

Everything But Preaching

Dick Hardy

Podcast Transcript

Jim Schambach: How the Role of a Second Chair Leader Can Benefit the Senior Pastor

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Jim Schambach: It's great to be with you today, Dick.

Dick Hardy: You bet. Just exactly how do we define this role of a second chair leader...a number two guy in the church?

Jim Schambach: It's a complex and challenging role in many ways. Probably the first thing I would say is it's really a subordinate role to the lead or senior pastor. It's a role that I think the executive pastor or senior associate or whatever you call that person and it could be any number of others too in a small church. It might even be some associate pastor, even a youth pastor, depending on the relationship that person has and the experience they have...

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: ...in working with that lead pastor, but it's really a subordinate role, a servant role. I think the most important thing that a senior pastor would want from a subordinate in that way is that they have a heart for and understand the loyalty issues that accompany this particular role. I'd say too, it's also not just a purely positional leadership role. By that I mean it's the kind of thing that a second chair would use would be their influence and persuasion influence in trying to get things done and to assist the lead pastor (or senior pastor) and other associates to accomplish the purposes of the pastor or the goals and missions of the church.

Dick Hardy: Well, and that's the kind of thing I've seen and watched over the years that a senior pastor can...you know, he's oftentimes the visionary, and the ability of the number two guy, the second chair guy to be able to run with his vision and make things happen is of inestimable value to the senior pastor.

Jim Schambach: Yeah, I would agree with that, and I think there are a couple of things that second chair should be able to do. He should be able to understand that vision and try and find ways to implement it...the way the lead or senior pastor would like to see it done, but also with the abilities, talents, gifts that the people who serve with him, other associates have in order to get it done. There is a sense in which the executive pastor or the second chair would need to understand that he might have to communicate a wide range of things, a mile wide and an inch deep in order to get those things accomplished.

Dick Hardy: Yeah.

Jim Schambach: He should know enough about all the things that are going on within the church so he doesn't step on toes and actually can get the job done.

Dick Hardy: He can actually get it done. Hey, you mentioned that word *loyalty* here a minute ago. That's just this huge thing. For some pastors, they just hard charge and either you're loyal or you're out the door. There are others who when considering bringing on or creating this kind of a role could feel a little gun-shy simply because of this...do they have the loyalty. Talk to me a little bit about how a pastor should view the loyalty issue and what he can do to instill that in people when he's bringing this position in.

Jim Schambach: My experience with the senior pastor was someone who I knew for quite some time, grew up in the church and in the district here, and we had a friendship. He knew me from when I was younger and worked with me and I worked with him. So there was this natural inclination to hang out together and enjoy life together, do things together, and out of that came a trust. That made it easier to do.

I made it a point when I first came on staff with the senior pastor to study his style...to try and understand where his heart was and to understand how he got things done. I think that's probably one of the most important things that a second chair can do for a senior pastor or lead pastor, and that is not to try to impose your own perspective on things, but try to fit within what his styles are...his way of doing things. In my case the former pastor who was here was here for twenty-some years and so I wasn't about to change the things that he had been successful in doing, but try to work within it.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: That takes time. I think you develop. You have a sense of loyalty, but you develop that and deepen that loyalty as you ask questions, as you come along side of him, as you find ways to help him get the work, the vision, that he has done...not your own.

At the same time I found it a tremendously valuable thing to be able to share my thoughts, my ideas with him, and oftentimes he would buy into some of the things that I was saying because he knew my heart, he knew where I was coming from, what I was doing was not different from what he was doing. I'd given some time and prayer to thinking about how *we* can get this thing done. It became less of a senior leader-subordinate to more of a collegial role.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: You know as second chair, or a senior would know from their perspective when that happens...when it becomes, "Here's what I want you to do..." to, "How can we get this done? What do you think?" That's where the dynamic really changes and good things can come out of both that relationship for you and the senior, but also for the church because they see downstream the solidarity that you have in trying to get these things done. A lot of times there's not nearly as much resistance, and sometimes that enthusiasm is shared by associates because of what the executive pastor can do.

Dick Hardy: Oh, you bet it does. You're striking on an item that really takes me to the reflection of, again, if a senior pastor is contemplating this here is a major reason, in my mind, why this position is so valuable. In most cases the larger the church gets, the harder it is for the

senior pastor to get good, honest feedback because the culture gets to be such that it can become threatening to people to challenge the senior pastor.

Now the senior pastor...*he's* not creating that, but just the growth and the size starts creating that, and to have a number two guy, to have a second chair, who can speak honestly to a senior pastor, in my mind, is of unbelievable value. That's a major reason why, if I were a senior pastor, I'd look for that guy who I could be attached at the hip with, who I could trust implicitly with my life, who would speak honestly to me, and yet at the end of the day and walk out of the office and carry the water I need to have carried.

Jim Schambach: Yeah, and there are so many details that a senior pastor or lead pastor has to grapple with. It's impossible if he's going to stay on task with what he needs to do to do all the other things that are associated with managing an office staff or pastoral staff.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: So having a good relationship with someone who can speak for you at times or persuade others in the same way you would try to do it is very important. Sometimes the second chair has to subordinate his own style in order to convey accurately what the lead pastor or senior pastor does. I've had to do that in two different ways with two different pastors. My style is a little bit different if I were to act independently of them, but I can't do that because no matter what I think about my leadership style...if I think it's better or not so good...as the lead pastor, I am representing him in some way to those downstream.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: In doing so if I don't represent it well they'll get a bad perspective or inaccurate perspective of the senior pastor.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: That would be unhealthy for him. I have to put aside my personal preferences about doing things and try and operate in a way that makes him look good, convey what needs to be done, and at the same time persuade those who are his members of his staff to see that they are part of a team and not necessarily a group of hirelings who are there to do his bidding.

I think that's probably one of the things senior pastors probably need to hear that each of the men or women that he hires has a peculiar personality and gifts and abilities that they want to contribute and need to feel that they belong to a staff in such a way that they're not viewed as somebody simply hired to do a job for them but rather part of a team that's trying to accomplish the goals and purposes of the senior pastor.

Dick Hardy: You know, one of the things I have observed over the years with second chair guys, and I don't know if you've experienced this, but the whole business of sometimes being the front guy who takes the hit for the senior leader. In other words, shielding him from unnecessary

attacks or whatever the right word is...attacks or things that could come at him, but that you could deflect. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Jim Schambach: Yeah, you know sometimes with the role the senior or lead pastor plays, he's not always...it's very difficult sometimes to be fully present with everyone who needs your attention.

Dick Hardy: Yeah.

Jim Schambach: Oftentimes my job has been to try and explain, especially to new hires how the senior works, or how the lead pastor works, because as much as the lead pastor or senior pastor may want to spend the quality time with that individual, they're likely not to get it...especially in a larger church...the kind of time where they get a chance to really...

Dick Hardy: Hang out with the guy.

Jim Schambach: Hang out with them, yeah. So how they view the senior sometimes is important, and I've often deflected attention from him. I've tried to explain to staff what's going on, and it's amazing to me that if it's done well that the associates often give more than the benefit of the doubt. They'll go out of their way to encourage and affirm and thank and express gratitude in some way...

Dick Hardy: Yeah.

Jim Schambach: ...for being on staff and being with somebody who is doing such a great job in leading the church.

Dick Hardy: Sure.

Jim Schambach: You know, that makes a huge difference to people, even in the congregation sometimes. Sometimes to work in such a way to explain to people as warm and fuzzy as he may be in the pulpit, there are times when he just is human too.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: He has good days and bad days, and so most people give the senior pastor or lead pastor the benefit of the doubt. There are those who want to make it more difficult than they need to be and oftentimes that can easily be deflected by a conversation or a phone call.

Dick Hardy: A couple of things you and I bantered around here by e-mail is the fact that a second chair kind of guy, executive pastor, senior associate...is not just a hireling.

Jim Schambach: Yeah.

Dick Hardy: Talk to me a little bit about that. I'm guessing in most larger churches they don't view them that way, but there could be instances as a church is growing into that, they could just say, "Well this is just one more staff member."

Jim Schambach: Yeah, you know I think as I've mentioned I worked with a man who had been here for twenty-some years. So his leadership style was much tied into the positional leadership role, but the guys he began to hire...they were next gen leaders and often times would want more input than he really needed or wanted from them.

Dick Hardy: Yeah.

Jim Schambach: I spent a lot of time talking with him about...how do we make them feel a part of things instead of viewed as somebody who is brought in on your decisions (that are the senior's decisions) but really not able to shape or give direction to how that might have been implemented. Working with the senior pastor in particular, or even a lead pastor to help them understand that each of these men bring something to the table. They put their feet under the table just like we do.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: They want to contribute and want the senior to understand their unique perspective. They may not actually want anything more done than just to be heard, but that is a tremendously important thing to them, and I think builds bridges and collegiality and ultimately helps in accomplishing the greater good for the church and the work of the ministry.

Dick Hardy: You are so right. Talk to me about the...I assume that there are some occasions when a senior pastor needs to allow the second chair guy to manage him, to help him in that way. There is a price to pay for some of these leadership tradeoffs. Can you talk to me about some of the give and take in that?

Jim Schambach: Yeah, both of the men that I work with (have worked with now)...they have huge hearts. They want to do...they want to spend time with both staff and congregation. In doing so they often bite off more than they can really chew. In both instances, I've sat down with them and said, "Look, let me help you define what you do best, and you stay with that, and then offload those things to me that I can help you, that are important to you, that I can get done. Then let me get it done. If I'm not doing it the way you want you can tell me and I'll work to get it the way you want done. If you don't do it that way eventually it could affect your health, your relationship with people in the church and in the community."

In both instances, in approaching them that way they have been very receptive to some of the ideas I've had about defining what they do. I say to them, "What's the gold thread? What's the silver thread? What's the bronze thread that runs through you that you cannot but help yourself in doing some way in one way or another?" Often times it's preaching or teaching or in pastoral care or in giving some general oversight to something.

If they stay on those things...that's probably what made the church and they great at what they're doing. If they move from that it's likely to affect the health of the church and the ability to accomplish the goals that they have in mind. Other things are equally important like making sure the details are worked out and various events that are being planned or in welcoming new staff or in hiring people. They just can't possibly stay on top of all those things.

Helping them define what they do best and staying with it is actually a very easy thing to do. They know what that is usually. Affirming that you want to step into that picture with them to help alleviate them of some of those things is in their best interest. In our case, for example, when I came on staff and the church was about 1,200 people. The senior pastor was doing nearly everything, from administering the staff and working with the pastoral staff and making sure all the details...and it created him some serious health problems.

We decided along with the board of deacons that was why I was hired to come on board was to help him get those things that were important to him...paying attention to the details of things that took off his shoulders and began to get it done. It took a little while to understand his style and how I needed to express it to other people. Once that was worked out it began to work so much more effectively. I think it extended his ministry here at the church. I think he would tell you that if he was here in conversation with us.

So a good executive pastor will work hard at trying to manage his pastor in a way that's not going to take him out of what he does best, but to keep him in what he does best.

Dick Hardy: That's right.

Jim Schambach: And to serve the greater good of the church and the staff.

Dick Hardy: You're not controlling him.

Jim Schambach: No, no.

Dick Hardy: You're enabling him to do what he's best at.

Jim Schambach: No, that's right. That's why conversations are important. There is a price to pay to have a good exec. pastor or a senior associate. You have to spend time and share your heart and share your style. If a senior is not willing to do that it probably won't work.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: Even how you make decisions and how you want decisions made, and I think the senior pastor or lead pastor has to be sensitive to the exec. pastor because he is not the senior pastor. He is different, but at the same time they have the same desire, the same goal to see the greater good of the church extended and the work of ministry accomplished. It's a give and take and it's learning about each other and trust and sharing vision and ideas and learning how to manage people and talking through things. If you want a good relationship with the second chair you have to spend time with them. If you do, it could be very rewarding.

Dick Hardy: You bet. I remember back when I was involved in National Association of Church Administration, we had a threshold number of about 500. When a church reaches 500, they really have somebody doing the administrative and tasks that need to be taken from the senior pastor. Those are there and somebody's doing it. Either it is an administrator, executive pastor, senior associate, or the senior pastor himself is doing it.

Give me a thought on...what do you say to the pastor of a church of 500, 600, 700, or 800 who says, "I can't afford this guy?" Financially...how do you address that with guys like that?

Jim Schambach: Well, if that's really the truth that they can't afford it, I think he needs to look at some associate who can work with him and have some administrative ability to reel down on all the details, understand them, and begin to share that responsibility with them.

I've seen that happen in a couple of different places whether a youth pastor or children's pastor, even a music pastor because of their relationship with that person, they begin to share some of the administrative duties and concerns about managing the office. That has lead to making room for...he's on staff being paid...creates a little more of a work load for the associate, but often times that's a welcomed thing because they sometimes associates like the new challenge of something like that.

Dick Hardy: Right.

Jim Schambach: If they have the gifts and abilities to do it, they end up doing it. Ultimately, I don't think the church will grow unless you have somebody to take that responsibility from the senior...

Dick Hardy: There you go.

Jim Schambach: ...or lead pastor, so...

Dick Hardy: Exactly.

Jim Schambach: ...they can't afford not to do it.

Dick Hardy: Yeah, you can't afford not to do it, exactly right because you're going to reach a payback point with that person that's going to come a whole lot quicker if you do it than if you don't do it.

Jim Schambach: There are so many things that are happening in the church world today, I think from a litigious point of view that if you don't drill down, have somebody minding the store, so to speak, with all the employment issues and insurance issues and financial issues, it's not shared, I think things will fall through the cracks and expose...the risk becomes so much greater and could create significant problems down the road.

Dick Hardy: You bet.

Jim Schambach: It's a good thing to do.

Dick Hardy: Well, give me a parting shot, Jim. Man I really appreciate you taking time to hang out on the phone today on this subject. Any parting thoughts for a senior pastor as he's looking at this? This is your chance to sell the role of executive pastor.

Jim Schambach: Well it's been tremendously satisfying, and I think there are a lot of men out there like me who perhaps could be senior associate or executive pastors, or even lead pastors, and they just want to make a difference. They want to contribute to the cause and be part of a vision, mission, and a purpose that is significant, and if you keep your eyes and ears open, they are out there to explore. It can be tremendously satisfying to the senior or lead pastor to be involved with someone that way and benefit the church in a significant way. Don't give up on it. I think it's a great idea. It's still part of the church's future.

Dick Hardy: Well, you hit the nail on the head, friend. Thank you very much. I really appreciate Jim Schambach being on the podcast today.

You have listened to the *Everything But Preaching* podcast by The Hardy Group. I'm Dick Hardy. Feel free to go to the website, www.thehardygroup.org, or give me a call at 417-576-5492. Let's talk.