



## Balance and Boundaries

### Personal Foundation 6 of Sustainable Leadership

#### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a Christian leader's work/life balance and boundaries and the relationship with sustainable leadership. Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) for church leaders who completed the Leader Survey show that those with good balance and boundaries are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out. NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church



leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage

well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Balance and Boundaries is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

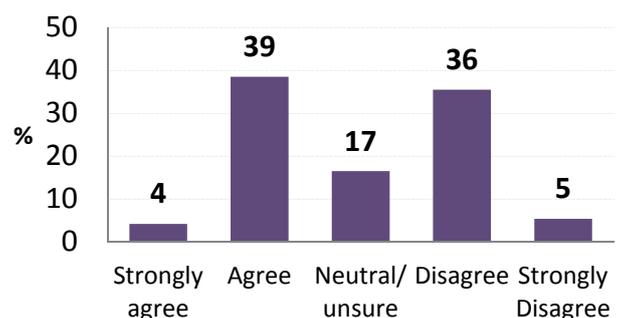
#### What are balance and boundaries?

Constant and unbroken engagement in ministry can stop a church leader's energy levels returning to a natural and healthy equilibrium. It's possible for leaders not to recognise when this is happening, or to feel powerless to do something about it. Being sometimes caught amidst competing demands and limited resources only emphasises the need for a leader to establish clear and appropriate boundaries between work time and other time. A balanced life with clear boundaries allows leaders to be realistic in knowing

what they do and what they don't do. Not doing this may, in the longer term, mean the leader cannot sustain their energy levels in ministry, becoming overwhelmed, and unable to cope. Results for almost two thousand senior church leaders to two key questions in this area are shown below.

*" I find it hard to keep my work life separate from other areas of life such as my home life "*

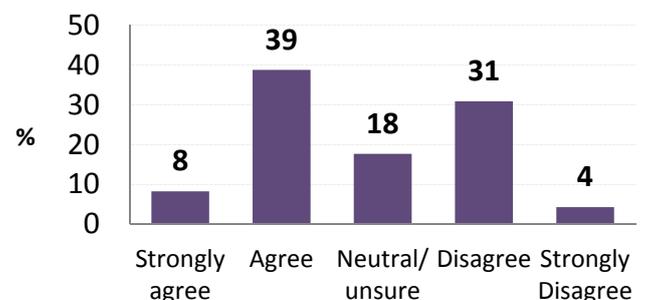
**Figure 1: Hard to keep work separate from other areas of life**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,870, weighted).

*" I often find I have a lack of time for recreation, relaxation or other activities "*

**Figure 2: Lack time for recreation/relaxation activities**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,868, weighted).

There are more senior ministers who agree they find it hard to keep work separate from other areas of life, than those who disagree (Figure 1). Almost half (48%) agree that they have a lack of time for activities that would bring balance to their work life (Figure 2). Clearly maintaining good work/life balance and boundaries is a challenge for many church leaders.

A positively worded question "I manage to keep good boundaries between work and the rest of my life" showed a similar breakdown with 50% of senior leaders agreeing and 50% either disagreeing or indicating they were neutral or unsure. This issue is certainly not just a problem for senior church leaders, with lay leaders even less likely to agree. Those who have been in ministry less than 3 years or with no theological training, or working over 50 hours a week are all more likely to indicate problems with maintaining their boundaries and work-life balance.

On the positive side, those who are participating in retreats or meeting with a professional or pastoral supervisor or mentor are more likely to agree they are maintaining good work-life boundaries. There are many other activities that those in church leadership (both lay and ordained) participate in and find helpful. Figure 3 below shows the results for senior church leaders to the question:

*"How helpful have each of the following been to you in reducing stress levels or enhancing your wellbeing?"*

The most strongly endorsed activity was 'Going on recreational leave', with 75% of senior ministers describing it as 'very helpful' and another 18% as 'of some help'. Also highly rated was 'Spending quality time with your family' (68%), 'Spending time alone in reflection, prayer' (58%) and 'Doing physical exercise

or sport' (57%). Each of these were at least 'of some help' to over 90% of senior leaders. Simple things such as 'Doing hobbies or non-ministry activities' and 'Learning to say no' were also very helpful to over 40% of leaders, while 'Participating in retreats, spiritual formation' and 'Listening to music and going to cultural events' were not selected by as many leaders, perhaps because they represent short term single events. As stated earlier, those who participated in retreats were more likely to indicate good boundaries, and this includes even those who described those retreats as 'not very helpful'.

### An important area for leaders to follow up

The nature of church leadership is naturally going to produce challenges in terms of maintaining work-life balance and boundaries. Living in close proximity to the workplace and having unusual and necessarily flexible working hours are practical issues many vocations do not need to contend with. Being part of a community where all (or most) others are volunteers also creates boundary dynamics that others often remain unaware of. Add to these the nature of the work as ministering to important needs, whether personal crises, teaching and administering sacraments, or equipping others for service, and it can be difficult for leaders to know when to say 'no' to rest and recharge.

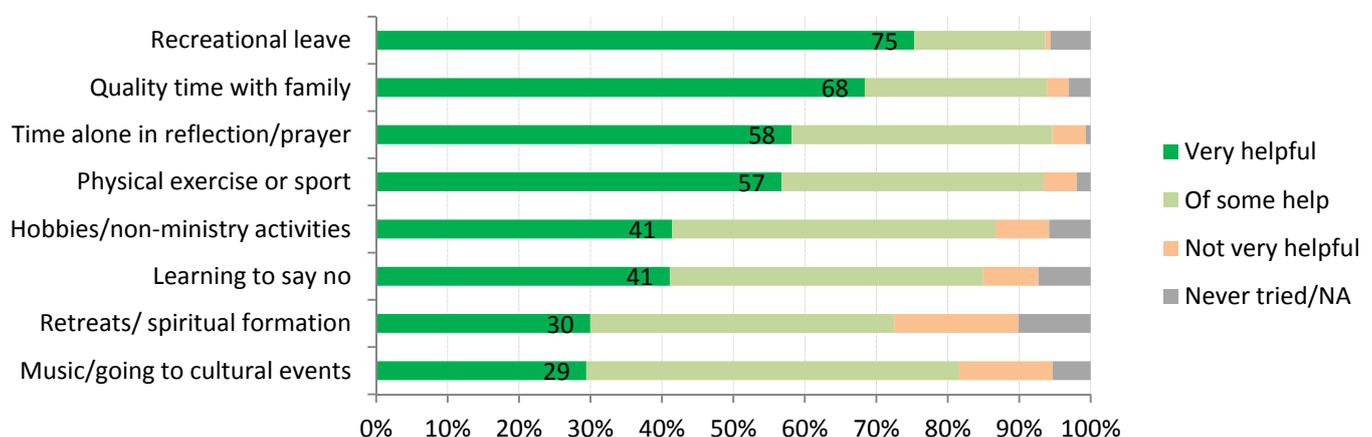
### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) Balance and Boundaries: Personal Foundation 6, Factsheet 1.14007. Sydney: NCLS Research.

**Figure 3: Helpful activities for work/life balance and boundaries**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey D Senior Leaders(n=479, weighted).