Healthy Systems, Healthy Church

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“Nelson is not a theorist but a veteran church planter who has successfully planted a purpose-driven church. Listen and learn from this gifted man.”
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Lead Pastor, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA
Author of The Purpose Driven Church and The Purpose Driven Life

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Alan Nelson
Executive Editor, Rev! Magazine
Author of Me to We

“Nelson helps us partner with God in reaching our cities and seeing individuals take steps on their journey toward maturity in Christ.”
Bob Franquiz
Lead Pastor, Calvary Fellowship, Miami Lakes, FL
Nelson Searcy is the founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church, a multi-site, multi-cultural church with locations across New York City, including Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. With the majority of its growth coming from new believers, The Journey has been recognized as one of the fastest-growing and most innovative churches in America by Outreach Magazine. Through his coaching networks, Nelson has coached over 700 Pastors across the U.S. He is the author of numerous books and church-growth resources, as well as a coach, consultant and strategist.

Take Your Leadership and Your Church to the Next Level!

THE NELSON SEARCY COACHING NETWORK follows the outline of the nine Growth Barriers and eight Growth Systems as taught in Nelson Searcy’s books and workshops, and is customized according to the specific needs of those accepted.

To learn more, go to page 28 of this E-book, or visit ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Telecoaching
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Body Shop</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power of Systems</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eight Systems of The Church</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Weekend Service System</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evangelism System</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Assimilation System</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Small Groups System</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ministry System</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stewardship System</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Leadership System</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strategic System</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationship Factor</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you ever held a newborn baby? Have you counted tiny fingers and toes or watched a little chest move up and down, drawing breath for the first time? That baby may be a simple bundle of joy for his parents but, in reality, he’s also a bundle of something else. He is a bundle of perfectly formed, intricate systems that are already working together to keep him alive. Thanks to his tiny circulatory system, his heart is pumping blood through his veins. Thanks to his respiratory system, his lungs are taking in air. His digestive system is breaking down his mother’s milk from the very first drop and his muscular system is letting him wrap his tiny hand around his father’s finger. Even in a brand-new baby, each of these systems and others are fully developed, fully functioning and ready to grow with him as he starts his journey toward adulthood.

God must be into systems. He organized the universe with systems. He established the measurement of time through a system. And, from the beginning, He formed our bodies as a cohesive unit of systems. Adam and Eve – untouched and unblemished specimens of God’s craftsmanship – were compilations of the systems that caused them to function. They were perfect adult examples of that newborn baby. Without systems humming under the surface, they would not have been able to walk or even breathe. They wouldn’t have been able to experience the pleasures of the garden. Eve wouldn’t have been able to pluck the apple from the tree and Adam wouldn’t have been able to take the bite that set God’s redemptive plan into motion. Without their systems, they would have remained as unmolded lumps of clay, unable to fulfill the purposes of God. From the beginning, God has put systems to work, providing the mechanics and the platform through which He shows His greatness.
One more thing about Adam and Eve: what is it that we know about them for sure? What was the blueprint God used in creating them? Himself. Genesis affirms that God created man in his own image. Don’t miss this: God created beings that function through systems and said that they had been created in his own image. Yes, God is into systems.

Paul understood God’s affinity for systems. That’s why, in trying to help us wrap our minds around how the church should function, he compared the body of Christ to the human body. He aligned the design of the church with the functioning of our own different parts. In Romans, Paul writes, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Sounds remarkably like how God designed our physical bodies with systems, right? Go back and read the verse again substituting the word “systems” every time you see the word “members.” Makes perfect sense, doesn’t it?

And so it is with the church as it is with our own bodily systems. Can the endocrine system say to the nervous system, “Because I am not the nervous system, I am of no use?” Of course not. All the parts of the body – both the church body and the physical body – work together, allowing us to fulfill God’s purposes and plans on this earth. And both of those respective bodies function best through well-developed systems.
In the 1950s, the Japanese automotive industry was completely transformed by an American man named Edward Deming. Until just after World War II, few people knew who Deming was. An obscure professor at the University of Chicago, he spent a lot of time constructing and lecturing on ideas about quality measurement and control. Shortly after the end of the war, leaders in Japan’s automotive industry heard about Deming’s research and came to him for advice. They had a notion that the automobile could be Japan’s key to renewed prosperity and acclaim, but the industry was, at present, in shambles. To own a Japanese car was to own a dud. Something wasn’t working right. In the minds of the industry leaders, that “something” was their people.

Already convinced that their problem was the result of a disinterested and lazy workforce, the Japanese automotive top tier brought Deming in to conduct extensive research on how their cars moved from inception to final product. They wanted to know where the breakdowns were occurring and who, specifically, was responsible. So Deming commenced with a ten-year evaluation. His results were surprising. The industry leaders had it all wrong. They didn’t have a people problem at all. In fact, their employees were committed, hard-working and eager to put a good product on the market. They just didn’t know how to go about it. Why? Because the industry’s systems for moving a car through the stages of production were ineffective, at best. This was not a people problem; it was a systems problem.

Deming went to the Japanese hopefuls who had hired him so many years ago and delivered this message: “Your system is designed to give you exactly what it is giving you.” In essence, he was telling them that they were responsible for their own failures. They had put weak systems in place that, by design, could not produce their desired results. No one had ever told them how to set their systems up for effectiveness. With Deming’s help, the industry leaders spawned a revolution
by putting strong systems in place and started the turnaround that eventually made Japanese cars the highly sought-after commodities they are today. Even now, Japan celebrates Deming Day, in honor of the man who showed them how to structure for success through a series of interrelated systems.
The Power of Systems

We may not be building cars in Japan, but we all use systems to help us accomplish our objectives every day. Think about the system you have for getting dressed in the morning. You don’t put on your deodorant until you get out of the shower. You drink your coffee before you brush your teeth. Right? There’s a system to the way you prepare yourself for the day that makes getting out of the house faster and easier. You also have a system for the way you organize your calendar. You have a system for the way you prepare for a Sunday morning...even if you don’t realize it.

In speaking to pastors and church leaders across the country, I end up being on the road a lot. I check in and out of hotels regularly. Until recently, I used to leave something behind almost every time I checked out. I would inevitably forget my cell phone, its charger, my keys, or something else that wouldn’t hit me until I was miles away. So, I developed a simple system. Now, whenever I go into a hotel room, I put all of my miscellaneous things on top of the television, rather than scattering them across the desk, dresser, bedside tables and bathroom vanities. Since I’ve implemented this system, I don’t have to waste precious time and gas money going back to hotels to pick up the things I’ve left. And I don’t have to deal with the stress of knowing that my phone is going to die any minute or that my house keys are in someone else’s hands. This rudimentary system is doing what a system is meant to do: it’s saving me stress, time, energy and money.

A system is any ongoing process that Saves You Stress, Time, Energy and Money, and continues to produce results. Good systems function under the surface to keep things running smoothly so that you can concentrate on more important priorities. Thankfully, you don’t have to think about the fact that your neurological system is allowing you to read and process this information. That system is doing its job impeccably, or you wouldn’t be able to understand the words in front of
you. But, if you began to see a decline in your cognitive ability — if all of a sudden you could not remember or analyze information in the way you always have — you would have to deal with the stress of knowing something was wrong and put a lot of money, time and energy into figuring out where the breakdown was occurring. We may not be aware of a good system when it is running well, but there is no mistaking when something isn’t working like it should.

Can the same thing be true in the church? We know that the church is a body, so it follows that the church also has systems working beneath the surface. Even if you don’t know how to identify those systems, much less keep them healthy, they are there, both simple and complex, ready to help you achieve God’s purposes for your church. Deming’s truth applies here, as well: your systems, in whatever state they may be, are giving you exactly what they are currently designed to give you.
We may look different on the outside, but underneath each one of us is a function of common machinery. We all have hearts that pump blood, even though we are different blood types. We all have senses that take in the world, though in some of us one sense is more elevated than another. In the same way, all churches are made up of the same exact systems, even though we may view and utilize them in slightly different ways based on our individual calls to ministry. The question isn’t whether or not these systems are in place, but whether or not they are being maximized.

The eight systems of every church are interconnected. While some may be more developed than others, none of these systems can stand alone. And since a church is a living entity, like us, the well-developed systems run whether we are thinking about them or not. Just as you breathe while you sleep, strong systems operate without constant supervision. Still, to make sure that all of our church’s systems are running correctly, we should take them in for a periodic checkup. If we are disinterested or lazy about growing and maintaining our systems, they will not produce the results we want. In other words, slack equals lack. When we become slack in taking care of our systems, we experience lack, and our systems, and therefore our churches, fail to live up to their God-given potential. We have to do our part to make sure that all eight systems are set up and functioning correctly, so that our churches will be healthy and thriving.

There are simple ways to measure how each system is functioning, no matter what stage it’s in. So whether your church is like a brand-new baby, just starting its journey of growth, or like a robust adult in the prime of his life, it has eight systems in place waiting to be utilized and maximized for life-changing results.

Let’s take a look at these eight church systems, from the outside in...
The Weekend Service System:  
How We Plan, Implement and Evaluate 
the Weekend Services at Our Church

Also known as the Worship Planning System, the Weekend Service System helps you plan, implement and evaluate your weekend service(s). Sunday comes around with great regularity. The way you plan, implement and evaluate your music, preaching, transitions, offering, etc. is key. Sunday is game day. The day you need to be at your best. The day you need to be totally reliant on God. The day you need to have some assurance that things are going to go just like they should so that people will have the best possible opportunity to encounter God. If you are slack in your planning, the lack will be obvious.

Whether you acknowledge it or not, you already have a system for preparation in place. The system may not be giving you the results you want, but it’s there. Think about it – How do you plan your teaching? How do you plan worship? If you use sermon notes, when are they due to the printer? You already have a way of getting these things done, so step back and look at how efficient your way is. Do you operate in crisis mode every week?

To start building up your Weekend Service System, make a list of everything that goes into getting ready for the weekend. Think about what you can do to lower your stress and save yourself time and energy. As you develop this system, don’t forget to evaluate how well things are working in the service each week. How have you been evaluating each service to make sure the next one is better? When was the last time you watched a game tape (i.e. a tape of a recent worship service)? How often do you work on your communication with your worship leader? Always be asking yourself and those you trust:

- What was missing?
- What was confusing?
- How can we be doing things better?

If you don’t pay attention to the details of your worship service, they will atrophy.
If you don’t pay close attention to the details of your worship service, they will atrophy. Yep, that’s just another way of saying that if you slack, there will be lack.

**Challenge:**

Let me issue you a challenge for each of your eight church systems, starting with the Weekend Service System. Don’t just read through this information and then let it go. Take some action steps. Think about your Weekend Service System. Jot down some ideas for how you can make your service better. Decide to give attention to the areas you’ve been neglecting. The worst thing you can do is let Sunday run on auto-pilot. God is always up to something new. Make sure you are in a position to magnify whatever that is!
Some refer to the Evangelism System as the Outreach System or the Marketing System. No matter what name you give it, this is the system that inspires you to ask, “How do we attract people to our church?” All churches grow through the incarnational and the attractional. Ultimately, God is the one doing the attracting and the drawing, but have you ever wondered why some churches seem to get all of the new growth while others sit stagnant? How does God decide which church to draw people to?

The principle of spiritual readiness teaches that God will never give us more than we are prepared to handle. We have to do our part to let people know we are in town and ready to receive them. So, how do you get that message out? How do you invite people through your doors for the first time? As you begin to think about this system, make sure that you are maximizing the seasons of the year when people are most willing to come to church for the first time. Keep your culture in mind. Know whether your community will respond best to postcards, emails, phone calls, billboards, or a specific combination of outreach methods. Yes, God attracts, but we have to do our part of the preparation.

Step back and take an objective look at your Evangelism System. What has this system looked like in your church over the last six months? Is it in a baby stage or a well-developed one? If it has been well developed in the past, are you still seeing result? Are your methods of outreach effective? Are you seeing a lot of first-time guests? If not, there’s a good chance it’s because you’ve been slacking on evangelism. To start revving this system up, ask yourself these questions:

Maximize the seasons of the year when people are most willing to come to church for the first time.
• When was the last time we did a big direct mail campaign?

• Have we invested in servant evangelism lately?

• Who was the last person I personally invited to church?

• When was the last time we challenged our people to bring their friends to a big day?

**Challenge:**

Think about specific steps you can take to reach your community this month. Lead the way in your personal evangelism. Give your people opportunities to invite their friends and then support them any way you can. Evangelism is critical to what we do. We’ll never be able to bring unbelievers into God’s kingdom if we can’t first bring them through the doors of our churches!

If you want to dig deeper into how you can bring the community into your church, check out our best-selling resource, *The Evangelism Seminar*, by clicking here or by visiting ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Store. And here’s some exciting news: I am thrilled to bring you even more in-depth teaching on this topic with my new book *Ignite: How To Spark Immediate Growth In Your Church*. It’s available at your local bookstore or at Amazon.com.
The Assimilation System is your plan for taking people from their first visit to being fully developing members of your church. How do you get people to keep coming back until they are ready to plug in at a deeper level? Many churches have an evangelism problem, meaning that they have a hard time getting first-timers through their doors, but even more have an assimilation problem. You can’t just expect your first-time guests to come back without any intentional action from you and your staff. You have to make sure you are creating environments that make them feel comfortable and welcome, environments that they will be eager to return to.

Start thinking about how many first-time guests you have over the course of a year. An average of just three guests each week means that you influence over 150 new people every twelve months. How many of those are sticking around? To be growing consistently, you need to be keeping one in five of your first-time guests. What can you do to see those results? How do you bring your new person’s assimilation full circle so that they start inviting their friends? To get a gauge on how well you are keeping on top of your assimilation, try asking yourself these questions:

- How many of our first-time guests end up becoming members? Are we happy with that number? If not, where is the problem?
- When was the last time I looked at our church through a guest’s eyes?
- Have I filled out our communication card to make sure it is user-friendly?
- What do people say is their first impression of our church?

A little bit of assimilation tweaking can reap big results. Simply by keeping your finger on the pulse of this one system, you will see a huge difference in growth.
Challenge:

Be honest about how well your Assimilation System is working and what kind of improvements you need to make. When God blesses you with guests, you need to make sure you are doing your part to give them unhindered access to learning His truth! If you want to learn more about creating an assimilation system that will lead your first-time guests down the path to membership, let me encourage you to study *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests Into Fully Engaged Members Of Your Church* or download *The Assimilation Seminar* at ChurchLeaderInsights.com.
Believe it or not, it is possible to have 100% church participation in small groups. How? By having a strong Small Groups System in place that focuses on the core question, “How do we fill and reproduce small groups at our church?” Whether you are a church with groups, a church of groups, a church with Sunday school, or a church operating on a semester-based system, you have to have a specific plan in place for filling your current groups and multiplying new ones. How do you start groups that get off the ground quickly and then sustain their momentum?

At The Journey, our Small Groups System is based around four key activities: Focus, Form, Fill and Facilitate. By setting up an ongoing system that focuses, forms, fills and facilitates our groups for success every semester, we see 100% participation with low stress, time commitment, expended energy and outgoing money. If you have a weak Small Groups System, you will see problems in many of your other systems as well. But a strong Groups System will help you solve leadership, pastoral care, volunteer, and hospitality issues across the board.

Think about your Small Groups System. Would you say that it is healthy? How are things going? Are you doing your part and seeing God’s blessing? Or have you been slacking off and experiencing lack? To take the pulse of this system in your church, ask yourself:

- How many of our regular attenders and members are actively involved in a small group?
- Are we competing against our own groups by offering too many other activities?
- How many passionate group leaders do we have?
- Am I involved in a small group? Is everyone on my staff?
Challenge:

First of all, if you aren’t in a small group, join one today. The same goes for everyone on your staff. Your people won’t engage in what you aren’t modeling. Secondly, take a hard look at the state of your Small Groups System. Be honest about the level of excitement in your church over groups. Be honest about your participation numbers. Sketch out some ideas about what you can do to improve your system next semester.

If you want to explore and learn to implement the proven principles for building a Small Groups System that fosters 100% participation, I encourage you to spend some time with two resources: first, *Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups*, available on Amazon.com. This book details everything I know about building a Small Groups System from scratch to overwhelming success. Second: dive further into The Journey’s Small Groups System by ordering or downloading *The Small Groups Intensive*. I am convinced that these resources will lead you to cooperating with God in developing a life-changing Small Groups System.

KEEP READING »
The Ministry System, also known as the Volunteer System, determines how you mobilize people for significant ministry at your church. God created people to serve. It’s part of how they grow as disciples. If you don’t have a system in place that helps them get plugged in, you will be hurting both yourself and your potential, untapped leaders.

At The Journey, our goal is to get 50% of our people involved in serving at least one hour each week. What’s your goal? Do you have one? If you have multiple services on a Sunday, try asking volunteers to serve at one service and attend another. You can never have too many volunteers. Check up on your Ministry System by asking yourself these questions:

- How many passionate volunteers do we have?
- How many passionate volunteers would we like to have?
- What are we doing to make people want to serve?
- When was the last time I personally put some time into investing in our volunteers?

**Challenge:**

What steps do you need to take to create a volunteer system that makes people want to get involved and do the things that you can’t hire people to do? Think about what you want your Ministry System to look like one year from today, and jot that vision down.
Most of us, as church leaders, tend to separate the issue of giving from other spiritual disciplines, like praying, reading our Bibles, and gathering for service. This is because we are afraid to hold our attenders accountable in the personal area of money. But, let’s face it – money is essential to Kingdom growth. It’s also an essential issue in the hearts of our people. We will never develop strong disciples until we learn to develop strong givers. This is where the Stewardship System comes in.

How do you encourage people to give for the first time? How do you know when they do? Once they give that first gift, how do you follow up with them? How do you turn sporadic givers into regular givers and teach them the importance of giving the full tithe?

Most new givers don’t go from 0% to 10% right away. There is a path we have to lead them down, as they mature in their understanding of stewardship. Growth doesn’t happen haphazardly. We will never disciple a church of extravagant givers if we don’t have a system in place that allows us to train, educate and nurture them.

So, how effective is your Stewardship System? Have you been slack in doing your part to fund the kingdom? To test your level of proactivity, ask yourself:

- Am I modeling extravagant giving?
- When was the last time we taught on the spiritual discipline of giving?
- Have we put forth a “tithe challenge” in the last year?
Challenge:

Spend some time with your Stewardship System over the next few weeks. Think through your process for explaining the importance of giving. Think about how you follow up with those who give. Write out your own financial testimony. If you will give this system some true attention, you can begin to recast the sticky issue of money as the important spiritual discipline it really is.

To learn more about strengthening this critically important system, take a look at this packaged recording of a two-day Stewardship Intensive I recently held with a few key leaders. It’s full of detailed, step-by-step information to help you lead your church down the path toward full, Biblical stewardship.

KEEP READING »
As your church grows, you will need to develop staff, lay leaders, and high-powered volunteers. What kind of plan do you have in place to make sure you are developing people in the right way? What tools are you using? How do you determine the qualifications of a leader? Your Leadership System will help you with staff management, organizational efficiency, and personal development. To get an idea of how things are going with your Leadership System, consider:

- When was the last time I invested in developing new leaders?
- How am I helping my current leaders grow personally and spiritually?
- Am I modeling the kind of leadership I want to see from my leaders?
- Are any of my levels of leadership in need of more people?

To start structuring this system for health, define the expectations of every leadership position in your church. Assign requirements for each role, and make sure that you don’t let anyone blindly climb the leadership ladder. Put deadlines on service roles, so that everyone who agrees to serve in a high-level volunteer position knows that it isn’t forever.

**Challenge:**

Spend some time thinking through your leader development process. Take a hard look at who is moving up through the ranks and make sure that you have enough leaders at all levels of service. Pick up and scan a book on leadership that you might want your staff to read together. And don’t forget to make the connections between systems. The Ministry System is a direct inroad to the Leadership System. Everything works together for optimal success.

*KEEP READING*
The Strategic System sits above the other seven systems, and serves as the evaluation tool that ties them all together. It gives us the opportunity and means to make sure that we are constantly improving, rather than living by the status quo. Strategy has a bad wrap, but without it, we continue to re-invent the wheel week after week, month after month and year after year. A well-thought-out strategy will help you become more faithful and fruitful in every area of your ministry. To that end, the Strategic System makes sure that you are continually evaluating and improving all of your other systems.

How healthy is your Strategic System? Ask yourself these questions:

- When was the last time I checked in with my eight church systems?
- How prepared am I for what God wants to do in and through my church?
- Do my staff members know and understand our strategy?

Think of the Strategic System like your church’s annual physical. Just as with your body, if you don’t pay periodic attention to how the systems are working (if you slack), disease can creep in (you’ll experience lack). The Strategic System keeps your church humming along efficiently and ensures that you are always proactively looking for ways to improve.

**Challenge:**

Pull out your calendar and block out some time for reviewing your strategic system. Meet with your strategic team and discuss ways to improve your strategy. As you sow some time and effort into your Strategic System, you will reap the

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A well-thought-out strategy will help you become more faithful and fruitful in every area of your ministry.
reward in your other seven systems. Don’t skimp on strategy. It’s the thread that ties your church systems together.

This system is so important that it’s one of the first ones I created a workshop around in an effort to get the information out to church leaders like you. If you click here, you can have the downloadable version of The Strategy Seminar at your fingertips within ten minutes. Don’t let slack lead to lack any longer. The health of your church systems is up to you.
No matter how strong your eight systems are, they can never be fully maximized until you have the right people around you. Relationships are the tracks on which successful systems run. Take a look at the diagram below:

The best results come from having good people working within good systems. As Deming found in Japan, good people working in bad systems just leads to a lot of frustration and misunderstanding. Have you been there? Perhaps some of the people problems you’ve experienced haven’t really been people problems at all. Then again, maybe you have well-developed systems in place, but some of the wrong people working in them. If that’s the case, you’ve probably been seeing better than average results, but can’t quite break through to the next level. Systems will never be enough on their own. The people inside have to be motivated to work together in pursuit of a common vision; in this case, the vision to give people the best possible opportunity to become fully-developing followers of Jesus.

God has shown us since the beginning of time that He is into systems. He wired the planets to operate through systematic patterns. He created the soil to produce through strategic systems of sowing and reaping. He wired you and me to
function with certain cycles and beneath certain time tables. You and me – those creatures that He created to live through systems. Following the trends that God has put in place is the best way to reach this world with His glory. If you look at the way He set things up, and then align yourself and your ministry accordingly, you can start every day with the assurance that you are doing His will.

God wants to work in the church. He wants more for your church body and mine than we can even dream. And He has given us not only examples of His systems but also systems of our own to help us accomplish all of the plans that He has in store. God is not haphazard in His execution, and neither should we be. Let’s do our part to maximize these eight systems fully so that God can work through them mightily.

For more details and opportunities for in-depth training on each of the Eight Church Systems and what they can do for your church, visit our website at ChurchLeaderInsights.com. For hands-on and in-depth personal training on implementing the Eight Church Systems in your church, check out the Coaching Networks with Nelson Searcy at ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Coaching.
New Senior Pastor Tele-Coaching Network
begins August 2010!

The Senior Pastor Tele-Coaching Network is a relationship-based coaching network for pastors seeking to break the 125, 250, 500, 750 and 1000 attendance barriers. The heart of the Network is found in a group of senior pastors meeting together monthly for training, coaching and networking.

Space is LIMITED and, unfortunately, we cannot accept everyone who applies.

The Coaching Network will follow the outline of the Nine Growth Barriers and Eight Growth Systems as taught in the workshops led by Nelson Searcy and will be customized according to the specific needs of those accepted.

What you receive in the Nelson Searcy Tele-Coaching Network:

- Monthly hands-on coaching from Nelson Searcy
- A proven coaching process that leads to growth and health
- Over $1,679 in FREE resources from Church Leader Insights, PLUS special discounts on any new resources
- Unlimited email access to Nelson Searcy and the CLI team
- A monthly coaching environment where everyone is focused on a Kingdom agenda
- MP3s of each session for your review; Even if you miss the exact date, you can listen to the network at your leisure
- FREE attendance at all live or web CLI training events during your network
- Private “call-in” times with Nelson Searcy to have your specific questions answered in more detail
- A private day-long meeting with Nelson Searcy, exclusively for tele-coaching participants (location to be determined)
- The chance to grow and take your church to the next level
- Plus much, much more!

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