**Co-laboring & Agility**

Disability Concerns Leadership Training Event

Vinnie Adams and Dan Vander Plaats

**INTRODUCTION: WHY DO CHURCHES NEED AGILITY?**

* Agility is demanded of people with disabilities. But in order to ensure that “everyone belongs,” we can’t be the only agile ones. We have to help our churches be agile too.
* That’s why you are all here. The agility you already practice, combined with the agility we can help you share with your churches, can ensure that everyone belongs and everyone serves.
* Within [The 5 Stages](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qzQkSKDZIM3YvXD7VGgb6OkqK-HE1Qcn/view?usp=sharing) agility is required to function at Stages 4 and 5 (Friendship and Co-laborers)
* There are three enemies that stand in the way of church agility:

**ENEMY #1: GETTING STUCK IN “MINISTRY-*TO*” INSTEAD OF MINISTRY-WITH OR MINISTRY-BY**

* Getting stuck at stage 3: Care
* If you look / think / sound / smell / act like me, then we can be in community. If you don’t, there are 4 possibilities - ignorance, enmity, **charity**, or kingdom-possibilities.
* Another thing that trips us up… the **language** used isn’t “ministry-to” as much as it is “ministry-for” (e.g. We need a ministry for this)
* Finally, "ministry-to" is **easier**.

*What help can we finds to defeat this enemy?*

* Language matters - get in the habit of using the term “ministry with”
* What bridges the gap from stage 3 to 5? Friendship, reciprocal relationship where we value each other. The best thing we can facilitate is relationships - let this be the foundation of strategy and programming.
* **Avoid the pendulum**: as we talk about the difference between stage 3 and 5, realize that "ministry-to” and “care" is still super important! It’s just not the end goal.

**ENEMY #2: DISABILITY MINISTRY AS AN END INSTEAD OF THE MEANS**

* We lack holistic vision. "we just need an advocate, a leader, a ministry, a group, etc.”
* Once a ministry/advocate/committee is empowered, everything disability-related is now “their” issue, as opposed to the issue of the church.
* Once we start initiatives, we realize that the culture we’re trying to influence is a lot more rigid than we thought, and we start “building up our silos” as opposed to breaking down walls. “If you want to run fast, run alone. If you want to run far, run together.”
* In other words, siloed ministry is **easier**. It lets us check a box on a list and move on. But the church needs something more in order for it to be the church.

*What help can we finds to defeat this enemy?*

* Have a bigger vision! Use the 5 stages, and pin stage 5
* Talk less about the means, talk more about the ends-focus on the goal while you are on the journey. It doesn’t mean that time isn’t spent more on means, but your conversations (especially to the rest of the church) should be about the end in mind. You need to train your church to be agile.
* **Avoid the** **pendulum**: you still need strategy and means! Vision without strategy leaves you nothing but a couple of nice words on a piece of paper.

**ENEMY #3: BEING SATISFIED**

* All of this leads to a false sense of “arrival.” *E.g. Look at how many folks are in our friendship group! Look at the families we’re reaching! Look at all our volunteers!*
* The 5 stages initially helps us assess our attitudes generally, but it also helps us assess how we look at individual people. You can be at different stages with different people.
* Stage 5 requires constant agility - (1) individually and (2) as church communities.

*What help can we finds to defeat this enemy?*

* Constantly ask "what could be better?” (Jeff McNair, Joni and Friends). Doing so accomplishes two things - it allows us to celebrate how far we’ve come but simultaneously recognize that we always have more to do.
* Practice the disciplines of reading and researching, learning from others, conversing about what you are doing with others and receiving feedback. And certainly, do not neglect prayer for your work as an advocate, for your church to be the church.
* **Avoid the** **pendulum**: don’t beat yourself up and make sure to celebrate along the way! Just remember that the journey doesn’t end until Jesus comes back.

**CONCLUSION:**

* This isn’t about disability ministry, this is about the gospel. Our churches too often believe that stopping to include people with disabilities will slow down the gospel. To the contrary, doing so helps us reflect the body of Christ, and amplifies our gospel witness to the world. *We include because it gives God glory!*
* We need churches to be agile. To fail at agility means a muting of our gospel witness because we do not reflect his kingdom. Here are some things to avoid:
	+ Doing church the way we’ve always done it is not our goal. Leaders and voices that perpetuate the status quo is not our goal.
	+ Social justice is not our goal. The gospel of the kingdom is our goal, and any justice that proclaims the gospel can and ought to be our goal.
	+ Affirming voices that have not been heard is our goal, but not so that they can be heard, but so that God’s kingdom might advance because they are being heard.
	+ A word of caution: as great as our work is, it can become a stumbling block of pride - that we know better or are better than those who do not include. Conflating the cause of people with disabilities and the Kingdom of God can present hazards to our work as churches and church members.
* A church that is agile is marked by these characteristics:
	+ They seek to *INCLUDE* everyone as part of the body (seeing needs as necessities)
	+ They *HEAR* from everyone in the body so that they can respond, because they don’t see differences as deficiencies
	+ They are *LED* by people who have been on the margins, who have been oppressed or left out
	+ They are not doing these things to be relevant, or on the leading edge, or even because they are seeking justice, but because they *SEEK TO BE FAITHFUL* to God. They seek justice because it glorifies god

**FINAL WORDS:**

* A church that is faithful to the gospel is including and being led and served by, people with disabilities.
* People with disabilities, and their advocates, who are agile are seeking to give themselves to the Kingdom work of the church so that God’s name might be lifted up and glorified.
* Let’s be agile together.

**OTHER RESOURCES:** [The 5 Stages website](http://www.the5stages.com/) | [Video presenting The 5 Stages](http://www.the5stages.com/resources/videos-2/) |
[Translations of The 5 Stages](http://www.the5stages.com/resources/translations/) | [The 5 Stages Booklet](https://www.amazon.com/Changing-Attitudes-About-Disability-Disabilities/dp/1940567238/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=changing+attitudes+about+disability&qid=1596818386&sr=8-1)