

THE POWER OF SABBATICAL

Rob Ribbe
Director, HoneyRock/Wheaton College

Goals of Session:

1. Building a case for a sabbatical
2. Setting it up for maximum impact
3. Insuring your ministry and team survive the exit and re-entry

My story:

- Ph.D. and a talk on the swing.
- From the chilly Northwoods of Wisconsin to the warmth of Columbia, South Carolina.
- From the woods to the city.
- From small to big.
- From busy to slow.
- From small Christian liberal arts college to large state university.
- From Free Church to Anglican Communion.
- From responsibility to rest.
- How my sabbatical started and almost ended in the same day.

Why a sabbatical is important?

1. Perspective: The power of transitions—changing scenery and settings and pace.
2. Pacing (versus Production)
3. Presence
4. Process (versus perfection)
5. Provision
6. Besides its biblical: Sabbath, Jubilee

Why not to take a sabbatical?

1. Escape or Avoid
2. Job search

The Mental/Spiritual gymnastics of leaving your job, ministry, and life for 3 to 6 to 9 months.

1. What will people think—especially the staff?
2. Must be expendable and certainly is replace-able.
3. What if interim does it better than me?
4. Will they miss me or be glad I'm gone?
5. What if I come back different? Will the culture allow me to change?
6. "Will you come back?"

Guiding Principles:

1. It's about LEAVING! Get out of Dodge!!!! Don't stay home!!!!
Separate...don't stay involved.

2. It's about LISTENING! Find a spiritual director and/or counselor...with your spouse.
3. It's about RECEIVING!
 - a. Let people bless you.
 - b. Vibrant loving church where can be ministered to.
 - c. Say NO to anything ministry or responsibility.
4. It's about RESTING!...RE-INVIGORATING your body, mind, soul and heart.

Logistics: Setting it up for maximum impact

1. Planting the seed...watering over time. 2-3 years in advance
2. God's vision and call—inline with rest of life and ministry.
3. Set a few very specific goals and build the sabbatical around them
 - a. Personal Renewal
 - b. Family Adventure: What do you guys want to do?
 - c. Professional Development
4. Financial planning:
 - a. Foundations
 - b. Ministry Budget
 - c. Fundraising
 - d. Personal Savings
5. Visit your sabbatical location with your family ahead of time...to find church, home and get kids acclimatized to new world.
6. Consider a family/sabbatical blog. Keeps your friends at home in touch. Have your ministry consider a blog.

Transitioning in and out of your ministry:

1. Count the cost
2. Work with board chair or wise, internally respected advisor (or 2 or 3) to identify pit-falls, problems, concerns, plans.
3. Identify an interim replacement at least a year in advance.
 - a. Talk openly about what they need.
 - b. Involve in on-going projects and processes and people that are critical to on-going operations.
 - c. Develop together a list of critical functions and must dos. It should be a short list.
 - d. Realize all the goals you'd seek to accomplish if you were there won't get done...nor should they.
 - e. Develop a "when it's okay to call me" list. Be available and willing.
4. Phase out and phase in?
5. Come back slow.
6. Expect change, re-organization, and expansion of your staff. Facilitate it.