



DEFINING MOMENTS

Process Tool

Managing Change

Summary

About a year ago, Willow Creek Community Church made a major transition as the leaders decided to change the format of the midweek service, called New Community. In this edition of *Defining Moments*, senior pastor Bill Hybels, executive pastor Greg Hawkins, the leader of this transition, Leanne Mellado, and host Nancy Beach talk about the change process they went through and identify transferable principles to help church leaders navigate significant changes.

Outline

I. The Origins of New Community

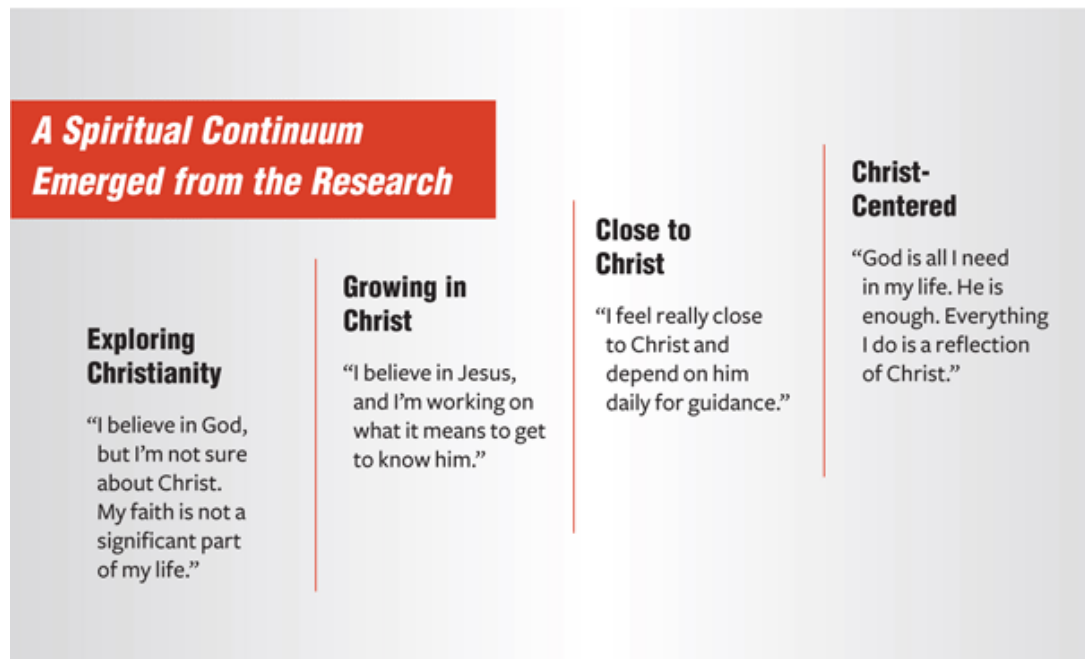
- A. The original vision for New Community came during Willow's theater days.
 1. It developed out of the growing appetite of the congregation for more learning, fellowship, and a sense of being the core of the church.
 2. They began to rent a place on Wednesday nights where they could gather and worship.
 - a. There, Bill would talk about things going on at the heart of their church that he wouldn't want to talk about on the weekends with all the guests there.
 - b. Then, there would be 30 or 40 minutes of Bible teaching.
 3. It wasn't a program that the church leadership decided to put on — it was an uprising of people who wanted more than what was being offered on weekends.
- B. At the beginning, it was just the core leadership.
 1. When the church was running 500 or 600 people, they had 30 to 50 people in the midweek service.
 2. Even as the weekend services started to go to several thousand in attendance, it still took at least 10 years before the midweek service grew to about 1,000.
- C. When attendance hit 1,000, they started to realize that these attenders were their core, and the midweek service was where they could do most of their equipping and training.
 1. They decided to make the service a priority.
 2. They began to offer communion only at the midweek service.

II. Identifying the Need for Change

- A. Several factors caused Willow's leadership to consider changing the way they did Wednesday nights.
 1. Attendance at New Community peaked around the year 2000 and then it started to decline.

- a. The teaching and worship hadn't really changed.
 - b. They knew that families were having difficulty getting out and getting childcare in the middle of the week.
 - c. The congregation was also aging and had kids who had homework to do on weeknights.
 - d. The leadership saw these dynamics but still felt that New Community was a powerful thing.
 2. They surveyed the congregation in 2004 and again in 2007 to understand the impact of the service on attenders' spiritual growth.
 - a. With that new information to wrestle with, it became clear that their congregation had matured.
 - b. There were folks who were still early in their journey with Christ, and some were very deep into a relationship with Christ.
 - c. The midweek service offered only one teaching, and the leaders consistently found that they weren't "wowing" everyone.
 - d. The quality of teaching was excellent, but the people's spiritual needs were different in each stage.
 3. They knew they couldn't count on the midweek service to lead the core anymore, so they had to find a different way to do that.
- B. Even given the data, changing New Community wasn't a no-brainer.
1. New Community was the "holiest" thing at Willow — the sacred cow.
 2. Whenever a leader is thinking about messing with the thing that their truly committed people have the strongest sentiments about — something that's run without interruption or major change for three decades — that's not a no-brainer.
 3. As the leadership team started considering morphing New Community, Bill knew it had to be an airtight, clean change, or they were going to create so many disappointed people.
- C. One common mistake senior leaders tend to make is not assessing the risk factors of the change.
1. What Willow got right in this change is that they realized it was going to stir deep emotion.
 2. Where pastors and leaders usually have their deepest regrets is when they say in hindsight that they didn't think a change was going to affect their organization as much as it did, so they ran through it too quickly.
 3. Willow's leadership knew that this was going to be one of the biggest changes they were ever going to bring to their church, and they needed to move slowly and methodically.
 4. They knew that what mattered to those core attenders was their ongoing learning and immersion in the Word of God and the chance to worship.
 5. They had to understand that it's not just talking those people out of something that's important to them, it's saying how those needs are going to be addressed moving forward.
 6. Beyond just knowing where you're at, you really need to know where you want to end up.
 7. Communicate the preferred future rather than just apologizing for the change — inspire them for something else.

8. When you know what they need and want, then when you envision that future, you're trying to show that where you're heading is going to have value to them.
 9. Because of the data and anecdotal evidence Willow's leaders had, they had great confidence that they were addressing the right issues.
- D. Leanne was identified as the point leader to execute a transition from one service to multiple classes.
1. Bill's charge to Leanne was that they needed to hit a broader spectrum of believers.
 2. They wanted to catalyze movement along the spiritual spectrum, and they wanted people to take responsibility for their spiritual growth.
 3. They wanted to give them tools by which they could learn to choose what was right for them in their spiritual journey.
- E. The need to hit a broader spectrum of believers came directly out of the REVEAL findings.



1. Those at different stages have different needs.
 - a. Those exploring Christianity want to understand the Bible at a basic level, and there are some basic theological issues to wrestle with early on.
 - b. For those growing in Christ, there are some foundational practices that need to be embedded into their lives, such as prayer and studying the Bible on their own.
 - c. For those who are close to Christ and becoming Christ-centered, their appetite for the Word of God grows even deeper, and they want life application.
2. Willow's leaders wanted to position the midweek classes with language that would speak to people based on where they were in their journey.
3. The classes needed to have a high quality of delivery, because that's what the congregation was used to receiving at the midweek service.
4. The leaders communicated that they believed the changes would serve the congregation's spiritual development desires better than the current format.

5. The congregation had enough trust in the leaders that they were willing to give it a try.
6. The leaders also told the congregation that if this didn't work, they will be open to returning to what they used to do or making other modification.
7. The spirit was that the leaders wanted to serve the people better, not make it more convenient for the staff.

III. Anticipating the Ripple Effects

- A. One of the lessons you learn when you're changing anything of substance in an organization is that it redefines three or four other things in the organization.
- B. You never change one big thing without it having a chain reaction all through the organization.
- C. Before they went to the class format, they realized people were going to come to the weekend services with a little different set of expectations.
 1. They had to get their heads around that very rapidly, or they would give back ground on the weekends while they were making advances at the midweek.
 2. It was a challenging six-month period in which the expectations of people for weekend services changed, and the leaders didn't know how to meet those expectations because they'd never done it a different way before.
 3. They had to be in experimentation and feedback mode and take some bold moves.
- D. You have to think about the ripple effects before you launch a change.
 1. Don't do the primary thing and then say "oops" as you see the other effects.
 2. Count the cost of all that has to be done to make this change, including all the ripples.
- A. It quickly became obvious that Willow was old enough to have traditions, and having great worship on Wednesday nights was a well-established tradition.
 1. When they knew they wanted to go to this university model, they knew the emphasis was going to be on the classes, but they didn't want to make that change without at least taking into account the impact on the congregation.
 2. They sent out a survey and proposed worship options, so the people would know they were listening to them.
 3. By allowing the congregation to feel they had a part in the decision, they were able to make some choices that allowed for worship but also put the emphasis on the classes themselves.
 4. Had they not gone that extra step to listen and provide a 30-minute worship opportunity, that would have been a huge mistake.
 5. Their initial plan didn't call for weekly worship — perhaps a once-a-month worship format — but when they listened to the congregation, the desire for worship came out very strongly.
 6. They opted not to throw two huge changes at people — changing to the university format *and* taking away the worship experience.
 7. In hindsight, that was a bigger deal than they had anticipated, and the decision to continue having worship was critical for this change to work as well as it did.
 8. They also listed the worship experience as optional, so it wasn't like a new extended New Community format — just an optional worship experience before the classes.
 9. As it's played out, a lot of people do show up just for the classes, and others are still very devoted to the worship time.

IV. Logistics & Budgeting

- A. One of Leanne's huge tasks was to set up systems capable of handling all of the logistics of these classes.
 - 1. They had one shot to launch these classes and they knew they needed to hit it strong.
 - 2. They didn't want to reinvent the wheel on these systems.
 - a. They had enough resources around them that they could pull people in and learn from them.
 - b. Incorporating those learnings made life much easier.
 - c. They had a short period of time to do this, so efficiency was key.
 - d. At the same time, they needed to make a high-quality system that would deliver what it needed to and not frustrate the people trying to use it.
- B. This was an expensive change, because they were going from one teacher and one worship leader for one midweek service to having around 15 teachers doing 15 different classes in 15 different rooms.
 - 1. They hadn't had this change factored into the budget because it came midyear, but they had a donor who gave a substantial gift.
 - 2. Bill is not sure they would have done it if God had not tapped that donor on the shoulder.
 - 3. Bill has heard many stories from pastors who felt God was asking them to make a change, but not all the funding was there, and it's uncanny how many times when they take a step of faith to do the right thing, there will be a resource miracle.

V. Communicating the Change

- A. Once they counted the cost and knew the components involved with this change, it was clear that this was going to affect some people's jobs and volunteer roles.
 - 1. They met with the small team who was involved in planning the midweek services and included them in thinking about the change — not just telling them about it.
 - 2. With any change like this, you want to get in front of the most affected constituents as quickly as possible to include them in the process and get feedback.
 - 3. Given the magnitude of this change, Bill needed to be involved in those communications, because those people needed to know they weren't casually going into this.
 - 4. Concentric circles of communication moved out from the most affected to the rest of the staff so they would understand and be equipped to answer the questions that would come their way.
 - 5. Then, the communication had to go to the congregation, first to the people who attended the midweek service, because they were the most affected.
 - 6. You have to think through major changes and honor people's process, instead of one day making an announcement.
- B. The senior pastor is usually the voice of change, the one who needs to explain it to the widest circle.
 - 1. When pastors have been around for more than 10 or 15 years, and they've absorbed some of the price of having to bring change, there's a small voice that makes them want to duck these things and let someone else be the fall-guy.
 - 2. When change reaches a certain magnitude in the congregation, people have to hear from the senior pastor.

3. Bill had to be the one to do it, and it was going to take the best vision talk he could possibly put together.
4. He built the talk and ran it by the team to make sure he was covering all the key elements, and they helped him fill in the places where he had overlooked something.
5. Bill wanted the team in the front row when he gave his talk.
6. By the time Bill's talk was over, they knew the congregation was mature enough and they had build a case strong enough that the people were at least willing to try the change.
7. When you're standing in front of people trying to bring change, you know if you're going down or if this change has possibilities.
8. Bill remembers being partway through the talk and thinking that God was giving them the opportunity to make this thing fly.
9. When you're bringing change, you have to search your heart and decide if you're selling something you believe in or not.
10. Bill knew in his heart that this was the best thing for the church.
11. The people read his heart and honored the spirit of trust built up over the years.

VI. Preparing for Pushback

- A. Their best preparation was sending Bill out to lead the charge, but beyond that, they had to deliver a quality product.
- B. They also had to be prepared to hear negative feedback and greet it with kindness and gentleness and help people through it.
- C. There was a backlash, probably more so in the beginning, but not as much as could have been expected.
- D. A lot of people who had been around for a long time were used to New Community the way it was, and they felt a loss.
- E. If you wait to bring a change until you get 100 percent buy-in, you'll never bring change.
 1. You have to get used to that.
 2. Even if you have the best idea, process, persuasion talk, and prayers, there's always a percentage of people who won't like it.
 3. Bill usually thinks of it as about 5 percent.
 4. For those people, it's not about the merit of the idea but that they've had some other things change too much in their lives, and they want some things in their lives to never change.
 5. When Bill teaches on change management, he always tells a story of when they were doing a lot of changes back in the 1980s.
 - a. He held a meeting for anyone who couldn't get on board with the changes.
 - b. There were maybe 50 people who showed up.
 - c. The whole first hour Bill sat there and fielded questions, and then said that if anyone no longer had questions, they could go.
 - d. Two-thirds of the people left, and then he did another round of questions.
 - e. After that round, there was one guy named Jim left.
 - f. Bill asked him if there was any shot that he was going to get on board with the change.
 - g. Jim kept saying that it was just too much change — it just freaked him out.
 - h. Bill apologized that they had gone past his comfort zone, but then he said that they were going to go ahead with the change.

- i. Bill wants a unanimous vote all the time, and he's disappointed if he can't get everybody on board.
 - j. As he drove home, he realized, however, that there are always going to be several Jims who can't get on board.
 - k. You can't surrender leadership to them, but you do have to listen and try to convince them.
 - l. Jim stayed around, and a couple years later, he was fine with how things were.
- F. When Willow did a capital campaign in 2000, as the leaders began to take the vision to the next ring of people, they started getting pushback.
 - 1. Their consultant assured them that it was normal.
 - 2. He told them that every time a change goes out to the next layer of people affected, you will get pushback and then you have a crisis of faith in your idea.
 - 3. What's really happening is that those people need to go through their own process of ownership, and if you give them enough time to process, most of the pushback goes away.
 - 4. If you find that it's not going away, then you may realize that you've missed some things.
- G. Pushback will always be part of the process, so our job is to equip the person who's going to take the idea to the next layer to be prepared for the pushback.
 - 1. Make it normative that you're going to get pushback — while staying open to learning and adjustments.
 - 2. It's unrealistic for senior leaders who have spent months wrestling with something and deciding on a course of action to expect other people to immediately get it and get on board.
 - 3. If it took three months for the most committed people (who think about these issues every day and whose jobs depend on it) to decide, what's the right expectation of time to allow the next ring of people to process it?
- H. If you do something major and there's no pushback, it could be a bad sign.
 - 1. The people may be ambivalent and don't care.
 - 2. Or, the pushback could be going underground and they're being passive aggressive.

II. Timing a Change

- A. To decide if a change can be made, Bill has to assess if he has what it takes to climb that hill during that season given everything he's juggling in his life at that time.
- B. He has to manage his energy — that's an important rule of self-leadership.
- C. You have to know yourself.
- D. When are the seasons of the year when you are freshest?
- E. Those seasons would be a good time to take a big hill.

VII. Initial Response to the Change

- A. They wanted it to be easy for people to choose their classes, so they divided them into four categories from beginner to advanced.
- B. They were surprised at the response — 2,200 signed up and 2,500 showed up.
- C. They learned quite a bit that first night, and so did the congregation.
- D. The congregation was used to just going in and listening to a service.

- E. Because of room capacities, the congregation had to be transitioned into understanding the need to register, the importance of showing up, and taking responsibility for getting the class materials.
- F. When Greg saw the numbers, it confirmed for him that they were in touch with the need and had offered what was needed in a way the people were asking for.
- G. Leanne and her team also created online learning experiences that made the on-campus classes available to anyone anywhere, and some people were actually relieved that they didn't have to drive to the church campus anymore.
 - 1. Bill felt they had removed a sort of unhealthy guilt that some of the congregation was carrying, thinking that something was wrong with them spiritually if they missed a New Community.
 - 2. When they moved to the new format, they said publicly that all guilt was removed if people's lives did not allow for them to come to campus on Wednesday nights.
 - 3. People could access the learning wherever they were.

VIII. Measuring Success

- A. Success is when the intention of the change produces the effect or deliverable you had in mind.
- B. Bill's hope was that they would get feedback from people months later saying how grateful they were that this learning was available and that they would never want to go back to the old way.
- C. There's a hunger for God in this church, and the leaders had delivered on that too narrowly for too many years.
- D. Once they opened that up and offered the variety, they tapped into something that's really powerful in producing spiritual growth in the church.
- E. It's less about how many people have attended and more about what the results of the next REVEAL survey will show about people's spiritual growth.
 - 1. REVEAL helped them understand the situation and the quantitative change they wanted to see.
 - 2. The results they're starting to collect from the latest survey are incredibly encouraging.
 - 3. People in all four major segments of the spiritual journey are saying that they are increasingly satisfied with the role the church is playing in their growth and development.
 - 4. The group of Christ-centered people who were the most dissatisfied with the church and felt that the church wasn't helping them go deeper are now the group with the highest satisfaction.
 - 5. People are in love with the Scriptures and the leaders are hearing more enthusiastic stories than ever.

IX. Four Tips for Big Changes

- A. Anticipate the needs of the people and listen to them.
- B. Learn along the way.
- C. Deliver what you promised.
- D. Don't reinvent the wheel if you don't have to.

X. Facts Are Friends

- A. Willow's leaders have worked so hard over the years to really understand what was going on in the congregation and what was working and what wasn't.
- B. Because of REVEAL, they have very different conversations these days, and previous eras feel like the dark ages.
- C. They have such clarity that is now being proven as they've implemented changes like the classes and seen the effect on the congregation.
 - 1. People are feeling more challenged by the church.
 - 2. They are understanding the Bible in greater ways.
 - 3. Their personal relationship with Christ is more nurtured.
 - 4. They are grateful to the church for the efforts the leaders are making on their behalf.
- D. REVEAL has streamlined decision making and made it easier for them to make some of these bolder changes.
- E. They are making changes with more confidence and as they design the changes they know they can nuance the change to make sure it really is meeting the needs that they know can help someone accelerate their spiritual growth.
- F. Facts are your friend.
 - 1. They may be startling, and they may unmask something that's going to break your heart.
 - 2. Facts don't always feel friendly, because they can be devastating.
 - 3. Hopefully you get past that and start rolling up your sleeves, because under the loving rule of God and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, you must be able to serve your people better than you have in the past.
 - 4. Willow is a couple of years into this, and having done another REVEAL survey, they can see the remarkable changes and what's going on in the congregation.
 - 5. When you can get feedback from your congregation in intelligent ways that help you develop this virtuous cycle of serving, reacting, serving differently and better, then you develop a community that is mobilizing people toward Christ-centeredness.
 - 6. We all want to see people far from God wind up being Christ-centered.
 - 7. It helps to know that you are getting better and that your efforts are worth it.

Process Questions

1. What is one insight or idea from this recording that particularly resonated with you? If you'd like, write your thoughts below.

2. Willow's leaders were aware that transitioning New Community would be a huge change for the congregation, so they were very thorough in their preparations. If you are contemplating a significant change in your church or ministry, pick two or three of the questions below and on the next page to start capturing your initial thoughts. (If you're not anticipating a major change, you can move on to the next question.)

What are the factors causing you to consider this change? (Declining attendance? Survey information?)

What do you see as the risk factors of this change? (Is a sacred cow involved?)

What ripple effects do you anticipate? (Implications for other ministries, staff, etc.?)

What logistical and budgeting issues do you need to consider? (Do you have to invent the wheel? Could a donation cover the cost?)

How will you communicate the change? (Does it need to come from the senior pastor?)

What pushback might you get, and how will you handle it? (Can you identify your "Jims"?)

Do you have the energy for this change right now? (When are the seasons of the year when you are freshest?)

How will you measure success? (Verbal feedback? Attendance? Surveys?)

3. The interview ended with discussion of the axiom "facts are friends."

a. How friendly do you think you are to facts and feedback about your ministry?

I resist hearing
facts and feedback.

I demonstrate an openness
to facts and feedback.



b. Based on what you heard in this session, are there any changes you'd like to make?