

How Nehemiah's Code Applies Today

For decades it was my privilege to pastor some wonderful churches. Every pastor I know—from those pastoring small churches out at the crossroads to pastors of some of our nation's largest congregations—has observed the same thing I did in the pastorate: There are plenty of jobs a pastor can do full time.

He could spend all of his time studying to preach and teach God's word. Finding time to prepare to preach on Sunday morning, and still in many churches on Sunday night, plus a Wednesday night Bible study and perhaps a men's breakfast, plus funerals and weddings—that alone can be a full-time job. Ministering to those in need of comfort and care could be a full-time job, especially for those men serving churches with hundreds or thousands of members. Counseling those who are troubled, confused or seeking direction could easily fill up a weekly calendar. Administering a multimillion-dollar budget and directing a staff of scores of people can be a full-time job.

I have observed some pastors who are so overwhelmed that they begin to dictate to others. I have known others who simply abdicated their place of leadership. The wise leader—whether in the church, home or business—is the one who learns the art of delegation—rather than abdication or dictation—and puts it into practice, who knows how to let things go to other people, but who doesn't let up on the accountability factor.

Nehemiah faced an enormous task: The walls of Jerusalem were crumbled. The book opens with Nehemiah inquiring of the survivors from Jerusalem, and he is told, "Also, the wall of Jerusalem remains broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire" (Neh 1:3b). Nehemiah received permission to leave

Persia, to travel to Jerusalem and to rebuild the walls, to heal it of its reproach.

Your Bible records that he was successful and did so in only 52 days! There was no way, though, he could have done it all on his own. He delegated! Nehemiah left us a stellar example to follow by laying out five important principles that are essential to the delegation process: Set clear objectives with specific tasks, pick the right person for the right job, be an example yourself, hold others accountable and be generous in giving genuine pats on the back.

He had an enormous task; the wall had been lying in rubble for decades. This was no time to bark orders, nor was it time to abdicate and leave the work for someone else to finish later. It had to be done.

Set clear objectives with specific tasks. Nehemiah was laser-focused on his goal of rebuilding the broken wall and burned-down gates of Jerusalem. Each worker knew exactly where he was to be along the wall, what was to be done and what was expected of him. Without these first tasks, there was little hope of completion.

Pick the right person for the right job. A lot of walls have never been rebuilt because some leader somewhere picked the wrong person for the right job or the right person for the wrong job. Nehemiah had a knack for picking the right people. In Nehemiah 3, we see him putting workers near their own homes—do you think they had an incentive to do a good job near their own dwellings? They had a personal interest in the detail of the work. Some had the task of removing rubbish; others were busy cutting stones. Everyone had a job, and they had the right job.

Be an example yourself. Wise leaders know that they will never get people to follow their lead in the rebuilding process unless they lead by example themselves. Nehemiah was right

there beside them, sweating and working as diligently as any of them. In Nehemiah 4, we see proof of this when he says, "Neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes" (v. 23). If we want others to follow our lead, then we must lead by example.

Hold people accountable. Talk about holding people accountable for their assigned task! Nehemiah knew who worked next to whom and where each of them worked. He knew who did the work, and he also knew who didn't do the work. He recorded for all posterity that "the Tekoites made repairs; but their noblemen would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord" (Neh. 3:5). He also took note of those who went above and beyond the call of duty, and he recorded those who "repaired another section" (3:27n). If we're going to succeed in delegation, we must hold people accountable. Many do not succeed in delegation because accountability is a lost word in our vocabulary. Yet most of what fails in our life does so because of neglect. No accountability. If accountability is good for cars and homes and our physical needs, then it is essential in the process of rebuilding.

Give a genuine pat on the back. There is no greater motivation for those to whom a task is delegated than to hear a word of genuine appreciation, affirmation and encouragement from their leader. Unfortunately, we are living in a day of increasing depersonalization and nonverbal communication. With the advent of texts, emails and social media, we simply don't talk to one another as much anymore. Most of us have become nothing more than a Social Security number to the government, a statistic to the Census Bureau. But Nehemiah shows us the power of taking personal interest in those individuals on our team, in our home, at our office or wherever we may be. You see him recording names where people did a particular job. He treated his co-workers with respect; he knew them and called them by name. He let them know they had worth.

Nehemiah demonstrates what a true delegator does. We all must

do that if we're on a journey of rebuilding. Many people who start out with big dreams of rebuilding never see their wall completed because they have never discovered the art of delegation. Nehemiah did and he learned, as we all can, that it's never too late for a new beginning!

NOTE: *Excerpts in this article are taken from the new Thomas Nelson book The Nehemiah Code: It's Never Too Late for a New Beginning by O.S. Hawkins, author of the Code Series of devotionals. All author's royalties and proceeds from The Nehemiah Code and all books in the Code Series go to Mission: Dignity®, supporting retired pastors and their widows in need in their declining years. Find information on The Nehemiah Code and other books by O.S. Hawkins by visiting . Follow him on twitter @OSHawkins.*