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## Book Review: Pastor Unique: Becoming a Turnaround Leader by Laverne E. Brown, Gordon E. Penfold, and Gary J. Westra

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## **Book Review**

### *Pastor Unique: Becoming a Turnaround Leader*

By Lavern E. Brown, Gordon E. Penfold, and Gary J. Westra

WestBow Press, 2016

354 pages

\$24.95

Reviewed by Jim Roden. He has a passion for church revitalization and is currently the lead pastor at The Journey Church in Tucson, Arizona. He recently defended his doctoral dissertation at Talbot School of Theology in completion of his Doctorate of Ministry degree. He earned his M.Div. from Western Seminary and B.A. from The Master's University.

It is no secret that churches in North America are struggling in their God-given mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Yet we are in a post-Christian culture, and many churches are stagnant or in decline. Only 15 to 20 percent of all evangelical churches in North America are growing and only a portion of these are growing through the conversion and addition of lost souls to faith in Jesus Christ. This is a time and place that calls for bold leadership, sacrificial effort, fervent prayer, and solid research of best practices in the area of church revitalization.

*Pastor Unique*, written by Lavern Brown, Gordon Penfold, and Gary Westra, is a well-researched book that focuses on what is required to effectively lead church revitalization in the midst of this challenging cultural context. Brown, Penfold, and Westra met online because of their common passion for local church revitalization. *Pastor Unique* is the fruit of their friendship and collaborative efforts. All three have individually earned a place at the table through years of pastoral ministry as well as their personal interest in church leadership best practices through careful

and thorough research. *Pastor Unique* is written for pastors, church leaders, and denominational executives who want to understand which leadership behaviors promote church renewal and which behaviors hinder it as well as how to apply these behaviors in order to realize revitalization so they can effectively minister in the local church. While it is written as a one stop, do-it-all book on church revitalization, its greatest contribution is the discovery of statistically significant differences between naturally hardwired turnaround pastors called “TAPs” and those who are not naturally hardwired as turnaround pastors called “NTAPs.”

*Pastor Unique* is written for a very clear purpose. In the introduction, the authors develop a sense of urgency for the subject matter at hand. The reader is left with a sense of anticipation for the rest of the book’s content. Chapters one through three introduce what the authors perceive to be the need for assessment-based training and coaching beyond basic seminary training as well as the primary factors that they believe contribute to ineffectiveness in churches and church leadership. In this section, the authors also address the need for pastors to see themselves the way God sees them. They attempt to help readers understand and begin to believe that they are called and gifted by God to accomplish significant things for Jesus Christ through their pastoral ministries.

In chapters four and five, the authors take time to explain their research strategy and their preference for what is called the Birkman Method, which is a personality assessment tool. They explain why they believe this method is superior to other personality assessments. This is also where they reveal their discoveries of what leadership behaviors distinguish TAPs from NTAPs.

In chapters six through eight, the authors lead the reader into the application of their research findings regarding best practices for leadership. This is where the authors develop their theology of spiritual leadership and explain why they believe that firm and directive leadership is essential for leading systemic change in the local church. They also begin to integrate their research with change-management theory and conflict-management theory.

Denominational leader and church consultant Paul Borden, who specifically writes to denominational executives and leaders, is the author of chapter 9. His main agenda is to convince denominational leaders of the value of assessment-based training and coaching as well as cluster-group participation. Borden gives practical guidance as to how to use this book in denominational work. Finally, in chapter ten, Brown, Penfold, and Westra give a strategy that pastors can use in order to move forward and begin to behave as TAPs along with some practical next steps.

It is my opinion that the guest chapter by Borden is a bit awkward and misplaced. I would also recommend that it be designated as an appendix instead of a main chapter. It is also my opinion that Appendix C, “Turnaround Pastors Must Stand Apart,” actually be placed in the main content of this book as one of the main chapters instead of being an appendix.

The authors hope to demonstrate that there are in fact measurable, statistically significant differences between TAPs and NTAPs using the Birkman assessment tool. They also hope to demonstrate that by adopting turnaround leadership best practices, even non-turnaround pastors can be successful in leading church revitalization. It is my opinion that Brown, Penfold, and Westra do a fantastic job of not only demonstrating this as a real possibility but also leading pastors and denominational leaders toward a hopeful future as they provide next steps for facilitating effective church revitalization. They accomplish this in *Pastor Unique* through helpful and engaging content, crisp writing, and real-life examples in an optimistic tone. They also encourage pastors to engage in best practices such as mentorship, cluster groups, and attending a “Turnaround Pastor Boot Camp.”

Much of the content of *Pastor Unique* overlaps with, and is supported by, preexisting church revitalization research and theory; but chapter five is truly unique and original. It is my opinion that chapter five is the heart and soul of this book and is the most significant contribution to the church-growth movement and to the body of church revitalization research. In this chapter, the authors present seven statistically significant differences between TAPs and NTAPs.

The seven statistically significant differences identified by our research included three Usual Behaviors, two Needs, and two Interests between NTAPs and TAPs. We discovered three Usual Behaviors that were significant: Authority, Change, and Freedom. We also found two Needs: Freedom and Thought. Finally, our research found two Interests that were different between TAPs and NTAPs: Music and Social Service. (81)

As a Usual Behavior, Authority means that a person is more likely to not only speak his opinion but to assert that opinion in a group. TAPs scored almost twice as high in this as NTAPs. Another Usual Behavior distinction between TAPs and NTAPs is Change. This relational component assesses a person’s ability to deal with shifting priorities, be flexible, and remain patient with interruptions. “TAPs relish variety in the unexpected. NTAPs

like things in sequence, minimal interruption, and no surprises” (84).

Freedom actually showed up in two different dimensions as a distinction between TAPs and NTAPs: Usual Behavior as well as Need. What this means is that TAPs thrive on the unexpected and relish multitasking. “Because of their Freedom Usual Behavior, TAPs – who tend to be individualistic – initiate their own course. Their Freedom Need scores mean that they want freedom in action and thought. They push against control and traditionalism” (86). TAPs live free and expect others to allow them to live free.

One of the surprising discoveries was the difference that the authors discovered between TAPs and NTAPs in Thought Need. They initially assumed that TAPs would be quick and decisive in their decision making. What they discovered was just the opposite: TAPs need “white space” for complex decision making. They need time to think, evaluate, and consider the consequences of many different courses of action before pulling the trigger on significant decisions whereas NTAPs are more likely to make quick or even impulsive decisions. It is the authors’ belief that NTAPs do this because they are uncomfortable with ambiguity and tend to make quick decisions in order to alleviate internal discomfort and organizational anxiety. TAPs on the other hand, have a higher tolerance for ambiguity and can more easily stand apart from organizational anxiety and pressure.

There were two statistically significant interests that distinguished TAPs from NTAPs: Music and Social Services. The authors’ theory on music is that TAPs are auditory learners and in touch with the way things sound. This would be important both for the musical quality of a worship service as well as the sound of their own preaching style and presentation. “If the worship services do not move people and generate passion for the Lord, they will not invite their friends to their church” (95).

The final statistically significant difference between these two groups of pastors was in the area of Social Service; and while both TAPs and NTAPs scored significantly higher than the general population in their interest in caring for others, TAPs scored lower than NTAPs. “NTAPs like the ‘hands-on’ aspect of ministry...They have a very strong desire to meet the emotional needs of others. They thrive on close contact with people, to teach, counsel, and comfort. They love the caring side of pastoral ministry” (96). Perhaps the lower Social Service Interest score of TAPs allows them to have the time and emotional energy to work on other leadership behaviors that contribute more clearly to church revitalization.

The authors demonstrate a clear bias toward firm and directive pastoral leadership but this bias is supported by their solid research on TAPs and supported in their writing with clear biblical teaching.

Overall, this book was powerful for me. I've been through it more than once and have found the TAPs best practices described within its pages to be vitally important to my church and personal leadership.

This book makes a very important contribution to the field of biblical church growth and revitalization. The content is presented in a helpful and engaging manner. Furthermore, it is my opinion that every church planter, lead pastor, seminarian, church consultant, seminary professor, denominational leader, and elder board should read this book. The research findings and content are simply that important!