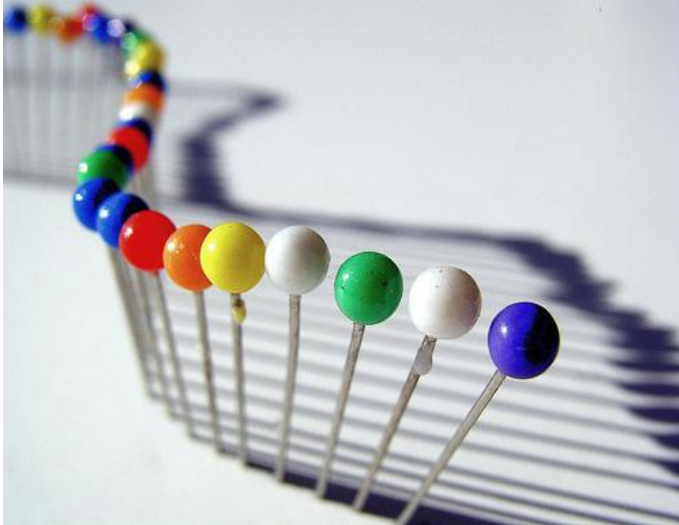


# TRIBES and the FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

By Greg Wiens



How much has the organizational nature of churches changed in the last 100 years? Not much, really. Congregations, committees, budgets, choirs, pulpits, pews, and potlucks make up the modern church. It is comfortable, but is it effective? It is traditional, but is it outdated? In his book, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, author Seth Godin examines the shift occurring in many different organizations today.

According to Godin, the marketplace is experiencing a radical metamorphosis. Organizations are leaving a factory-centric model to one of groups (tribes) connected around a common cause or purpose. Below are some of the fundamental differences between the two models:

## FACTORY

One hierarchical leader  
Flow-charted organization  
Membership = Filling a position  
Focused on a task  
Efficiency = Profitability

## TRIBE

An influential leader  
Networked community  
Membership = Commitment and passion  
Focused on a cause  
Risk = Transformation

Godin investigates the sociological factors that have changed the landscape of the workplace. The three most influential are:

- People want more than just a paycheck from their jobs; they truly want to accomplish something while there.
- Organizations do not profit from the production of goods as much as they used to.
- Increasingly, consumers make spending choices on moral and ethical grounds rather than financial.

According to Godin, it only takes a shared interest, a means of communication and a leader for a group to become a tribe. Tribal leaders differ from traditional leaders who rest on their laurels of authority. Tribal leaders influence through passion, inspiring their members to follow the cause. “[Members] are grounded in respect and admiration for the leader of the tribe and for the other members as well,” says Godin. Many organizations stagnate at the group level for lack of charismatic leadership.

Characteristically, tribal leaders have a knack for inspiring followers to action around a common cause. The tweets, texts, and emails of the digital age have facilitated the emergence of tribes. A good tribal leader leverages these technologies so that members can communicate with the leader, with each other, and with non-members.

The similarities between tribes and the New Testament church are hard to miss. The early church was a movement committed to transforming the world, a community dedicated to a cause. The gates of hell could not prevail against it. Replace *tribe* with *church* and what's left is a depiction of the early Christian movement.

Many churches today have become the ineffective factories described in Godin's book. The only requirement of factory workers is to punch in, work, and punch out. Other than showing up, no commitment is needed. In "factory" churches, members need only fill a pew to belong. However, factories tend to falter in turbulent times because of this lack of commitment. Conversely, tribes thrive in chaos because members are dedicated to the cause regardless of cost, and are willing to get their hands dirty to keep it alive. Risk is assumed in the healthy functioning of tribes, and threat of failure only serves to stoke passion. This explains why new churches spring up out of crises while established churches struggle.

The church today must turn its factories into tribes. Church leaders must choose the cause over a corner office, impact over dissidence, significance over security, relationships over accolades, and passion over prestige. The only way the church will survive these turbulent times will be through renegade leaders who challenge the status quo and unite Christians around the cause of the gospel. The good news is that many younger Christian leaders espouse these qualities; the bad news is these qualities often irritate the establishment. The concepts outlined in *Tribes* may be challenging to a seasoned church leader. For that reason, however, it should be required reading.

## Great quotes from Tribes:

**Heretics are the new leaders. The ones who challenge the status quo, who get out in front of their tribes, who create movements... The marketplace now rewards (and embraces) the heretics. It is clearly more fun to make the rules than to follow them, and for the first time, it is also profitable, powerful, and productive to do just that.**

*A crowd is a tribe without a leader. A crowd is a tribe without communication. Most organizations spend their time marketing to the crowd. Smart organizations assemble the tribe. Crowds are interesting, and they can create all sorts of worthwhile artifacts and market effects. But tribes are longer lasting and more effective.*

What people are afraid of isn't failure. It's blame. Criticism. We choose not to be remarkable because we're worried about criticism. We hesitate to create innovative movies, launch new human resource initiatives, design a menu that makes diners take notice, or give an audacious sermon because we're worried, deep down, that someone will hate it and call us on it.

**Leaders, on the other hand, don't care very much for organizational structure or the official blessing of whatever factory they work for. They use passion and ideas to lead people, as opposed to using threats and bureaucracy to manage them. Leaders must become aware of how the organization works, because this awareness allows them to change it.**

Change is frightening, and to many people who would be leaders, it seems more of a threat than a promise. That is too bad, because the future belongs to our leaders, regardless of where they work or what they do.

*If everyone could [lead], they would, and it wouldn't be worth much. It's uncomfortable to stand up in front of strangers. It's uncomfortable to propose an idea that might fail. It's uncomfortable to challenge the status quo. It's uncomfortable to resist the urge to settle. When you identify the discomfort, you've found the place where a leader is needed. If you're not uncomfortable in your work as a leader, it's almost certain you're not reaching your potential as a leader.*

**The art of leadership is understanding what you cannot compromise on.**

***In order to win an election, you need more than half the votes ... In order to lead a tribe, no such rule applies. All you need to do is motivate people who choose to follow you. The rest of the population is free to ignore you or disagree with you or move on. This leads to an interesting thought: you get to choose the tribe you will lead. Through your actions as a leader, you attract a tribe that wants to follow you. That tribe has a worldview that matches the message you are sending.***

The first thing you need to know is that individuals have far more power than ever before in history. One person can change an industry. One person can declare war. One person can reinvent science or politics or technology...The second thing you need to know is that the only thing holding you back from becoming the kind of person who changes things is this: lack of faith. Faith that you can do it. Faith that it is worth doing. Faith that failure won't destroy you.

Religion gives our faith a little support when it needs it, and it makes it easy for your peers to encourage you to embrace your faith. Religion at its best is a sort of mantra, a subtle but consistent reminder that belief is okay, and that faith is the way to get where you are going. The reason we need to talk about this, though, is that often religion does just the opposite. Religion at its worst reinforces the status quo, often at the expense of our faith.

***Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us***  
**By Seth Godin**  
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