

2018-07-08-WIWIK-Bishop-1

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For more information, visit [leadinglds.org](#). One of my favorite parts of Leading LDS is the community. Leaders getting together and just talking about their experience. It's not that we have all the answers.

It's not that we know what we're doing. But we've all experienced different angles of leadership and by talking about it and sharing it, we all grow together. And that's one reason why I wanted to do more of these What I Wish I Knew episodes.

These are just short episodes of clips put together based around a question or specific calling. And in this episode, we asked a variety of bishops what they wish they knew before they were called as bishop. And then we have a group of leaders who have shared just a short experience or two of what they wish they knew.

And maybe you listening to this are a newly called bishop or know somebody that you could send this to that would benefit from their perspective and what they wish they knew before they were bishop. We would love to get your input on various callings and questions and maybe having you record a short clip about what you wish you knew about your calling or a specific question. So if you go to [leadinglds.org](#) and search What I Wish I Knew and see if there's some content that you could contribute to help other leaders in their new calling.

So let's learn what other leaders wish they knew before they were called as bishop. Before I was bishop, I wish I knew that the Savior Jesus Christ suffered their pains. And it wasn't up to me to suffer them again.

Since I was a convert of only three years and only 22 years old, I felt such overwhelming stress and ownership of the members' problems. Also, being so young and new to the church, I didn't know I could set limits. I tried to do everything and I mean everything anyone asked me to do.

I delegated poorly because I didn't know how and I didn't know I could. Now that I'm serving the fourth time as bishop, I'm much more comfortable in letting the Savior and the Holy Ghost lead the members. I just help the members connect to the sources of healing and reconciliation.

Before I was a bishop, I wish I knew that every calling didn't need to be filled by people. I had

an opportunity to go to a leadership conference where Elder Holland taught a principle that he learned when he was over both the Asia area and the Africa area. And what he saw when he was over those areas was units, wards, and branches where every possible combination of the organizations within those units existed.

Some units didn't have young women's or young men or even Relief Society or Primary because they just didn't have the people. And what he noticed was that those units still functioned. The gospel was still true.

The members were still taught and things still continued to progress and move forward. And the principle that he taught was that too often leaders in the church would take a list of callings and they would start filling in members until the list had a name by every calling. And sometimes that would result in names showing up on that list two, three, or four times.

And he said that was incorrect. The way that the Lord expected it to be done is that the exact opposite, that we start with a list of members and we prayerfully consider where the Lord would have that member serve at this particular time. And then once we run out of names, then we stop issuing callings and we make do with what we have.

And that's what I wish I had learned when I was first called as a bishop. Hi, this is Jethro Jones. The thing I wish I knew before I was bishop is actually the thing that I was really grateful to know.

The outgoing bishop told me that it is important to let people wait and not respond to every emergency. And there are a lot of emergencies when you're the bishop. And it was really great for him to let me know that if somebody has sinned and they need to confess it, it's okay to let that wait.

And of course, you got to let the spirit be your guide and know when you should react and when you should wait and listen closely to that. But really being able to say, okay, we can meet Wednesday or Sunday, or it doesn't have to be in the next 24 hours. And taking that time allows them to get right with the Lord and ready with the Lord before meeting with the bishop.

So that was a really powerful thing that I definitely put to use. And I'm so grateful that I knew that before becoming a bishop, because that saved my bacon and made it so that I wasn't ditching my family for every thing that came up with the members of the ward. Before I was a bishop, I wish I knew this quote by Ed Penninger.

The quote is, it's harder to be spiritually in tune when you're not administratively sound. That sounds like simple advice, but so many times new bishops are so immersed and so flooded and up to their necks with administrative stuff that they don't have the time, energy to get around to the spiritual stuff, which is what being a bishop is all about. So the spiritual stuff is way harder, but sometimes we'll get the two mixed up.

Another quote that I wish I knew before I was bishop was, you can tell a lot about someone's

character by what they do in their idle time. As bishop, you're not going to have a lot of free time and that's okay. This is a season in your life to learn and grow, but I highly recommend that you get up to speed as quickly as you can.

I'd read the handbooks, both in one and two, cover to cover at least a couple of times just at the get-go. And then obviously you'll probably study those in ward council and bishop meetings as you go. Read the temple recommend books, read through the new young men's activity program.

And my final reading recommendation is read *Leadership for the Saints* by Ed Penninger. Another recommendation would be to get really good at online tools like Evernote, Asana, and become an expert in LDS tools. That LDS tools app has just about everything you possibly need as a bishop to look up at a moment's notice.

That combined with the new online food order setup, and you can really do quite a bit. Most of your moving records around and looking up membership record numbers and checking on the status of things just right from a smartphone. Evernote, that's what I use to keep all of my documents.

It's extremely powerful because then you can have every talk you've ever given, all your notes on any particular subject all searchable. So if someone goes short, you can stand up with a fully prepared talk that you have in the palm of your hand. Asana is what we use for our task management on the bishopric and the ward council level.

And it's a dream, totally free to allow you to communicate and effectively organize large groups of people. Another recommendation or something that I wish I knew before I was a bishop was that the importance of choosing a vision, a focus or an ongoing goal. It could be just as simple as teaching the area plan.

For our ward, we've decided that our vision, what we talk about all the time when we build everything around all of our activities, actions, and everything that we do is based around this, is we're trying to help our members understand and rely on the teachings of Jesus Christ, qualify for the temple, blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their family, and others for eternal life with the Father in heaven. Another quote is, service isn't doing extraordinary things, rather it's doing simple things extraordinarily well. Don't be under the impression that you have to invent new programs or new ways of doing things or, you know, be the cool guy, be the cool bishop.

It's simply a matter of being there and doing the simple things very, very well. I would counsel you to be available, approachable, and consistent. Sometimes bishops are so hairy and frantic, running between meeting to meeting that there's not the time to listen to the Spirit or just be available in your office when people, something they want to talk about.

I would also recommend to, when you ask people to serve, ask them to get a specific result, but

leave it entirely up to them on how to accomplish it. And one last quote is from Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame, and he says, a body will rust out much faster than it will wear out. I think sometimes in the church, we get this idea that we're going to wear out, we're going too fast.

However, I don't think that's true. I don't think that's part of God's plan. I think God's plan is for us always to be actively engaged.

If you look at the people that are going to struggle the most and have the most trouble in your ward, it's usually the people that are rusting, not the people that are acting. So if someone starts to rust a little bit, if they're slowing down, and that's all relative to their own situations, of course, I'm not recommending someone do more than they can, but there's a lot of power to keeping people active and keeping people experimenting on the word. And my last recommendation would simply be become an expert at running ward council.

That's your time to shine. That's your time to listen. Let others contribute, not listen to you talk and get ideas from everyone else.

That's it. This is Kirk Christensen from Spokane, Washington in the Bowditch Ward. This is Mark Sieberkraut from the Efrata Third Ward in Efrata, Washington, United States.

And I'm currently serving as a bishop. And there's a few things that I wish I would know. Well, before I was a bishop, I wish I had known a few things.

The first one is that the weight of the calling is real, but so is the help and the blessings that you receive. That's so, so important because I was not prepared for the weight of when someone came to you with a transgression or a sin or just a challenge. I was not prepared to feel some of that challenge with them, to feel the pain, to feel the hurt.

And that was hard. It was a big, huge weight and I was not prepared for that. So I wish I would have known that was going to come in the way that it did.

The second thing that I wish I'd known and done more of is to realize that the handbooks are your best friend as a bishop. I was telling a friend of mine that just got called the other day that the most important thing he could do when he got called was to one, know the handbooks really well, both handbook one and handbook two. And when someone comes to you, one of your auxiliary leaders or one of your quorum leaders or another leader in the work comes to you and says, what should we do in this position, situation bishop? The first thing I learned to do was to say, what does the handbook say? First off, you will never go wrong if you follow the handbook.

Second off, it makes you look really smart. And not that that's important, but it does, it gives a foundation. It gives a guidance for all of the counsel you give.

What does the handbook say? What are we supposed to be doing? You send them back, they go

look. And the cool thing is they start to realize that you're going to ask that and they go look before they even talk to you. And they solve a lot of their own problems, which takes a lot off of your plate, which is really, really important.

The next thing that I think is important, and I wish I would have known is that it's okay. I learned it's okay as a bishop to get frustrated with situations. And quite frankly, even people at times, you are going to get frustrated.

People are going to frustrate you. They're either not going to get to do what they want and what you asked them to do, or they're going to disagree with you or they argue with you, or they're just going to not fulfill their responsibilities. And it's okay to get frustrated at times.

If you don't, you will lose your mind trying to bottle all that up inside. It's okay to be frustrated, but don't vent that to anybody else. Vent it to yourself.

Maybe your counselors, depending on the situation, if they know what's going on, but then love them anyways, love the people anyways, serve them anyways. You might get frustrated and you might vent for a little bit about something, but when you walk out that door of your office, you love that person. They're standing right outside the door.

You shake their hand, you smile, you ask how they're doing and you mean it. And you really will, because you do have charity. You are given the love of Christ as a bishop.

I know that that's true. The other thing that I wish I had known is it's almost a cultural thing in the church to almost complain about our colleagues. What's it like to be bishop? Oh man, I wish I wasn't bishop.

Oh man, this is so hard. There's so many terrible things. Oh, there's a disciplinary counselor.

Oh, there's this, or oh, I'm struggling with this youth or oh this, oh that. And you focus on those things. And the thing that I realized is when I did that, because anybody that does not have the mantle cannot carry that weight the way that you're able to as a bishop.

Case in point, the most important was with my wife. She saw when I was struggling with something. She saw when I had a particularly tough interview.

She saw those things. She saw how I acted. I wasn't betraying confidences, but she could tell.

It's just, there was a weight. And so you have to make sure that you focus and notice the positive things, the good things about the calling, because if you don't, those around you will only notice the bad. They'll only notice the weight.

They'll only notice that you're struggling or you're frustrated or you're having a tough time and they'll start to resent the calling. And you don't want them to do that because as a bishop, sometimes you get so used to the good experiences. You get used to feeling the spirit.

You get used to receiving promptings. You get used to having a great interview with the youth where everything's going great and you're just so excited for them as they're turning in their mission papers or they've decided to go to BYU or they've decided that they want to repent and they've made great strides. And if you're not careful and you don't point out those really good experiences, those around you will start to resent that you're the bishop and that you have that office.

And they don't have that mantle to carry those things like you do. It really is different. I've noticed that with my family.

They cannot carry the stress and the strain like you can because they don't have the spirit. They don't have that mantle of the calling. They can't bear it up the way that you can because the spirit's helping you.

So those are the things I would say. The weight is real, but so are the blessings. Use the handbooks as much as you can.

It's okay to get frustrated at times and to make sure you focus on the positive. The only other thing I would say is make sure you listen to Leading LDS. It's easy to get in a bubble, but the things that Kurt's teaching here helps you to more effectively teach your ward and help them as the bishop.

Before I was bishop, I wish I knew that the Lord was much closer to this work than I had ever imagined, especially in the repentance process. When I first became bishop, I was afraid of what was going to be hard and was casual about what I thought would be easy. But I found quickly that what I thought was easy was hard and what I thought hard was easy.

By that, I thought I could handle the administration of the ward, the staffing of the different organizations and those things like that. I found that that became a very time-consuming and often difficult part as you dealt with different personalities and different people. It wasn't like running a business where you had the threat of firing somebody or wasn't like trying to do things in a family where you had some authoritarian situations that could be handled well with a direct order.

These are all people who are adults and who wanted to do well but often had personality conflicts. So that became often more hard than I had expected. But with the help of the Lord, it became a much easier part of seeing how the Lord could help these people develop into a Christ-centered disciple.

What I thought was going to be hard was the first time someone would come to me and say, Bishop, I need to talk. I knew that it was a very serious thing that they had done or had been involved with that caused me to wonder if I would say the right thing or do the right thing in response. But I found very quickly that the Savior is very, very close to his repentance process because he's already paid that ultimate price for each of those sins already, and he's not going

to let us fail.

He will guide and direct your thoughts, the directions of how you deal with those who are dealing with serious sin and overcoming them. The Savior loves those sinners, and he will help you love them as much or more than you ever thought possible. I also learned that delegation is not only easier on you, but it is much better for the Lord.

It develops other disciples and other leaders and other opportunities for many people to be blessed with different talents. Section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants opened my eyes to that, that all gifts are not given to any one person, but they're given to many for the benefit of all. So when we delegate, we're allowing the gifts of the Spirit to work more fully for the benefit of the Lord.

Again, my other realization came when I found my job was to be a disciple and help create other disciples. Gordon B. Hinckley famously said, teaching is the essence of leadership. So my last thought that I wish I knew beforehand is that my main role as a bishop was to be a teacher, a teacher at all times.

So always be teaching, always be lifting, always have the opportunity in formal and informal ways to lift and strengthen and teach the gospel, the principles of righteousness and salvation, and focusing them on the Savior and all things that you do and say. I loved being a bishop, and now as a stake president, I'm helping other bishops. I love having a PPI with them and sharing their thoughts.

I see them develop into amazing leaders as the Lord gets very involved with the administration of His church, but more importantly, the personal ministry that each of these bishops are able to develop. If you've just been called to be a bishop, God bless you. It will be a great adventure and something that will change your life for the better.

It will bless your family, and you'll be able to look back with great fondness at a time when you're able to feel the Spirit of the Lord guide and direct your thoughts and your actions in a way that probably hasn't happened since you were a missionary. The Lord is close to this work, so let Him be close to you. Grateful for all of the work of Leading LDS, and thanks for listening for a little snippet.

Thanks. Hey, this is Kurt Franken with Leading LDS. You're obviously familiar with my voice from the many episodes, but I couldn't let a What I Wish I Knew episode go by before sharing what I wish I would have known before I was called as bishop.

I had the opportunity to serve as bishop for about five years, and man, did I learn a lot. And the big thing, if I was to boil down to one concept, it would be this, that the grace of Jesus Christ covers the shortcomings of bishops as well. And along with that, you were not called to fix it.

Christ was called to fix it. He's the Savior. He fixed it all.

And what I mean by that is, you know, there's so much responsibility, so much weight of that calling, that you have individuals come into your office that have demands, that have needs, and you know, sometimes you'll feel inspired to say no. And I remember, you know, I was in a very welfare-heavy ward, lots of welfare requests from individuals a lot of time I had never met before. They were just, you know, came out of nowhere, out of the woodwork, and requesting some financial help.

And you know, this was a very difficult process to figure out, and a lot of the time I had to say no. And it just broke my heart to see, you know, a lot of time they were angry with me or frustrated with me that I said no as the bishop. And it's so important that you realize that one, you're not called to fix it, right? You weren't called to fix their life, to fix their finances, and though you have access to a checkbook of sacred funds that allows you to pay their rent, allows you to put food on their table, and which you'll probably do quite a bit, the majority of the requests you get, you'll probably say yes.

But those that you say no, it's important to realize it's okay. You were not called to fix it. You were not called to fix their problems.

You're not called to save them from the the trials that they face in life. Christ was called to do that. As they walk out of that office, you need to understand that Christ is still on their side.

Christ still got their back, and it's not your role. You weren't the last hope for the solving of their problems. Christ still has them.

And you know, along the lines of you weren't called to fix it, it reminds me of other instances where, man, I was just human, and I just made these oversights, and I didn't, you know, there may have been somebody in the hospital for a few days I hadn't even considered it, right? And I think back to President Monson, when he was Bishop Monson, and the inspiring stories of him visiting individuals in the office, of him visiting individuals in the hospital, or in the perfect moment, I guarantee you that even Bishop Monson dropped the ball at times and just missed it. And that's okay, because you were not called to fix it as Bishop. You were called to love, to give service, to do your best, to be there when they needed to talk.

And sometimes you won't be, and that's okay, because Christ still has them. His atonement is infinite. So as you embark on this incredible calling, by far the best calling in the church, have the assurance that it's not all up to you, that Christ has their back, and He is doing the saving.

You do the loving. That concludes this interview of what I wish I knew before I was Bishop. Now we want you to contribute what you wish you knew before you were Bishop or other callings.

This is one of many episodes that we'll do around this calling of Bishop and other questions. You know, I want to put together information about what I wish I knew before I performed a wedding as a Bishop, or what I wish I knew before writing a welfare check, right? So many questions and angles that we could learn from each other about your experience as a leader.

So go to leadinglds.org and search what I wish I knew to find other content and also to find out how you can contribute to this project and share your perspective on leadership.

As always, all we ask is a dollar a month for the content that we create at Leading LDS. If you can give \$10 a month, even better, \$20, \$30, \$50, \$100, whatever it is you can afford that's not going to shell shock your budget. Go to leadinglds.org and hit the donate button and become a core leader, which means you're a subscribing donor to Leading LDS and you will have more access to additional content that will help you better lead and be the leader we all strive to be.

Until next time, be a leader and not a calling. Leading LDS It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness—a loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.

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