In a one-on-one: Share candid feedback

Build these Practices into your Regular Ministry Rhythms

Development isn't a one-time event. The difference between good intentions and actual development comes down to rhythm. These five practices work best when they're woven into the regular patterns of how you already lead, not added as extra tasks on an already overwhelming to-do list. Check below where you could incorporate these ideas:

- Schedule regular one-on-ones:** Plan 20-30 minutes every other week for check in.
- Use transition times:** The drive to an event or walk to the parking lot can be as valuable as a scheduled meeting.
- Build debriefs into events:** Five minutes of reflection after a ministry moment turns experience into learning.
- Set weekly reminders:** What doesn't get scheduled doesn't happen.
- Create a simple resource library:** Keep templates and examples ready so you can provide just-in-time help without scrambling.
- Make it part of your prep:** When planning ministry, ask "Who could I develop through this?"

Remember, the goal isn't to do all five practices with every person every week. The goal is to shift from seeing people as task-completers to seeing them as leaders to develop.