

Discover the 'New Wineskin' for Men's Discipleship

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Why did the Hindenburg explode? Strategy Professor Richard Rumelt noted that no one had ever asked the important design question: "Does it make any sense to have people riding in a gondola, strapped to a giant sack of flammable hydrogen gas?"

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The 'Old Wineskin' of Men's Ministry

"Men's ministry" has become the Hindenburg of the contemporary church.

Let's say you attend a church with 100 men. After years of diligently promoting men's ministry, you have eight men who meet in a small group early on Wednesday mornings. Another twelve men get together one Saturday each month for breakfast followed by a service project. That's a total of 18 men in your "men's ministry"—and that's after many years of sweat and tears. But you're feeling pretty good about it, so you check "men's ministry" off your To Do List.

What's wrong with this picture? It's simple. What about the other 82 men?

The whole concept of traditional men's ministry has a fatal design flaw. It's simply this: only a small percentage of your men are ever going to join a ministry that is for "men only." Even if you're the greatest promoter since P. T. Barnum, you're still never going to twist enough arms to get more than, say, 20 to 30 percent of your men into a traditional "men's only" ministry.

But the church is filled with other men—some of whom don't "get it," and others who do.

First, the church is filled with men who don't "get it." They're the ones who slip through the cracks. You'll just never get them to attend the men's only events, and the church has no other strategy to effectively disciple them. Occasionally one of them, like the Hindenburg, dramatically bursts into flames and becomes the talk of the town. But most just flounder, quietly drifting along in spiritual apathy. Literally millions of men have not become passionate disciples of Christ simply because they were left behind.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the church is filled with men who do "get it." These are men who are passionate about loving and serving Christ in the homes, church, and work. They're already teaching the middle school boys, driving the church bus, serving as deacons or elders, doing "fix it"

chores for widows, leading a couples' small group, singing in the choir, coaching youth soccer, ushering, or you name it.

Do we really want to be telling these men they aren't part of our "men's ministry"? They're exactly the kind of men we're trying to produce; yet we make them feel shunned because they won't participate in our "men's only" activities.

The era of "men's ministry" as an activity off to the side of the church is an "old wineskin." This kind of traditional "men's ministry" is a system perfectly designed to disciple less than 20 percent of your men.

The 'New Wineskin' of Ministry to Men

Stephen Jobs' success has always been "waiting for the next big thing." Here's the next big thing for your men.

Develop an *all-inclusive mindset*. Traditionally, when asked, "How many men are in your men's ministry?" a pastor might respond, "Eighteen." The all-inclusive mindset would say, "If we have 100 men in our church, then the size of our men's ministry is 100."

Help your leaders see that everything your church does that touches men is "men's ministry," from the worship service to ushering to helping in the kitchen. An all-inclusive ministry to men makes disciples of men right where they are. For example, you don't need your male Sunday school teachers to join a separate men's ministry. Instead, have them gather 30 minutes early once a month to discuss the challenges of being a male Sunday school teacher.

Leaders across America have discovered that in celebrating their "men's ministry" success to disciple a few men well, they have disguised that the majority of men are slipping through the cracks.

The vast majority of men in the church are not leading

powerful lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The National Coalition of Men's Ministries, founded in 1996, changed its name to the National Coalition of Ministries to Men. They recognized that the term *men's ministry* is an "old wineskin."

The traditional definition of men's ministry was "activity that happens when men are by themselves," such as a Saturday morning breakfast or a weekend retreat. Those activities certainly are part of men's ministry, but they don't include men who serve in other ways in your church, such as worship or sports activities with kids. Stop using the phrase "men's ministry;" instead, using an all-inclusive mindset, include all your men by talking about your "ministry to men."

Why did we ever think that more than a fraction of our men would be interested in "men's only" ministries? Men are busy and committed elsewhere with their children, spouses, careers. Don't let them slip through the cracks; include all the men in your church.

Suggested Applications

Gather your leaders and answer these four questions....

- What are the most meaningful ways men are already involved in our church, whether they are men's only activities or not?
- For the men in question #1, have we thought of these men as outsiders, or part of our ministry to men?
- What is a name we can give to "all" our men? Develop a new vocabulary to talk about what God is doing through all the men in your church. We'd suggest you drop the term "men's ministry" altogether and replace it with a name and slogan for your men.

Here are some examples that capture the all-inclusive concept:

1. First Men: No Man Left Behind
2. Real Men: Whatever It Takes
3. Kingdom Men: Training Men for the Battle

This way you can describe how God is at work through men in every area of your church. For example, your pastor could say from the front, “We’d like to thank the Iron Men who work with our elementary school children every Sunday morning—they do a great job.”

This goes a long way in communicating to all your men that they are all in this thing together. It will take a few years to convince all the men, but eventually they will see that you really are “for them” in however they decide to connect and serve.

What are some practical ways we can build an all-inclusive mindset in our church? For example, at your next new member’s weekend, have at least one member of your leadership team go and meet all the men and invite them to take a next step.

The new wineskin is the all-inclusive mindset: However many men we have in our church, that’s the size of our ministry to men. The key question is whether or not we are doing a good job to disciple them right where they are.

Pat Morley is the Founder and CEO of Man in the Mirror. After building one of Florida’s 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded Man in the Mirror, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of The Man in the Mirror, No Man Left Behind, Dad in the Mirror, and A Man’s Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines.