

How Can I Lead My Team to Believe “Less is More” in a “More is More” World?

Every day, ministry leaders spend too much time, managing too much church “stuff,” for too little life-change. It is safe to say that the church in North America is over-programming her calendar and under-disciplining her people.

Behind this reality is a stark irony: The effectiveness of our gospel work is limited, not by a lack of ministry effort but by an excess of ministry action.

The gospel-centered, transformational impact of your church sits as a malnourished beggar beside an every-growing buffet of church ministry programs.

We get too little discipleship precisely because we have too much church stuff

Church stuff is the whole of the ministry activities that make up your church calendar. Programming that ranges from weekly worship and groups, to monthly programming or quarterly training opportunities.

Church Stuff = Any event service, meeting, class, or group that your church offers this year.

It's time to make better decisions.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Simple Rules](#), by Donald Sull and Kathleen Eisenhardt

Complexity surrounds us. We have too much email, juggle multiple remotes, and hack through thickets of regulations from phone contracts to health plans. But complexity isn't destiny. Sull and Eisenhardt argue there's a better way. By developing a few simple yet effective rules, people can best even the most complex problems.

In *Simple Rules*, Sull and Eisenhardt masterfully challenge how we think about complexity and offer a new lens on how to cope. They take us on a surprising tour of what simple rules are, where they come from, and why they work. The authors illustrate the six kinds of rules that really matter - for helping artists find creativity and the Federal Reserve set interest rates, for keeping birds on track and Zipcar members organized, and for how insomniacs can sleep and mountain climbers stay safe.

Whether you're struggling with information overload, pursuing opportunities with limited resources, or just trying to change your bad habits, *Simple Rules* provides powerful insight into how and why simplicity tames complexity.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

How often do you attempt to address complex problems with complex solutions? An extreme

example that most of us are familiar with is the operations of governments – local, state, or federal. It seems that in every case, governments both create and attempt to solve complexity by creating regulations to cover every imaginable scenario.

In reality, trying to “solve” complex situations with more complexity almost always creates more confusion than it resolves. Again, a governmental example comes to mind: the U.S. income tax law. Every April taxpayers struggle to understand the new regulations that have been enacted since the previous year. In the meantime, the bureaucracy grows larger while the “answers” it provides are often contradictory and confusing.

While applying complicated solutions to complex problems may be an understandable approach, it is flawed. Complicated solutions quickly overwhelm people.

What if, instead of looking to complicated solutions for complex problems, we turned to simple rules?

Simple rules are shortcut strategies that save time and effort by focusing our attention and simplifying the way we process information.

Simple rules work because they do three things very well:

- They confer the flexibility to pursue new opportunities while maintaining some consistency.
- They produce better decisions.
- They allow members of a community to synchronize their activities with one another on the fly.

We'll start with boundary rules, the most basic variety of simple decision rules. Boundary rules can help you decide between two mutually exclusive alternatives. Boundary rules also help you to pick which opportunities to pursue and which to reject when faced with a large number of alternatives.

- Boundary rules narrow down the alternatives, helping people decide which opportunities to pursue in the face of an overwhelming number of choices.
- Boundary rules can also help pick the most promising opportunities when money is the binding constraint.
- Boundary rules can translate statistical findings into easy-to-use decision aids.
- Boundary rules can also translate broad policies into practical guidelines.

Boundary rules guide the choice of what to do (and not do) without requiring a lot of time, analysis, or information. Boundary rules work well for categorical choices, like those with a yes-or-no decision. These rules also come in handy when time, convenience, and cost matter. Boundary rules cover the basics of what to do.

Donald Sull and Kathleen Eisenhardt, [Simple Rules](#)

A NEXT STEP

Since we are talking about focus, again, select five to ten ideas (current or future) that you consider may have potential for ministry action.

On a chart tablet, number the ideas and write them on the top row of a matrix. Write the following concepts on the left column: money, knowledge, skills, scale, and time. These concepts will form the framework of your simple rules.

Together with your team, define how much money, the type of knowledge, the type of skills, scale (how much and how far), and the time necessary to develop each idea. Write a description of each concept in the matrix.

Add a last row at the end of the matrix and write down a realistic check-up of your own resources per idea.

Highlight in red where you lack resources, and reflect on our team whether you can find ways to acquire them, or if the idea should be shelved.

Choose the idea with the least amount of red highlights.

After completing this exercise, discuss with your team if this simple rules framework will work in your regular ministry planning. Revise any areas that need tweaking.

Distribute the simple rules framework to your team with instructions for use on future ideas.

You can make better disciples with less church activity. You and your church can see and act on the beauty of a less-is-more approach by making better decisions.

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[Regular daily reading of books](#) is an important part of my life. It even extends to my vocation, where as [Vision Room Curator](#) for [Auxano](#) I am responsible for publishing [SUMS Remix](#), a biweekly book “summary” for church leaders. Each Wednesday I will be taking a look back at previous issues of SUMS Remix and publishing an excerpt here.