

Ensuring Our Planters Are NOT ALONE

CHURCH PLANTER COACHING

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The theme, **Not Alone**, was repeated often at the SBC of Virginia's Annual Homecoming this past November at **First Baptist Church of Roanoke**. It is the desire of our partnership of churches that those who seek to push back the darkness would feel and know that they are not alone. However, in our efforts to strengthen and mobilize churches to make disciples and plant churches, those sent out to plant new churches can feel lonely.

One way to combat that sense of loneliness is to provide each new church planter with a coach.

WHAT IS A COACH'S ROLE?

Church planters experience some of the highest of highs, but what people don't always see is that they also have the lowest of lows. There are many reasons for this, but often times in ministry, it's easy to focus on the things that are yet to be done instead of focusing on where God is at work. Coaching brings focus to where God is leading and clarifies everything going on in a planter's mind. Having a coach helps a planter listen well to what God is saying and remember that he is **not alone**.

Coaches help clear the fog for church planters. In the fog, planters can feel lost and alone. As a church planter, I often felt that way. I knew where God had called me and what He had called me to do. I was certain of the vision He had given me. The strategies and tactics, however, to accomplish my vision to plant a Gospel-centered church weren't always as clear. Add people to this confusion, and you're driving in a thick fog. It can be unnerving



and leave you questioning, *Did I miss it? Have I taken a wrong turn? or even Should I just turn around?* Coaching clears the fog by helping church planters slow down, see clearly, and remember to step forward in faith. In all of this, the coach is there to remind the planter he is not alone.

SPECIFIC WAYS THAT COACHES HELP CHURCH PLANTERS AND ENSURE THEY ARE NOT ALONE:



Coaches are the **asking voice in the sea of telling voices**

Many voices speak into a church planter's life—spouse, mentors, core team, church attenders, conferences, websites, books, denominational leaders and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit. The reality is that all voices are not equal in value and some can be negative.

The role of a coach is unique—it's not to be another voice talking to the planter (as important as some of those voices are). A coach comes alongside a church planter to draw out what is already there. A coach's voice is the asking

A GREAT CHURCH PLANTER COACH PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN SENDING WELL AND ENSURING THAT THE PLANTERS ARE NOT ALONE



voice, and the coach's most basic tools are asking questions and listening well.



Coaches provide a safe place to process the planter's dreams and plans

A church planter coach fulfills his role on the team by providing a safe place for an often-overwhelmed church planter. The coach is asking the questions that no one else is asking, like, *What does God want? What's next? What's most important now? Who can help you? When are you going to start?* These and other questions help bring clarity to the church planter.



Coaches target the heart

No matter how much we succeed in other pursuits, nothing will ever replace five critical desires God has given us. In coaching conversations with church planters, these five concerns eventually come to the top of the list:

1. **GOD.** We want a vital, personal connection with God.
2. **FAMILY.** We want healthy relationships with our spouse and children.
3. **HEALTH.** We want to live well, sleep well, and feel well.
4. **TIME.** We want to get the most out of our days.
5. **PEOPLE.** We want to relate well to people outside of our home.

In coaching, it is our desire to coach the person—not the goal—and the planter—not the plant. Coaching the person means that we draw out his goals rather than prescribing goals we think would be best. A good coach will help the planter identify and define goals the planter is drawn toward. Also, coaching the person means that we intentionally press beyond the urgent church planting needs to the heart of the planter himself. The coach is not handcuffed by everything the church planter wants to be

coached through. A coach helps the planter move to a higher level of accountability for what God wants from him personally.

Jesus told His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21, NKJV). We commonly interpret this verse as inspiration to send *more*. That's a good thing, but we must also embrace the importance of sending *well* at the same time. As we send well, we will send more—healthy leaders multiply. A great church planter coach plays a critical role in sending *well* and ensuring that the planters are **not alone**.

Here are the experiences of some church planters who were connected with coaches through the SBCV:

My coach helped me by walking me through the painful days of church planting. We went through some serious lows during our first year as well as some incredible mountaintop highs. Having a coach by my side was critical in helping me keep a balanced and healthy perspective in every situation we encountered. I can't imagine having gone through our first year of church planting without my coach.
~ Jason Lamb, Pastor of Rising Church, Leesburg

I didn't really know what to expect when I received a coach, but it has filled in the gaps that a mentor or strategist couldn't provide. My mentors told me what to do, my strategist helped to resource me, but my coach filled a more proactive role in my life. My coach pressed and challenged me in a way that I needed most.
~ Isaac Martin, Pastor of Sojourn Church, Floyd

My coach helped me by offering wisdom and encouragement to stay the course and trust the Lord. Church planting is difficult, and it is comforting to be paired with someone who has not only been where you are but has also succeeded in establishing the foundation of a new church. My coach is a very capable, encouraging Spirit-filled coach!
~ Zack Randles, Pastor of Waterfront Church, Washington, DC