

What's your problem?

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When you begin to lead in an established role or institution, you will likely inherit both gifts and responsibilities. The gifts may include systems, structures and resources that were stewarded well by those who came before you. The new responsibilities will involve cultivating and sharing a vision that will outlast your tenure.

In addition to the gifts and responsibilities, you may also inherit problems you did not create — and perhaps a few you did not anticipate. Hopefully other leaders in the organization understand the challenges. Still, even under the best circumstances, dealing with inherited problems requires wisdom, skill and discernment.

When David became king of Israel, he inherited a divided kingdom. While there were many factors that created this political reality, none of the factors had to do with David's leadership. Today, in our own leadership contexts, only after we assume a new role will we understand the complexity of some of the challenges through which we must lead. If we make changes too quickly, people may resent the interventions that are supposed to make things better. The adage that says "seek to understand before you seek to be understood" is important to remember.

Should you inherit complex problems in a new church leadership role, resist the urge to rush toward a solution. Start by listening. Understand what people think about the issue, what solutions have been attempted in the past and how people feel about current options. With discernment and experimentation, you can chart a better course. No church is problem-free, but inherited problems require patience. They also demand humility, because we'll probably leave a few unresolved issues of our own for our successors.

New leaders and the organizations they serve often use the term “honeymoon period” to refer to the first several months on the job. During this period, you can do no wrong as a leader, and the organization appears to be doing everything right. As time passes, you may discover there are a few more problems than you anticipated. The finances need shoring up. The building needs maintenance. People aren’t as willing to volunteer as you thought they would be. But this is not the time for buyer’s remorse. This is the time to lead. This is the time to understand what God is calling you to do in your context.

Problems are everywhere. So even if you’re facing problems you did not create, embrace the opportunity. Perhaps God has called you for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).