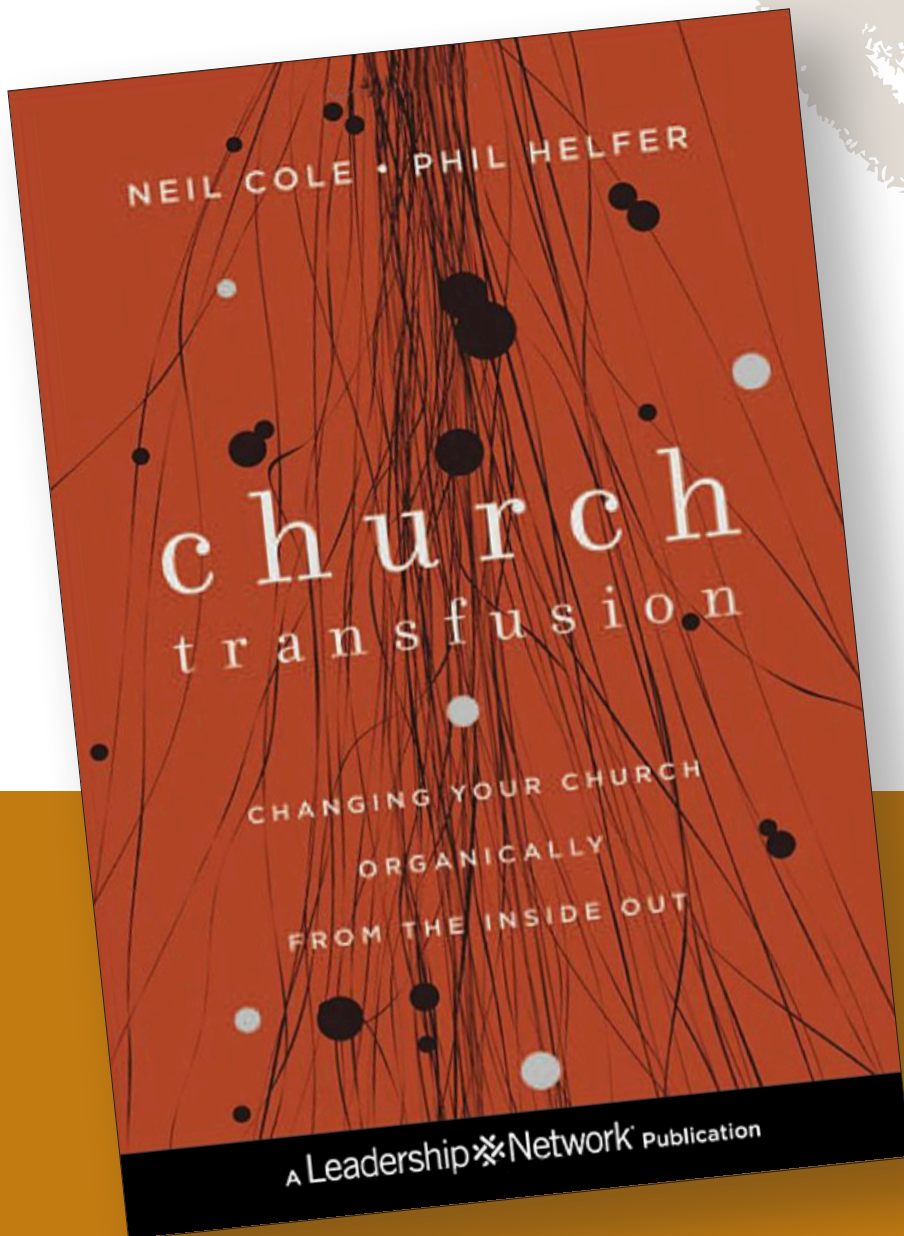


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Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer*

Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically From the Inside Out
Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2012. 219 pages.

Authors Neil Cole and Phil Helfer believe that we have allowed the world to co-opt and corrupt the true and vital expression of life in Christ and substitute it with the same old religious system found everywhere else in the world.

It is time to abandon the domestic faith of suburban consumer Churchianity to live a life of risk for the love of a Savior who left heaven to live among the poor and marginalized people of a backward and oppressed nation.

1

Part One: Change is Possible – With God

Our current systems are perfectly designed to produce the results we are currently getting. It is time for a change, time for the church as we know it to be **transfused** with the power and presence of the living God.

Jesus didn't die and rise from the dead so we can be like everyone else in the world. Our faith is more than just better doctrine; it is a better life. Jesus is the difference, and what a difference he makes!

Basic Organic Principles That Work in All Contexts

Although a church may be called to do worship, outreach, evangelism, Christian education, and community service, it was never meant to be organized around them. What the church does and what the church is are two very different things.

When we organize a church around what it does, the focus is shifted from Christ as the source of direction and power to the church itself as an avenue of service to God.

The concept of DNA is helpful in understanding what really makes a church a church. The DNA of the church consists of *divine truth*, *nurturing relationships*, and *apostolic mission*. We believe that every member of the body of Christ and every grouping within the church should possess this DNA.

- The D in DNA stands for Divine Truth, the Word of God, both written and personal.
- The N in DNA stands for Nurturing Relationships, those intimate personal relationships necessary for the growth of the body in love.
- The A in DNA stands for Apostolic Mission, with the understanding that the church is not a sending organization but a sent people.

The DNA at the core of every disciple, church, network and global movement is the glue that links us all together and connects us to Jesus, the Head (D), to one another as family members (N), and to the world where we are all on mission (A).

The whole DNA is found in every cell, and the activity flows out from it, not to it. We cannot program DNA from the top down; it must be in the center of every disciple and flow out from there.

Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

No Longer Business as Usual

*An established church doesn't need a transition to be healthy and vital. What is truly needed is more than a transition; it needs a **transfusion** of healthy DNA found in the blood of Jesus and nothing else.*

Every transfusion begins not with a structural change but with a transfusion of holistic and healthy disciple infused with the DNA.

If your calling is to transfuse an established church, there are many areas you will need to address:

- *The Core*: Integrating the DNA into the life of the individual disciple instead of finding it in an agenda, curriculum, program, ministry style or leader's personality.
- *The Flow*: Switching from a centripetal force sucking inward to a centrifugal force sending out.
- *The Standard*: Measuring influence of people multiplied to several generations, not number of people attending a program.
- *The Environment*: Changing from a very controlled environment to an uncontrolled and spontaneous one.

Indications for an easier transfusion:

- The younger the church, the easier it is to transfuse.
- The more desperate the church is, the easier it is to transfuse.
- Less of a clergy dogma makes for an easier time with transfusion.
- The churches where the senior leadership desires the transfusion will be more likely to succeed.
- The less program-intensive your ministry, the easier the transfusion will be.
- The less your church is built on consumer-driven ideas, the easier your transfusion process will be.
- A church with new Christians will transfuse more easily than one with more mature Christians.

To bring transfusion to a church body, the authors suggest that you follow this simple progressive pattern:

1. **See it.** Change agents and innovators must see the potential of a transfused church. They must understand and envision an organic body functioning in complete connections with the Head.
2. **Want it.** If there is going to be a contagion of health within the body then those would spread the healthy DNA must want it badly enough to endure the process necessary to bring complete change to a congregation.
3. **Pray for it.** The passion for this change needs to be such that it often becomes the subject of your prayers.
4. **Pay for it.** There is a cost to change. Count the cost up front, which is what Jesus taught; then if it is worth it, pay for it.
5. **Do it.** Make it happen. It will come about in phases, not all at once.

Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

2

Part Two: Implementing Change From the Inside Out Dying as if Your Life Depended on It

We often approach church and ministry with a theology focused on what is **SAFE**:

Self-preservation = our mission

Avoidance of the world and risk = wisdom

Financial security = responsible faith

Education = maturity

Perhaps it is time we embraced a theology of **DEATH**:

Die daily to who we are and what we want.

Empowering others, not self, is our life.

Acept risk as normative.

Theology is not just knowledge but practice.

Hold tight to Christ and loosely to everything else.

Unless we are willing to die, we will not live. It is that simple.

Once a church suffers from the hardening of the categories and establishes itself as an institution, it is on the path to dying.

Detoxifying from Dependence

Every Sunday there are very expensive buildings full of people who arrive anticipating some nice program to inspire them for the week. Every Sunday across the country we have a small and exhausted group of leaders working hard to entertain the masses enough that they will be inspired to return the next week and hopefully drop some money in the offering basket so that the leader can afford to put on a better show next week so as not to lose people to the other churches who are desperately trying to attract them, too.

It is possible for a church to think it is doing well when in fact it is very sick and near death. Of the seven letters to churches that Jesus sent in Revelations 2-3, almost half of the churches suffered a form of self-deception, two in a negative way and a third in a positive manner.

The worst part of self-deception is that by very definition, you do not think that you have a problem.

Common areas of dependence in churches today:

- Hearing leaders instead of God
- Being told how to think
- Top-down planning
- Expecting others to carry the kingdom
- Being financially dependent

Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

Starting the Detox process

It is time for leadership to start acting differently. Here are a few suggestions:

- Stop being the Bible answer man
- Redefine the gift of teacher
- Stop operating with positional authority
- Learn to become a disposable pastor

Leadershifts

It's possible for leaders to get off the merry-go-round and back to the joy of making disciples. People really do want to follow Jesus. They just need someone to come alongside them and show them the way.

Here are five major shifts in the way we typically think about leadership that must take place if we are to see the body of Christ emerge healthy, organically, and become fruitful in this world.

- *From cosmos to kingdom:* The Bible calls the system by which the world operates cosmos. The kingdom of God implies the rule of God. For the church to be what it is meant to be in Christ, it must operate on the principles of the kingdom and not the cosmos.
- *From management to engagement:* Management implies the efficient use and exploitation of available resources to accomplish a task or goal. A successful leader in Christ's church is more concerned with the success of the people they are engaged with than they are in the overall success of the leader's vision and plan.
- *From position to submission:* Jesus made it clear that "all authority in heaven and earth" belongs to Him. This means that no legitimate authority exists outside of Christ. All true authority begins with submission to the one True Authority. In a very real sense, a leader who does not understand submission will never truly understand authority.
- *From control to order:* If we are going to see the Body of Christ healthy and flourishing, we will need to learn to trust Christ's ability to actually control His own body. His presence in the life of each believer produces not only order but also effectiveness beyond our wildest imaginations.
- *From self-interest to selflessness:* God has created each of us for greatness, not necessarily a greatness that can be seen with the naked eye, but one that is visible to the God who sees all things. One of the keys to leading your church to greater fruitfulness is to set your own agenda aside. To be a servant leader, we must put the best interests of those we serve ahead of our own.

The true missional objective for virtually every person in Christ's body is: listen to Jesus and do what He says.

Believers must be challenged to engage the living Jesus in an intimate, personal way every day. We are only truly followers of Jesus when we look to Him for direction and do what He tells us.

A Simple Plan to Bring Transfusion About

As a leader of your church, you can always cast vision for change, but the actual implementation may require a slower and smaller start if it is to yield holistic transformative results. Any true organic change must be internal, relationally, and advance virally – like a contagion from one person to the next.

Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

The truth is that the church in the U.S. has needed a “skunk works” for some time.

In an effort to produce technological breakthroughs needed to bring WWII to a more rapid end, Lockheed selected a group of its most creative engineers, gave them space and resources, and told them to think outside the box. They were extremely successful, and the term “skunk works” (given to the group because of the smell of a nearby plastic factory) is given today to groups within an organization given a high degree of autonomy and tasked with working on advanced projects.

If you lead a church that is established, you may need a skunk works operation of your own if you want to experience a transfusion of organic life and principles into it. When you initiate a skunk works project, a few things are important to consider:

- *Select your innovators carefully* – it is not necessary to involve many people in the beginning. It is far more important to select the right people.
- *Grant permission* – the selected individuals should know that they have permission to try new things and even to fail.
- *Set boundaries if you must, but not many* – keep in mind that boundaries in established churches are often the very thing that prevents movements from happening.
- *Start in places other than your church campus* – the new project should be born outside the walls of the church building.
- *Establish lines of communication* – make sure that in the very beginning you establish a method of communication so that you are kept aware of how things are going.
- *Block incoming hostilities* – as you release a few key people to attempt new practices based on new paradigms, it is important that they be protected by the leadership of the church. The enemy of the new is most often the old.
- *Share reports regularly and enthusiastically* – use the pulpit to share your own enthusiasm for the new works being done.
- *Provide an avenue for early adopters to join the skunk works* – leverage the new success discovered to lift the whole church by allowing early adopters to join the effort.

It doesn't cost a dime to make a new disciple; it only costs your life.

What can we leave behind for future generations?

- *An example* – the process of contextualizing truth for a new generation is dynamic and produces enlightened and influential leaders as well as better and more useful methods.
- *Changes in cultural values and laws* – sometimes the work of a few becomes the legacy to the many. Some changes in values do shape future culture.
- *Godly children* – could it be that the greatest gift to the next generation is the next generation? Will we give ourselves to them, unconditionally, and train them to think for themselves and follow Jesus at all costs?

Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

The Price of Transfusion

- *The price church leaders must pay*—leaders often draw their self-worth and sense of significance from the role they play in the body of Christ. Leadership is often a lonely proposition, and the path ahead is seldom crystal clear. God often uses the fires of conflict, both internal and external, to forge us into His image.
- *The price church members must pay*—every believer in Jesus is called to take personal responsibility for his or her life – to deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ. Encourage your people not just to agree to the vision but also to pay the price, and you will all be better prepared for what is to come.
- *The price denominations must pay*—the more your dogma is built on tradition rather than Scripture, the harder your challenge will be. Written and unwritten denominational rules create fences the Scriptures may never have attended.

Conclusion: Equipping People for Ministry in the World

The authors of *Church Transfusion* believe the church's best days are ahead. Many believers have yet to awaken to their potential even though they are already deployed and found every day in the very places where they can make the biggest difference.

The church is desperate need of a transfusion of Christ's life and a willingness to live together differently so that a new wave of Christ's love and power will be released to affect the world for good.

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Church Transfusion | *Neil Cole and Phil Helfer (cont'd)*

Recommended Resources

1. Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini believes that that God wants to do something cosmically significant and locally specific through your church. **Read** how you can uncage your church's vision.
2. **Watch** authors Neil Cole and Phil Helfer as they give the one big idea behind *Church Transfusion* in this brief video.
3. **Read** author Neil Cole's brief overview of the transfusion process outlined in *Church Transfusion*.
4. **Read** how an existing church can be involved in organic church life in this article by Felicity Dale.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Mike Gammill

Vision Clarity Connection

Cole and Helper push into the oft-cited organizational logic maxim that *our churches are perfectly designed to produce the results we are getting*: disciples who are no different from, and make no discernable difference in, the world around them. The authors suggest that our design stems from organizing our churches around what we are called to do instead of who we are to called to be.

When we create a system that focuses more on what is sick—instead of what is healthy and productive—we will increasingly invest vital kingdom resources in fixing *things* instead of the *people* of God and a *lost world*. When we play it safe, our interests—instead of the interests of others—will increasingly dominate our plans. When we see ministry as a task where our personal excellence is required for success—instead of as a task of where we get to multiply our experienced gifting in others—we steadily reduce the influence, impact, and lifespan of our ministry.

Go Ahead

In order to Go Ahead and get a church transfusion, we need to organize what we do around who we are.

Transfusion instead of transition. Invest more time and energy introducing health and growing what is healthy instead of trying to fix what is broken. Gather your core ministry planning team and spend 45 minutes answering two questions:

1. What do we do best?
2. What untapped opportunity exists for us that is in line with what we do best?

Once these questions are answered, create a collaborative and cross-departmental taskforce to plan and oversee the execution of a sustained single-focused objective to see this new opportunity realized.

Die as if your life depended on it. Apply the principles of SAFE and DEATH to your ministry. Gather your staff and review and discuss these principles. Ask them two questions:

1. Where in our ministry have we played it SAFE this year?
2. Where can we embrace a theology of DEATH next ministry year?

Take the next step, and make it a yearly discipline for the ministry planning team to program 90% of what they did last year. Rank activities, programs, and time spent in order to identify and eliminate the bottom 10% in terms of its effectiveness in making disciples and invest the energy from the bottom 10% into the top 10%.

Discipline yourself and your leaders to be a disposable. Design ministry systems that will only succeed if ministry is passed on:

- Require every pastor to mentor at least one person who is expanding his or her ministry, will duplicate it somewhere else, or could replace him or her in case of emergency.
- Redefine the role of teachers to go beyond answering Bible questions to always include teaching people how to encounter God in Scripture.



More About Mike Gammill

Mike has fifteen years of experience serving in the local church in multiple capacities. He started in ministry as an Associate Pastor in a small rural church in Montana and served most recently as an Executive Pastor of Discipleship in a 5000-member church in Northwest Houston. From his experience as a lone associate pastor and an interim Senior Pastor in smaller churches to his experience on a staff of over thirty, Mike has a passion for uncovering potential in the Body of Christ through Christ-like leadership. He specializes in leading collaborative discussions and designing missionally aligned strategies and organizational structures.

Mike has a Master's of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary and is an Ordained Elder in the Evangelical Church of North America.

Email: mike@auxano.com

Blog: mikegammill.com

Twitter: [@mikegammill](https://twitter.com/mikegammill)

Phone: 406.219.1104

Bio: [Read More](#)



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