

## Breakthrough Skills

Participants also increase their knowledge and skills in a number of practical areas of leadership. The Initiative is not about improving their skills as managers, but rather about their effectiveness as leaders. The focus of the knowledge and skill components of the curriculum is two-fold: to deepen participant understanding of effective leadership, and to challenge their thinking in key areas of personal and professional performance related to avoiding breakdown and achieving breakthrough. The major knowledge and skill components of the program are:

***Self-Assessment, Feedback, & Communication*** – Effective leaders know how to give – and receive – feedback. In Galatians 6:2-5 Paul instructed believers to create “safe space” for each other, to make possible the essential work of seeking the truth together in love. Participants are encouraged throughout the program to see and tell the truth together.

In the first local workshop, participants are introduced to a variety of instruments and methods for self-assessment. These include the popular DiSC® inventory (Personal Profile System), SLTi (Strategic Leadership Type Indicator – a leadership style inventory), and Richard Bolles’ self-assessment exercises from *What Color Is Your Parachute?* They also learn how to use a specially-designed ministry assessment model that

addresses key building blocks of success – strategy, capacity, and relationships. Throughout the program, participants practice using a wide range of communication tools, many based on the ground-breaking work of Harvard’s Dr. Chris Argyris. They become skilled at providing feedback to each other, as well as being able to engage in effective problem solving together.

### ***Community Youth Development***

– God is at work in our communities. Effective leaders are able to see not only the needs, but also the resources of their communities, and know how to engage those resources to build strong, healthy, self-supporting communities. Healthy communities are important to God. In the midst of Israel’s most disheartening time, the Babylonian exile, the prophet speaks a message of encouragement telling the exiles to build a strong and vibrant community where they are... Jer. 29:4-7. In this workshop, participants learn practical ways to disciple young people in their faith and encourage them to think of themselves as leaders who have influence with their peers, their families, and their neighbors.

The second local workshop is built around the work of John McKnight and James Lofquist and the research of the Search Institute. McKnight, a committed Christian, is a respected scholar and life-long activist, who has developed simple models that provide the foundation for much of today’s most effective community development work. Lofquist, also both

a researcher and practitioner, developed a practical framework for describing different program approaches along a continuum from individual betterment to community development. Using these models, participants create their own comprehensive map of community assets, identifying specific assets which can be linked to their ministry and personal growth, and identifying potential contacts through which partnerships can be built. The Search Institute, a non-profit research organization, identified 40 developmental assets or values that young people need in order to thrive. Using the 40 developmental assets as a foundation, participants gain insight into the implications of positive youth development. Participants explore the role of faith formation and ways to develop ministry strategies that create an atmosphere where young people can discover God’s purpose for their lives, grow in their faith, and engage as assets and leaders in their communities.

***Scenario Planning*** – Effective leaders recognize the importance of preparing for the future, especially in times of turbulent change and significant unknowns. Participants learn to use a unique planning approach to anticipate possible future challenges and opportunities, to increase their preparedness, and thus to build a strong foundation for the future. In ministry one can sometimes feel torn between planning for the future and simply stepping out in faith. At many points in scripture,

however, we are told to draw upon both our wisdom and our faith in order to realize all of the potential of the opportunities we encounter.

Scenario Planning, pioneered by Royal Dutch Shell and first described in Peter Schwarz's book, *The Art of the Long View*, is an alternative to traditional strategic planning. At the third local workshop, participants learn how to identify the big unknowns that could significantly impact their future – personal or ministry – and then explore a variety of plausible scenarios that could result from the most likely combinations of such large-scale shifts. This allows them to identify the early warning signs to look for in relation to these changes, develop action strategies to increase the likelihood of future success under a range of circumstances, and build capacity to improve their ability to respond effectively no matter what the future holds.

**Healthy Change** – effective leaders understand the importance of creating healthy change, which means balancing the demands of organizational change with the needs of individuals as they implement change. “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” Eccles. 3:1 (NIV) In the verses that follow, one can see the need to balance the competing priorities of the changes we want to make with the needs of those who are impacted by those changes. Because of the Initiative's unique design, participants experience change and transition firsthand.

Creating significant, sustainable, strategic change is at the core for breakthrough and is a focal point of each of the training events. The Second National Conference provides an in-depth introduction to Peter Senge's principles of systems thinking and organizational learning, and pulls together a number of important aspects of change that have been introduced along the way.

**Systems Thinking & Organizational Learning** – Effective leaders see the bigger picture, and find ways to solve interconnected problems at a systems level rather than reacting to isolated events. Participants learn to use the tools of systems thinking and organizational learning to accomplish strategic, significant, sustainable, change. As mentioned above, participants are introduced to Peter Senge's pioneering work in this area at the Second National Conference. They also learn about the other disciplines of the learning organization – personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, and team learning. Using *The Anatomy of Peace* by the Arbing Institute, participants explore their personal role and relationships in areas where they have influence within systems. Through a variety of case studies and simulations, participants examine common systems problems and identify high leverage interventions that can yield greater benefits to problem solving.

**Resource Networking** – Effective leaders are creative at finding and accessing the resources they need, often from otherwise

untapped sources. Participants learn how to assess their resource needs, identify potential sources, make their case, and build ongoing, mutually-beneficial resource partnerships.

Nehemiah provides a wonderful example of resource networking when he implores the king to arrange for the resources he will need to undertake the daunting task of rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem. Even though all resources belong to God, various people hold them. So, in order to access resources, you must somehow connect with these holders. In other words, you must build relationships. More and more, organizations are finding that long-term success requires the building and nurturing of strong, mutually-beneficial partnerships. Our work begins with a framework developed by the Community Service division of the Pittsburgh-based Mellon Bank which is outlined in their free resource, *Discover Total Resources*. In the fourth local workshop participants learn a variety of non-traditional approaches for identifying and accessing the resources they need to achieve their ministry goals through the development of resource networks.

**Collaboration** – Effective leaders are committed collaborators, recognizing that the ability to work together productively with other like-minded people can produce results that are clearly more than just the sum of the parts. Throughout the program, participants are challenged to seek opportunities to work together,

and learn how to engage others in a process that produces lasting benefits.

Given the scarcity of resources in relation to the enormity of the needs facing most ministries, collaboration would seem to be a natural solution but this is often not the reality. Paul made it clear, though, that anyone who is serious about doing the Lord's work must be committed to working closely with other believers... "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Eph. 4:3-6 (NIV)

At the fifth local workshop, participants are introduced to the Biblical call to unity through the book *Well Connected* by Phill Butler. They also explore the tools of the Wilder Foundation, one of today's leading sources of research-based models in the area of community collaboration. The foundation's *Collaboration Handbook* provides a practical overview of the whole process of planning, establishing, managing and transitioning successful collaborative initiatives. The reinforcement of this key building block is timed to coincide with the completion of each individual's Breakthrough Plan, which typically incorporates some level of collaboration as a key dimension of moving forward into the future.

*These breakthrough skills are complementary with the core values and together they become the "training wheels" that enable leaders to learn and practice new ways of leading. The breakthrough skills foster transformation by addressing the way participants conceive of change, resources, planning, and leadership. The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative delivers the knowledge for continuing innovation and learning which are key for leaders in the future.*