



Believe:
Your Generosity
Language



Simply put, words are one of the most powerful leadership tools one can possess. They are free and there are a ton of them. On top of that, most leaders have been speaking words for decades. Thousands of them daily. You would think with such a high competency for speaking, mixed with a vast volume of free words that leaders would easily be creating the culture they desire to lead. However, most leaders step right over the power of words to create their future. We tend to lean more on action, directive, and decisions.

A leader's words create the energy and passion that powerfully influences the decisions, actions, people, and results of an organization. Culture is unstoppable and it is created by your words. For instance, when a leader leads with words of action, it creates a driven culture. When a leader leads with words of performance, it creates yet another unique culture. When a leader leads with words that are ever-changing based on the latest and greatest idea, it creates an unsteady culture. When a leader leads with no words, silence creates a mysterious type of culture.

The power of words to create culture is clearly evident when you assess the money culture in a church. Every church has one, and it is either positively engaging your people in giving or alienating them from the idea of money. Here are some examples of common cultural languages churches speak regarding money.

Church vs. Individual

This occurs when a church discusses money primarily from the perspective of the church's need. It can be heard every week prior to collecting the offering, in the weekly budget amount reported in the bulletin, or during the yearly annual budget approval process. This language perpetuates the mentality that one must give purely as a benefit to the church.

However, some churches are great at speaking about money through the eyes of an individual. Their language doesn't center on what the church needs to meet its expenses, instead it is about the life that is on the other side of living generously as one follows the Lord's leadership. People should give not because the church has a budget, rather, they need to give because it is the best way for a person to live. Learn to speak the language of the gifts of being a generous person.

Guilt vs. Promise

This occurs when church leadership tends to speak to the individual, but it is a negative language instead of one of promise. I have been in the generosity space for a long time. I can not tell you how many times (because it is too many to count) I have heard a pastor refer to his people in a negative way related to

money. Church money problems always seem to be left at the feet of people who just don't give like they should. So a sermon on tithing, obedience, and robbing God is brought out once a year to fix the problem. Then everything goes right back to normal.

While God definitely uses conviction to lead our lives, we should trust the Holy Spirit more with that job. When I experience a church that is growing generously, the people are more aware of the promises of God related to their resources than they are the problems. Learn the language of speaking about the promised life of God for every person when living open handedly. There are so many great financial promises in scripture. The promise of a hope filled future is so much more motivating than pointing out failures and personal disappointments. People already know money and generosity are real struggles. Help them find hope.

Transactional vs. Transformational

If your church does not have a plan to grow generous disciples, then you will always struggle with this one. Pastors tend to see the offering and financial report as a transaction. We need the resources to fulfill the budget which includes salaries, programming, and facility maintenance. As long as those resources are coming in and the church is staying in positive cash flow, all is good. That Monday morning e-mail detailing the offering can either put a spring in your step or drop a beat in your heart.

However, if you have a discipleship plan for growing generosity in believers for the benefit of their lives and families, you will have some other metrics to consider besides just revenue. The stress a church budget feels can be solved easily enough by adjusting expenses, however, that has nothing to do with helping people thrive in God's generosity dream for their lives. Church money can be going well, but that does not mean that people are thriving in the generous life God desires for them. Try not to let church money get in the way of generosity.

Need vs. Impact

When churches lack confidence on how to talk about money, they typically resort to silence. Until, of course, a need arises, then a leader has to become a fundraiser overnight. Because financial needs arise periodically, the pattern of silence to need, silence to need, need to silence, creates a powerful culture. Churches are mostly silent on money because they are seeking to avoid a negative culture. But the vacuum of a positive language actually becomes dangerous.

Sometimes churches will gloss over the need with a new, enhanced vision. However, this repeated process can leave people with more distrust. It is extremely important to clearly state the impact of giving. It needs to be obvious and measurable. Speak frequently about the difference a dollar and giver are making in the lives of real people in your ministry, community, and around the world. Preview a few websites of non-profit organizations to see how well some speak of impact versus organizational need.

Here's a little test to help you evaluate your money language and the potential health of your generosity culture:

1. What is your urgency factor to receive the weekly financial report and how does it make or break your day?

How often does it cause you to send a responsive email, have a conversation, or lead you to click delete as fast as you can?

2. When is money discussed in your staff meeting? Describe the language used in comparison to the categories above.

3. Evaluate the last time you taught your staff, leadership, and congregation on money. In each setting, which category above best describes the language type you used?

4. Evaluate your worship guide/church bulletin, offering time and prayer, and

common weekend worship experiences related to money. Which language type above would a guest say that they most likely experienced?

5. Preview your website -- especially your giving page. What type of language does it use?

6. Given what you have learned, create a simple action step for yourself personally.

"For the next 30 days I am going to strive to speak... (pick one)
-more toward the individual and less about the church.
-more toward the promise and less toward guilt.
-more toward transformation and less toward transaction.
-more toward the impact and less about the need."

Notes