# Characteristics of Church Planters

How can you know whether you, or someone in your church, is shaped and gifted for church planting? What are the qualities and attributes that are usually found in effective pioneers of new forms of church?

Effective church planters who plough fresh fields and pioneer in new ways come in all shapes and sizes, as do church plants. Scripture and church history indicate that God uses all types of people – frail, timid, brash, broken – to lead His people. Many of our heroes of faith have feet of clay and we are given insights into their character formation and development. So is there value in trying to develop a list or lists of core qualities of competent church planters? I believe that the answer is “Yes”, as long as we recognise that we are not seeking fully formed leaders but disciples who are continuing to be shaped in the character, calling and gifting of God.

All pastoral leaders need core qualities of call, character, and competence; teams are enhanced by chemistry and capacity – by cultures that challenge and embrace, and by complimentary gifts. Beyond this, are there factors that are intrinsic or unique to church planters/pioneers? The most referenced is Charles Ridley’s Church Planter Profile where he lists 13 Core Qualities:

1. Visioning Capacity
2. Intrinsically Motivated
3. Creates Ownership of Ministry/Building a Core Team
4. Reaching the Un-churched
5. Spousal Cooperation(where applicable)
6. Effectively Builds Relationships
7. Commitment to a Healthy Reproducing Church
8. Responsiveness to Community
9. Develops and Utilises the Gifts of Others
10. Flexible and Adaptable
11. Builds Group Cohesiveness
12. Resilience
13. Exercising Faith

While Ridley’s list dates back to 1988 and some language and concepts need to be updated – for example Ridley speaks of Church Growth when we are more likely to speak of Church Health – it is still a widely used tool and I use it as the basis of the day long interviews that I undertake as part of assessing church planters. The qualitative basis is built on the premise that the most likely indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. Without minimising the reality of ongoing transformation, a person who openly shared their faith, stepped out in new ways, developed teams, was relationally savvy, and worked cohesively with their spouse is more likely to do so again in a future situation.

More recently, Lifeway Research sought to shape their church planter assessment to an Australian context. In conjunction with many organisations, including Australian Baptists, Lifeway Research developed an on-line instrument that is self-administered. The benefit of their approach is that an individual church planters’ score for each of the 22 characteristics is rated against the overall score of “successful” church planters. For me, the negative is that this instrument is too dependent upon an individual’s self-assessment across all categories. Nevertheless, Lifeway’s church planter instrument is useful as a low cost, low time commitment, initial assessment. It can be used as an indicator of whether or not to conduct a more detailed assessment.

While the two instruments described above are useful for assessing church planters and some pioneering leaders, new methods and models need to be developed to effectively assess other pioneers such as in the field of community developers and social entrepreneurs who serve in the formation of new faith communities. Why is assessment important? Apart from the emotional, spiritual and financial cost of beginning something that can’t be completed (Luke 14:25-35), assessment provides an early indicator of strengths, work areas and potential pitfalls. It allows us to pro-actively plan and implement ways of giving church planters a greater opportunity to succeed. Church planter assessment is one tool in a tool box that includes theological formation, mentoring, coaching, and just-in-time learning.

The intensive 1.5 days Charles Ridley based assessment, when undertaken with other organisations, costs upwards of $700 or is free when undertaken through our BUV Mission Catalyst Team. The one hour Lifeway Research on-line assessment is also undertaken through our BUV Mission Catalyst Team and costs $30. For more details contact missioncatalyst@buv.com.au or david.chatelier@buv.com.au