

# Leadership

## Leading Systems, not Individuals

**Q:** What do you do with a “problem person?”

**A:** Look for the system that creates them or enables them to behave the way they do.

Some indicators of culture:




- Time
- Space
- Symbols
- Heroes and villains
- Budget
- Rules (spoken and unspoken)




The number one feature of an unhealthy system is: ANXIETY  
Anxiety causes us to function at our least creative levels — ironically when we need the most creativity!


## Our Brains



**Highest Functioning Level:**  
Creativity - a human quality



**Middle Functioning Level:**  
Feelings and processing - an animal quality



**Lowest Functioning Level:**  
Instinct of self-preservation - a reptilian quality

Reptilian thinking is defensive, attacking, self-preserving, conventional, reactive

### The language of anxiety:

- “I can’t possibly.” “It won’t work.”
- “They always/never...”
- “Everyone is...”
- “It’s not been done like that before.”
- “So-and-so will leave.”
- “He/she said...”

Is there a biblical perspective you can offer to these attitudes?

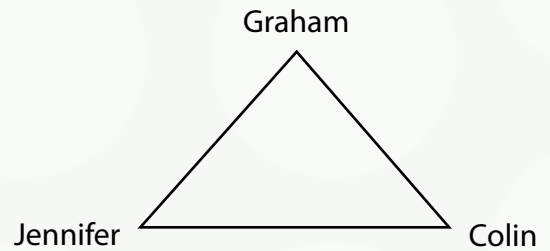
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## The Church's worst shape of all: a Triangle

Anxiety is spread through *triangulation*.

Graham says to Jennifer: "I'm really worried about Colin. He said some terrible things to me and I think he isn't a good Christian."

Jennifer says to Graham: "That's a problem with Colin. He's said bad things to me too. He's a got a problem with his temper and he's always been like that."



## Creating a Monster: What happens when Colin changes?

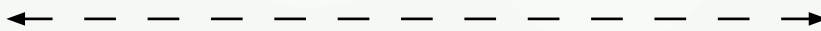
Blaming someone else relieves everyone of their responsibility. All anxiety is focused on the one who is doing the "wrong" thing and not conforming. If Colin's behaviour no longer happens (or is revealed not to happen in the first place), then the group looks for another scapegoat. (Example: the demoniac and the pigs in Mark 5:1-20.)

## The best antidote to dysfunctional systems: A non-anxious presence

Psychologists call this *differentiation*.

Some traps leaders can fall into:

Rescuing ←



→ Disappearing

"I have to do everything"  
"People won't cope without me"  
"We need to keep the machine running"  
"I should sacrifice everything"  
"I don't trust others to be competent to deal with their own stuff"  
"God needs a hand"



"It's their problem and I have nothing to do with it."  
"Consensus is the only way to lead."  
"I might make it worse."  
"I can't handle the way their bad behaviour affects me"  
"It will all sort itself out"

Some attitudes that can help a leader under stress:

1. God's in control (and better at this than any of us).
2. Love can be tender and tough and I can show both at the appropriate times.
3. Everyone is responsible for their own responses—we neither control nor generate people's choices.
4. A group decides on a code of behaviour together even without knowing it—it's okay to reveal that code.
5. Specifics help people be more truthful, and conflict can be productive.
6. A leader's credibility is in the investment made in the community; a leader's sanity is in being more than the community.
7. Leaders have choices too.
8. There are fifty-two Sundays in a year. One bad Sunday will not kill the church.

Disclaimer: While this handout was prepared by Jude Waldron, the ideas come from the thinking of Murray Bowen and Ed Friedman. Two good books that explore their ideas are:  
Steinke, Peter L. *How your Church Family Really Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Alban Institute, 1992.  
Boers, A P. *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behaviour*. Alban Institute, 1998.