

Formation Must Match Responsibility

How churches and organizations harm leaders by scaling influence faster than character — and what to do about it.

Dr. J Rodriguez, Founder, Troika Ministries • 2026-07-09 • NIV84 (primary)

"Formation must match responsibility. We harm leaders and churches when we scale influence faster than character."

"Pressure reveals formation; it does not create it."

— Dr. J Rodriguez, Founder, Troika Ministries

o. The Epidemic This Paper Answers

This paper is the root-cause treatise in the Troika Position Papers series. Of the epidemic's four symptoms, it answers two directly:

- **Symptom 02 — A Famine of Formation.** "Leaders are trained in skills and scaled by platforms, but almost nowhere is anyone formed in character. Competence is abundant. Trustworthiness is the scarcity." This paper names the exact mechanism by which that famine happens: organizations advance people on the timeline of visible gifting, not the slower timeline of proven character.
- **Symptom 04 — The Oldest Pattern.** "The pattern of choosing leaders who look the part... scaling influence faster than character." This is not a modern management failure. It is Israel at Ramah, demanding a king "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8) instead of asking God who to trust — the same pattern, dressed in whatever century is asking.

Everything that follows is the biblical, theological, and neurobiological case for why this keeps happening, and what Troika has built structurally to refuse it.

I. The Thesis

Every church and every organization eventually asks the same question: *who is ready to lead?* The answer is almost always given in the currency of gifting — who preaches well, who closes deals, who draws a crowd, who has the résumé. Rarely is the answer given in the currency of character — who has been faithful in very little, over time, when no one was measuring.

This is the wound underneath more moral failures, more burned-out leaders, and more fractured congregations than any single scandal can account for. It is not usually a story about a bad person seizing power. It is far more often a story about a good person handed more weight than their formation could carry — because someone, somewhere, mistook talent for readiness.

The thesis of this paper is simple: formation must match responsibility. Influence should never be permitted to outrun character. When it does, the organization has not discovered a flaw in the leader — it has manufactured one, by asking a person to stand in a place their formation had not yet reached.

II. The Vocation This Protects — Rooted in Original Intent

This is not merely a risk-management principle. It is a guardrail around a specific, older vocation. Troika's foundational doctrine — **Original Intent** — holds that God's intent has always been fellowship: the Father prepared a garden (Genesis 2:8-9, 15), the Son prepared a place (John 14:2-3), and the Spirit dwells in us now, preparing us for that prepared place (Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5). The fourth movement of that doctrine is the human vocation it produces: **we must align with God's original intent and prepare a people for the prepared place** — echoing Luke 1:17, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Leadership, in this frame, is never self-referential. A leader is not being formed for their own advancement, platform, or title — they are being prepared *by the Spirit* so that they can, in turn, prepare others. That is why the timing question this paper raises is not a bureaucratic one. **When an organization elevates someone faster than the Spirit has finished preparing them, it does not merely create organizational risk — it interrupts the very preparation the vocation depends on.** A person put in front of a congregation or a company before their own preparation is complete cannot do for others what has not yet been done in them. They are asked to distribute a place they have not yet been given.

This is also why "formation must match responsibility" is not in tension with urgency for the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The mandate to make disciples is not served by moving faster than the Spirit's own preparation — it is served by trusting that preparation's pace, because the whole point of preparing a people is that they are actually ready to receive what is being prepared for them.

III. The Diagnosis — What Scaling Too Fast Looks Like

The pattern repeats across every context Troika serves — churches, ministries, and marketplace organizations alike:

- **Gifting is mistaken for readiness.** A gifted communicator, a strong closer, a naturally charismatic presence is promoted because the *visible* fruit — competence, charm, results — is easy to see and easy

to reward. What is not visible yet is whether that same person can be trusted with money unsupervised, correction unoffended, or delay without resentment.

- **Results substitute for character review.** Numbers went up, so the person must be sound. But a system that only measures output has no mechanism for detecting a person who is deteriorating internally while performing well externally — which is precisely the profile of most public moral failures.
- **Urgency overrides process.** A pulpit is empty, a role must be filled, a campaign needs a face — and the bench is thin, so someone is advanced before the normal proving process has run its course.
- **Deference to institutional pressure quiets discernment.** Boards, search committees, and denominational structures can create a momentum of their own, where naming a hesitation about someone's character becomes socially costly, so no one names it.

None of these failures require a villain. They require only an organization that never built a mechanism for asking the one question that matters before elevating someone: *not "can they do this," but "who are they when no one is asking them to perform?"*

IV. The Biblical Case — God Has Always Tested Before He Sent

Scripture does not treat this as a modern management insight. It treats it as the ordinary way God builds leaders, and the ordinary way God warns His people against building them wrongly.

The pattern is old enough to have a first instance. Long before any pulpit or boardroom, Israel gave the template for scaling influence by appearance instead of character:

They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.' But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'

1 Samuel 8:5–7, NIV84

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.'

1 Samuel 8:19–20, NIV84

Notice what Israel actually asked for: a king who could *go out before us and fight our battles* — capability, presence, the look of strength. They did not ask Samuel to find them a man after God's own heart; God volunteered that later, after their own choice had already run its course. The request itself was the failure, not merely its eventual outcome. Every time an organization reaches for the candidate who "looks like a leader" instead of the one who has been quietly faithful, it is re-enacting Ramah.

God looks at what people skip. When Samuel was sent to anoint a king from Jesse's sons, he assumed the tallest, most commanding son must be the one:

But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'

1 Samuel 16:7, NIV84

David was not selected because he looked the part. He was selected because of what he was becoming while tending sheep, unseen — the years of faithfulness that would later hold up under the weight of a throne.

Moses was told to look for character before capacity. When Jethro counseled Moses to distribute leadership rather than carry it all himself, the qualification list did not begin with talent:

But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Exodus 18:21, NIV84

Ability is on the list — but it is not alone, and it is not first in weight. Trustworthiness and integrity toward gain are named as load-bearing qualifications, not soft preferences.

Paul warned explicitly against promoting the newly formed. Writing to Timothy about elder qualifications, Paul does not say "look for the most gifted." He says:

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

1 Timothy 3:6, NIV84

The danger named is not incompetence. It is **conceit** — the specific, predictable injury of handing authority to someone before their formation has had time to metabolize it. Paul treats this as a *structural* risk, not a character flaw unique to any one person. Anyone elevated faster than they are formed is exposed to it.

James names the weight of the seat, not the glamour of it.

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James 3:1, NIV84

Paul instructs Timothy toward patience, not urgency, in raising up leaders.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

1 Timothy 5:22, NIV84

The haste itself is named as a form of participation in whatever comes after. An organization that ordains, hires, or platforms in a hurry is not neutral if the person later fails — it has already taken on some of the weight of that failure by skipping the proving process Scripture assumes will happen.

Jesus gives the test that outlasts every résumé.

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Matthew 7:16–20, NIV84

Fruit, not gifting, is the test — and fruit requires a growing season. It cannot be inspected the week someone is hired.

Faithfulness in small things is the qualifying evidence for large things.

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Luke 16:10, NIV84

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:2, NIV84

Faithfulness is what is being sought — not brilliance, not charisma, not even fruitfulness in the sense of visible results. **Found faithful.** That requires time and observation an organization cannot compress no matter how badly it needs a leader today.

And Paul's charge to Timothy names the actual sequence of formation before responsibility:

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2, NIV84

Notice the order: *faithful* people, who *will be* competent to teach others. Faithfulness is the prerequisite. Competence to reproduce leadership in others is the fruit that grows out of it — not the other way around.

V. Why Character Lags — The ABC Model and the Limits of Speed

Troika's ABC model gives language for why this gap keeps opening. **Attitude** (inner posture) and **Behavior** (visible practice) can change quickly and can be coached, performed, or imitated in a matter of weeks. **Character** — the moral core, the thing that holds under pressure and in private — cannot. It is formed the way any durable thing is formed: slowly, through repetition, under conditions the person did not choose and could not fully control.

This is not merely pastoral intuition; it is congruent with how the brain itself changes. Character is best understood as *integrated neural systems* — pathways of virtue laid down through repeated practice

(Hebb's Rule: neurons that fire together wire together) and reinforced through myelination over time. There is no shortcut that produces durable character on an accelerated schedule, any more than there is a shortcut that produces a mature oak tree in a single season. An organization that promotes on the timeline of Attitude and Behavior, while assuming Character has kept pace, is building on a floor that has not finished curing.

Three horses, one direction. That is the troika. Attitude, Behavior, and Character. No horse pulls alone. When an organization only harnesses two of the three — visible competence and observable behavior — and calls it finished, it has built something that will eventually reveal, under the right pressure, that the third horse was never actually there.

VI. Pressure Reveals Formation — It Does Not Create It

This is the single most important operational principle in this paper, because it corrects the most common mistake organizations make in trying to solve the problem: **giving someone a hard assignment does not build their character. It only exposes what character was already there.**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4, NIV84

Testing *produces* endurance — but only across time, through repeated trials, with the person's cooperation and the Spirit's work. It is not produced by a single high-stakes placement. Handing someone a large platform in the hope that the pressure of it will "make a leader out of them" inverts the biblical pattern. Pressure is a **revealer**, used by God to show what has and has not yet been formed — it is not itself the forming agent, and organizations that use it that way are gambling with real souls and real congregations.

Paul describes the alternative discipline required of the leader himself:

I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NIV84

Disqualification, in Paul's own accounting, was a live risk *for himself* — after years of apostolic ministry, after planting churches, after writing what would become Scripture. If Paul assumed ongoing, disciplined formation was necessary for himself at that stage of responsibility, no organization should assume less for the leaders it is choosing to elevate.

This is also why Troika deliberately measures formation without turning it into a performance metric. The Troika Score exists precisely so that an organization has a mirror for where the Spirit is genuinely

working — not a scoreboard that can be gamed by increasing visible output. A number that goes up because someone worked harder at appearing formed is not formation. A number that reflects genuine growth in the fruit of the Spirit is:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23, NIV84

The fruit is singular — one Spirit forming one coherent life — which is exactly why it cannot be manufactured piecemeal under deadline pressure to fill a role.

VII. What It Costs When Organizations Get This Wrong

When formation does not match responsibility, the damage is never contained to the leader alone. It moves in concentric circles — the leader's own soul, the leader's family, the staff and volunteers who trusted the structure around them, and the wider congregation or organization whose trust in leadership itself is now injured. Troika's companion framework, the *Post-Failure Leadership & Restoration Framework*, exists specifically to walk churches through this aftermath — the difference between restoration to fellowship and restoration to office, the discernment process for whether someone can be trusted with responsibility again, and the four-movement path (Crisis & Safety → Discernment & Disqualification → Restoration of People → Succession & Re-Leading) that centers the harmed rather than the institution's reputation.

But that framework is triage. This paper is prevention. The better, cheaper, less painful moment to apply "formation must match responsibility" is *before* the promotion — not after the failure.

VIII. The Troika Response — What This Looks Like in Practice

Troika builds this conviction into the architecture of the platform itself, not just the preaching:

- **The 10-stage formation pathway places Leadership after Fruitfulness, not before it.** (Death → Curiosity → Conviction → Repentance → Belief → Obedience → Abiding → Fruitfulness → Leadership → Multiplication.) A person is not eligible for the Leadership stage by talent or tenure — they arrive at it by first demonstrating Fruitfulness, the stage immediately prior, which is itself observable, not merely claimed.
- **The Troika Score is a mirror, not a gate to game.** It measures formation across all nine virtues without turning it into a leaderboard, so an organization can have an honest conversation about readiness that is not simply "how long have they been here" or "how much do people like them."
- **Level 4 governance is explicitly fruit-verified, never automatic.** Even within Troika's own covenant household, "Level 4 eligibility is perpetual for direct heirs but requires fruit/formation — never

entitlement." Bloodline, tenure, and title are deliberately insufficient on their own. This is a structural decision, not a sentiment.

- **Troika Consulting's peer-triad model builds slow, mutual accountability into formation itself** — three people, rotating roles, examining real situations together over time, rather than a single evaluator making a single go/no-go call under time pressure.
- **"Pressure reveals, it does not create" governs how Troika designs testing.** Formation content (the 4th Day Reset, the ABC courses, the veteran cohort model) intentionally creates safe, bounded pressure — retreats, accountability groups, structured trials — specifically so that gaps in formation surface in a context designed to strengthen the person, rather than in a public platform designed to expose a congregation to the consequences.

IX. Conclusion

The tragedy in most stories of leadership failure is not that the person was evil from the start. It is that somewhere along the way, an organization — often with good intentions, often under real pressure to fill a real need — handed someone more weight than their formation could yet carry, and called the resulting collapse a personal failure rather than what it more often was: a structural one.

Troika's answer is not to slow down out of fear, or to withhold opportunity out of suspicion. It is to build formation and responsibility as two horses in the same harness, moving at the same pace, so that when influence does grow — and it should grow, as fruitfulness naturally invites greater stewardship — character has already arrived to meet it.

"Formation must match responsibility. We harm leaders and churches when we scale influence faster than character."

"Pressure reveals formation; it does not create it."

That is not a caution against leadership. It is the only foundation sturdy enough to hold it.

Scripture Reference List

- Genesis 2:8-9, 15 — the Father prepared a garden (Original Intent, movement 1)
- John 14:2-3 — the Son prepared a place (Original Intent, movement 2)
- Luke 1:17 — preparing a people for the Lord (the human vocation SII protects)
- 1 Samuel 8:5-7, 19-20 — Israel demands a king "like all the nations"; the oldest instance of scaling by appearance over character
- 1 Samuel 16:7 — God looks at the heart, not the stature
- Exodus 18:21 — trustworthiness named alongside ability in Jethro's counsel to Moses
- 1 Timothy 3:6 — not newly converted, lest conceit and the devil's condemnation follow

- James 3:1 — not many should become teachers; greater judgment awaits
- 1 Timothy 5:22 — lay hands on no one hastily
- Matthew 7:16-20 — you will recognize them by their fruits
- Luke 16:10 — faithful in very little, faithful in much
- 1 Corinthians 4:2 — it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful
- 2 Timothy 2:2 — entrust to faithful people who will become competent
- James 1:2-4 — testing produces endurance, toward maturity and completeness
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 — Paul disciplines himself lest he be disqualified
- Galatians 5:22-23 — the fruit of the Spirit, singular and unified

All Scripture quoted from the New International Version, 1984 edition (NIV84), per Troika Ministries' translation standard settled 2026-07-08. Converted from the original Lexham English Bible (LEB) citations, 2026-07-09.

Canon Alignment

Existing canon	How this paper reinforces it
The Epidemic (Series Preface)	This paper is the direct answer to Symptom 02 (Famine of Formation) and Symptom 04 (the Oldest Pattern)
Original Intent Narrative	\$I'll grounds the thesis in the vocation itself — rushing a leader interrupts the Spirit's own preparation, not just organizational risk
ABC Model	Names precisely why Character lags Attitude/Behavior in formation speed
10-stage formation pathway	Grounds why Leadership is stage 9, not stage 1
Troika Score	Positions the instrument as mirror-for-readiness, not scoreboard
Post-Failure Leadership & Restoration Framework	This paper is the prevention companion to that framework's triage
"Pressure reveals formation; it does not create it."	Elevated from quote to full argument (SV)
Level 4 governance clause	Cited as structural proof the conviction is built into Troika's own polity
Neurobiology and Biblical Integration canon	Hebb's Rule / myelination cited as the mechanism behind why Character cannot be rushed

Canonization Record

- **Originated by:** Dr. J (Jose G. Rodriguez, Ph.D.)
- **Drafted by:** Shepherd (AI), at Dr. J's direction, using Dr. J's own quoted thesis and Troika canon as source material, with Scripture retrieved live from Dr. J's Logos library

- **Status:** Awaiting Dr. J's review for voice and doctrinal precision before being finalized as position paper #1 of 9 and used as the pattern for the remaining eight
- **Review:** Dr. J retains sole authority to amend, publish, or withhold this paper

Last updated

2026-07-04

— — —

Lead Whole. Live True.

Troika Ministries • 501(c)(3) • EIN 30-0202549 • troikaministries.org