



Episode 98: Seeing Leaders Through Part 1

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Angie White & Robert Cortes

<https://thepdcast.com>

Transcript:

Mingo Palacios:

Hey, everybody. This conversation is all about seeing leaders through and what it looks like to be somebody on both the receiving end, if you're stepping through into a new ministry or a new church, or if you're a leader who's having to bring somebody in or send volunteers out and on to the next assignment. Enjoy Part 1 and stay tuned for Part 2.

Welcome to the PD podcast. My name is Mingo, your host, and today in the studio we've got Robert Cortes and Angie White, and we're talking about seeing leaders through – what it looks like to develop leaders. The big question, the big problem everybody has, always, forever, is “Where are the young leaders? How do we engage the next generation? Why does my church only seem to bring through or attract certain kinds of people?”

In this conversation, I'm hoping that we can unpack or uncover some of the things that we've experienced. Personally speaking, transitioning out of Saddleback staff, which is where I was a year ago, and now into a lead pastor position at a church, a statement that was made within my own team that I've experienced firsthand is some people are called to your church – in this case, it would've been some people are called *to* Saddleback and some people are called *through* Saddleback.

What you do with those relationships with people who are called to your ministry, and then not denying the fact that some people are called through your ministry, how do you manage those “through” experiences when you're seeing leaders through?

Today I've got Robert, who has been in ministry with me on several different assignments, different ministry expressions, and Angie, who has been an emerging leader, who started in young adult ministry and has made her way through all of these different checkpoints of ministry. She's been involved in women's ministry, she's been involved in leading a social media team, she's now a service director, soon to open an entire service where she'll be leading the charge on an entire church service.

Let's talk about some of the personal experiences we've had, good and negative, that have really stood out to us when it comes to being a leader that has been seen through a space or through a church, and what our responsibility is if we're hoping to be the kind of leaders that we want people to be magnetized to in hopes that they would engage in our own ministries. Welcome to the conversation.

Robert Cortes:

Thank you.

Angie White:

Thank you.

Mingo Palacios:

You're welcome, you're welcome. [laughter] What's the first thing that comes to your mind when we're talking about seeing leaders through?

Angie White: I immediately think of the people who are leading the leaders, or the ones who are discipling. I know for my generation, being in the young adults, we constantly talk about “This person’s a really good leader. I want to be under their leadership.” Then the ones that we don’t want to, I always wonder, what’s the common denominator between people who we’re not really attracted to as far as their leadership – not their ministry, but their leadership? It usually comes down to we can’t identify if they were ever discipled or if they were ever led well.

Mingo Palacios: Or in an active discipleship relationship with people in the current state.

Angie White: In my opinion, some of the best leaders I’ve ever had have been discipled by the same person, too. Like my college pastor, I’m pretty sure the person who discipled him discipled you too, right?

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, true statement.

Angie White: Yeah. It shows.

Mingo Palacios: He discipled Robert, too.

Angie White: Really?

Robert Cortes: Absolutely. I remember. I was in your house for a year and a half, every week.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, it was just a trickle down. It was a great example, and it was something I could tangibly wrap my hands around, like “this is what it looks like to love somebody towards Jesus.” I’m guessing your college pastor did that.

Your story is keen because I think this is the kind of storyline that a lot of leaders wonder if they can find somebody who’s seeking, somebody who’s lost, somebody who doesn’t necessarily know what God has built in them by way of shape and skill gifts, and then that discipleship relationship draws those things to the surface, and then opportunities come in parallel with that awareness.

What was your origin story, if you will, when it came to being led to a place where you understood what God had gifted you with, and then you stepping into ministry?

Angie White:

I feel like with a lot of Christians, it's like "I found Jesus, I'm attending church regularly, what next? Maybe I should start serving." So that's what I did. I went to our college pastor and I was like, "Hey, I want to start serving. I don't know what I can do, but I just want to help, whatever that looks like." He saw that as an answered prayer, because he's launching this new college ministry and needs all and any kind of help he can get.

But I never felt like he was just taking me in to use what I could do, but when he took me and some of my other friends in, it was a lot of relational work, more than hands-on ministry kind of work.

Mingo Palacios:

Did you bring friends to the table when you jumped in?

Angie White:

A couple. They were like, "I could never be a leader," and now they're serving in their own ministries. This was like 4 or 5 years ago. So when he brought us in, he's like, "Here's the vision. Here's what we're going to do for our ministry. This is what it's going to look like," but a lot of it was relationship building that led up to launching this ministry.

So he would always have us over at his house, we would hang out with him and his wife. He would come out to dinner with us after service. He was hanging out with us. He was doing what our friends were doing. He'd come to skate with us. He was always with us and doing stuff with us – *with us*, not always being like "Hey, come with me. I'm going to do this thing, come with me." He was always like, "What are you guys going to do tomorrow? I'm going to come hang out."

In that, he was able to get to know us in a different space outside of church, and then also see into our lives, so that when it came time for our weekly check-ins, he's like, "Hey, who was that guy you were talking

to?” He didn’t have to talk around and figure out “Who’s Angie talking to?” He already knew, because he was always around.

One thing he did was he held me accountable to my walk with God, and also held me accountable to the ministry and where I was serving. “Did you get the schedule ready for this? Did you text all the leaders?” Stuff like that. He held me accountable to almost every area of my life, and I think that’s what was most important.

Then when it came time when God started placing dreams in my heart for the ministry, he held me accountable to those dreams – one of them being I wanted to host our first college ministry conference. I told him all about it, I had the whole vision, and I was like, “Yeah, let’s do it.” He was like, “Okay, what’s next?” I was like, “Oh shoot, okay.”

Every week he would meet with me and he’s like, “How’s this going? Did you reach out to that person?” and literally held my hand like I was a baby through it. But that’s what I needed, because when it came time, it happened. All of it happened, and after that he was able to say, “See what you did?” He never made it feel like, “See what I did and then you helped out with the vision?”

He held me accountable to it and would make sure that I see it through, the vision itself, and then also within me. So that was a big thing, holding me accountable. I think that’s so key for raising up leaders, is holding them accountable to their personal lives and then their lives and their ministry and their walk with God, ultimately.

Mingo Palacios:

That’s convicting, because I feel like I need to do that more. A person who has a lot of ideas – I have a lot of ideas, and I want to add people to that inside circle to be like, “Hey, do you want to help see this idea come to life?” One of the challenges for me is to paint the picture of the highest version of the idea. It doesn’t have a ton of details, but I just imagine something happening and saying, “Can your dreams help make this dream come true? Is there alignment in the vision

that maybe you have in your heart, and some of the past experiences, and then the vision that I'm hoping to see come to life here?"

It's a hard one for me to recognize in the moment and say, "I know you can do this. I know you can make this thing be probably better than I'm dreaming it up. Please engage your dreams here."

Angie White:

There was a point in my walk too, while I was under his leadership, where I could've easily fell off. I fell into sin, and there was this whole thing, and he could've easily been like, "Hey, it's time for you to step down," blah, blah, blah, and write me off as someone who could be great.

Instead, that's when he pressed in the most, him and his wife, and they're like, "What's going on? Are you okay? Don't worry about all of your tasks. We just want to talk to you. What's happening? Maybe you should take a step back from your responsibilities and let's just heal," pretty much. After that, first I felt so loved – and it was hard, because he had to come down and be like, "This isn't okay, what you're doing." It was really hard to hear.

Mingo Palacios:

He was like, "You need to stop vaping." [laughter]

Angie White:

Vaping wasn't even a thing. He's like, "You need to stop taking selfies during worship." [laughter] I'm just kidding. But it was so good, and he showed me, when it came time for me to be a leader, he showed me how to handle when – because no one's perfect, and people are going to fail – how to handle those situations.

I've been in unfortunate situations where I start falling behind and I start hearing that they're thinking about moving on from me, and "maybe she's not supposed to be here anymore." And this is talking within ministry.

Mingo Palacios:

That's crazy that that's even a statement. "We're thinking about moving on from you." That's a very shallow existence relationally. That's very like, "You

have a job. If you don't do your job, we'll find somebody else to do your job."

Angie White:

Yeah. It makes sense in a job, but if we're talking about ministry and church – I was like, "I don't know if that's right, though." I was able to make that observation based off of how my college pastor handled the situation when I started falling behind. He pressed in more. And not just me; I saw him do that with our other leaders as well.

Mingo Palacios:

It makes me think there's two spectrums, there's two ways to view this. You're either a person who's looking for new blood, looking for new relationships, new people to help in ministry, or you're on the other side of this unfortunate version and you see a bunch of people going. They're choosing another place, another opportunity, another ministry, another dream.

There's still an opportunity for you to do something great, even if people are stepping away from you. This is an opportunity I think that can help reset your position, or maybe the way people think about the way that you deal with people.

I have really felt the conviction that when leaders – and this is difficult – when they spend any amount of time in my circle and I give them the next thing, like, "Hey, I'd love to see you take XYZ on. I think that you could go a level further or a level farther. Do you want to go into this next season with me?" and they say "I think I'm going to choose something outside of this. I think I'm going to go to a different ministry, I think I'm going to go to a different church," I took it so personally. Because I thought, man, I rolled the rug out. I put everything on the table for you.

When they chose something else, it was hard for me not to take it personally because of how much I had invested in them. I had been given two pieces of advice, one I experienced and the other one I was told.

The first one, when somebody chose another ministry when I gave them a chance to go into the next season with me, my mentor – the same guy that you were

talking about who mentored your college pastor – said, “Be a better pastor. Be a better leader.” Just flat-out. Not like, “you know what, that person probably didn’t pray enough about it” or “the opportunity wasn’t great enough.”

He said, “You need to be a better leader. If people are choosing another circle or another team, it’s because they see something in that team that you maybe don’t have yet or you’re not offering or you’re unable to offer. Be a better leader and people stay with you.” I was like, *gulp*. Dang it. That instantly is a chance for me to examine myself, how I lead, who I lead, the way I present leadership opportunities, and ask the question, am I leading like Jesus?

Then the second one that I experienced firsthand was when I stepped into my time at Saddleback, it was like I felt the parade. I felt like they were like, “We are so excited you’re here. We have been anticipating your arrival. We are excited to see what’s going to happen when you start working with us. We can’t wait for you to move in and get the party started.”

When I experienced that call to step out of Saddleback, I was really afraid – it’s human, right? Like, man, what’s going to happen? I don’t know if I’m going to lose these relationships. I don’t want to lose this proximity or the depth of these quality relationships. For the first time ever – I’d been in ministry for 20 years at that point – for the first time ever, I felt like I was experiencing the same celebration on the way out that I had experienced on the way in. Man, that was so countercultural, counterintuitive to what I had experienced in seasons past in other organizations, where I felt like when it was time for me to move on, they said, “You don’t have access to this. You don’t have access to these relationships anymore. You know you’re going to sacrifice these things. Choose wisely.”

I was given the opposite when I stepped away from Saddleback into a lead pastor position. They said, “What can we give you? Here’s everything we’ve got. You always have a line open to us.” And it was true. It was real. I called him the next day freaking out. The

phone got picked up, and I was given as much as I had when I was on their team as when I stepped off their team. They kept the door open.

That was such a huge check for me when I see young leaders into my world, to remember that I have to stand up and celebrate their next opportunity just as vigorously as I celebrate them coming into my circle. When they go out of it, I have to be just as encouraging, just as believing, just as behind them, and keep that door, keep that relationship on their way out as much as I welcomed them on the way in.

That's a huge mark of a mature leader, and I don't know that there's enough churches that are practicing that discipline for young leaders around them. It makes them feel like they're getting abandoned when they decide there could be more. Thoughts?

Robert Cortes:

You guys have said a lot. I'm just absorbing it right now and thinking, wow, what did that look like for me, from my perspective? I remember being in the ministry with Microsites and being disciplined in your house for a year and a half.

But it was the friendship – like I remember one time you said to me, “Hey Robert, you can do this, right? It's not that hard. Just go there, there's people with you.” You just said, “Hey Robert, you can do this.” I was like, okay, I guess I can. I believed what you said. You got all the support. Yes, we don't necessarily know everything. We sometimes don't even know what we're doing. But at the end of the day, Jesus is with you, and you just need to move forward and try something new.

At that time in the season I was in, I was at Impact 195, which is now the Rock School of Ministry, and that was probably one of the most impactful programs I ever did. It completely transformed my walk with Jesus. That's where the Microsite Ministry blossomed out of. I didn't even know how to pray. I remember walking through buildings, knocking on people's doors with my friend Aaron next to me, and he was in the ministry in Christ a lot longer than me. I was like a baby. I don't want to say baby; that's kind of a weird

thing to say. But I was very young in terms of my ministry.

Mingo Palacios:

Not yet mature.

Robert Cortes:

Yeah, not yet mature. But I got to witness, I got to model his behavior, how much he cared about people and how he asked, “Hey, can I pray for you?” when we knocked on a stranger’s door. It was mind-blowing to me that I was even allowed to do this kind of stuff. I didn’t know that thing, every member is a minister, everyone has that call to serve others in that capacity.

I just remember thinking to myself, if you hadn’t given me the opportunity to step into something, I would’ve never understood things that I felt were on my heart. Like, “I don’t know how to lead a Microsite. What is that? I can serve, I can set up tables, I can do this.” But then the opportunity to host, the opportunity to start another one and another one and another one – it wrecked my heart a lot of times afterwards because of the people that I saw being saved and then transformed. But at the same time, it wrecked me more than it wrecked other people.

So my personal season, when I left after 3-½ years – or more, I don’t know how many years. My mom passed away back 2-½ years ago, and I remember thinking to myself, man, she got to see some amazing things because of the opportunities that you provided. You just believed and said, “Hey, step into this, try this,” and I decided I’m going to step into that.

To me it feels like, if I had to summarize it, biblically speaking, I think God does the work beforehand. He gives us opportunities to step into things, and then we get the choice to step into it or not.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah. I’ve always loved the idea that as a leader, somebody who’s more mature has an ongoing walk with Jesus. Sometimes you have to believe on behalf of the person that you’re bringing up.

Robert Cortes:

Oh, my point – I’m sorry. [laughter] My point – because I went too far into a little bit of story there – is that when you went to Saddleback, I decided to follow

you in terms of, hey, what are you up to? You actually asked me, “Hey, let’s get together for some coffee. These are the things we’re going to do and I want your help.” I’m like, “I’m there.”

My loyalties are I follow leaders. I follow people. I don’t follow programs or buildings. I follow the people who’ve invested in me and I’ve invested in them. I think it boils down to the relationship, really.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah. Sometimes it’s easy to show up in a room, turn on the lights, get ready for people to show up, and then say “Hey, everybody, commit to this program. Please sign up, sign in, lead a piece of this program.” You sacrifice and you don’t do the hard work as the leader to say, “I want to invest in you relationally. I want to invest in you as a person.” Or there’s a give-and-get. There’s this strings attached, like “If you sign up, then I’ll be invested in your world.”

I just had coffee yesterday with a young guy who I don’t have any ministry ties to. He’s serving in another church in a ministry that has absolutely no connection to me. But I see future in him – not future with me, future in my stuff. Just God’s got a big story for that kid, and I’m interested in if the Lord is going to speak through me into that kid’s life. I sat down keenly aware that I needed to not pitch to him, like “Hey, there’s a spot for you over here on my team. Jump ship. Get in my sails.”

That’s so important. I don’t know, I might be young, less than one year senior pastoring at a church, but I think it’s a rhythm that I’ve not seen a lot of pastors do, where they invest keenly in a person, no strings attached, because they see that God has written big dreams and big capacity inside of somebody. You go, maybe God’s going to use me as a part of that person’s clarity for what’s next in their world, even if it doesn’t pay dividends back into my ministry.

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