**5 Simple Questions About the Future Every Leader Should Be Asking Right Now**

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Knowing what you should do as a leader in normal times is hard enough. As you may have noticed, these aren’t normal times. Trying to figure out what to do in the midst of a global crisis is so much more complicated. So how do you cut through the mess and noise to chart a course that leads you into a better future?

Here’s a simple place to begin start by asking the right questions. After all, the quality of the answers you get as a leader are determined by the quality of the questions you ask.

Ask better questions, you get much better answers and, as a result, a much better future.

The challenge is that it can be difficult to know which questions are the best questions to ask. In addition, you’ve got more agitated and angry voices than ever trying to tell you what to do (for more on that, see [*Pastors, Here’s Why Everyone’s So Mad at You Right Now*](https://careynieuwhof.com/pastors-heres-why-everyones-so-mad-at-you-right-now/)*).*

So, to help cut through the noise, here are five questions about the future that in my view, are the most helpful ones to be asking right now.

They’re questions I’m asking, and I think two years from now, they’ll turn out the be questions leaders who are making progress found themselves asking in this season.

**1. How Much of the Current Change Is Permanent?**

People in the midst of a revolution often don’t realize they’re in the midst of a revolution.

It’s not like people woke up on November 1st, 1517—the day after Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to a cathedral door—and said “Hey, it’s day 2 of the Reformation.” No one knew the Reformation had started. They didn’t realize a seismic shift was underway that would change the course not just of the church, but of human history.

When carriages and horses first started being replaced by cars, or radio went from Marconi’s curious invention to the launch of KDKA in Pittsburgh in 1920 (America’s first radio station), no one realized this was the cusp of a massive and permanent cultural change. The first cars and first radios seemed like anomalies, until, of course, they weren’t.

Crisis is an accelerator, and many of the ‘temporary’ trends we’re seeing right now are likely more permanent than we realize.

The COVID disruption that started off as a medical disruption is now also accelerating cultural disruption. Work, school, shopping, entertainment and fitness (all of which has become more home-based or morphed in other ways) will never quite be the same again.

Neither will church. Whether you and I *like* change or not is kind of irrelevant. Culture never asks permission to change. It just changes. If you want more on what I see changing, these posts can help.

[The Original 2020 is History: 7 New Disruptive Church Trends Every Leader Should Watch](https://careynieuwhof.com/the-original-2020-is-history-7-new-disruptive-church-trends-every-church-leader-should-watch/)

[Why Going Back to “Normal” church Seems So Compelling and Can Be So Dangerous](https://careynieuwhof.com/why-going-back-to-normal-church-seems-so-compelling-and-can-be-so-dangerous/)

[Avoid This Big Mistake: Stepping Back Into the Past When You Step Back Into Your Building](https://careynieuwhof.com/avoid-this-big-mistake-stepping-back-into-the-past-when-you-step-back-into-your-building/)

Leaders who see the future have a better chance of seizing it.

**2. What Do I Now Have Permission to Stop Doing?**

This is a fun question for most leaders.

Remember all those things pre-disruption you *wished* you weren’t doing but didn’t have the courage or energy to kill? Yep, now’s the time.

If you haven’t gone back to ‘normal’ yet, this is the time to redefine what normal is.

I’ve found that changing one big thing (like say a move to a new facility) can give you permission to change a lot more things.

It’s like moving from one era to another. People expect there will be change, dislocation and new things.

So often when we’ve gone through a big change, we’ll change a lot.

Hint: There’s never been a bigger disruption in our lifetime. You’ve already stopped doing so much…only bring back those things that are mission central as you move into the future.

Remember to focus on the why of change, not just the what and how. But if there was ever a time to change what wasn’t working, this is it.

If you’re wondering how to lead change without blowing up your organization or your own leadership, [this might help](https://amzn.to/2Iijgcg).

**3. What Would I Do If I Was Leading A Start-Up?**

It can be hard to transition an existing church or organization into a new future, but one helpful way to think about it is how you would approach things if you were a start-up.

Old models rarely do well in new eras.

If you were a brand-new church plant, opening a new restaurant, launching a new business…how would you approach it?

That kind of thinking can be exceptionally clarifying. For example, speaking at conferences and events was a [big part of my life pre-COVID](https://careynieuwhof.com/speaking/). Like many people, I haven’t been in a plane since March 2020.

With COVID still surging and mandatory quarantines in place where I live for returning visitors, I don’t know when I’ll be back on a plane again or speaking in person.

If you were launching out as a speaker right now, well, how would you behave? If you were launching a church right now, what would your strategy be? Or say you were opening a new restaurant, how much would you focus on indoor dining v. take out, delivery and patio space? Or helping people create their own food experiences? Once you know the answer to that question, go there.

For me, we’ve written in-person speaking out of our future plans indefinitely, launched a [second podcast](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/churchpulse-weekly/id1503586969) (which doesn’t, of course, require travel) and done any speaking events I accept digitally instead. At this point, it doesn’t matter when in-person speaking at events will be feasible again. We don’t need it.

Existing organizations who behave like startups will have a much better future than organizations that don’t. You can bet the future on things changing, or you can change. The second is a much wiser strategy.

**4. Where Are We Seeing Real Momentum?**

This is another fun question. It might feel like you have no momentum anywhere, but that won’t be true for most organizations. (If it is true for you—that you have zero momentum anywhere— the problems are much deeper than a global crisis.)

You likely have momentum somewhere, and chances are it’s happening somewhere *different* than it did before. Pay attention.

Example: you might be hyper-focused on getting people back in the building because that’s where you historically had momentum. You can end up being so fixated on trying to manufacture momentum where you used to have it that you completely miss that your YouTube channel is growing quickly and you have a far bigger open rate on your emails than in the past.

And when someone points out that you’re growing your open and subscriber rates, you dismiss them because it’s not where you want to see momentum.

Continue that for long, and you become the c.2003 music industry executive focused on CD sales who keeps ignoring the 20-year-olds who are focused on streams that keep growing while your CD sales keep dropping.

“*Streams aren’t real”* you tell yourself and make fun of people who don’t want to ‘own’ their music or have a physical copy of it.

Soon, you’re staring out the window watching the future pass you buy.

You probably have momentum somewhere.

Study it. Try to figure it out. Ask yourself why that’s growing and how you can leverage it to reach more people.

If you want to get your mission going, fuel what’s growing, not what’s declining.

**5. How Will I Find a Sustainable Pace?**

This one is really close to my heart. I’m running into so many exhausted leaders right now. I’ve been there. One of the best questions (perhaps *the* best question) you can ask yourself is how you can find a sustainable pace. As I shared in [this post](https://careynieuwhof.com/why-your-time-off-will-never-be-enough-to-truly-destress-you/), most leaders look to time off to heal them. The problem with that strategy is you can never have enough time off to recover from ridiculously stressful, unattainable days. Time off won’t heal you when the problem is how you spend time on.

A decade into leadership, I went through a season of burnout that was so intense I thought I was finished. By the grace of God, I wasn’t. But I’ll never forget how painful it was. (If it’s helpful, here are[*11 Signs You Might Be Burning Out*](https://careynieuwhof.com/11-signs-youre-more-than-just-tired-youre-burning-out/)*.*)

My heart for leaders is that you find a sustainable pace heading into year two of the crisis that will give you the regular rest and renewal you need.

My formula for staying out of burnout for the last decade and a half can be summed up in this phrase: *live in a way today that will help you thrive tomorrow.*

Most leaders live in a way that will make them struggle tomorrow: too many hours, not enough sleep, poor diet, too little exercise, and failing to nurture life-giving friendships. Living that way slid me into burnout.

So, as you move forward, ask yourself: what changes can you make spiritually, emotionally, relationally, physically, and even financially (financial stress is stress) that can help you thrive moving forward?

If the crisis is a long-term thing, which it appears to be, you need a longer-term strategy for personal renewal.

Time off isn’t the solution for an unsustainable pace. A sustainable pace is the solution for an unsustainable pace.