



# THE MULTI- VOCATIONAL LEADER

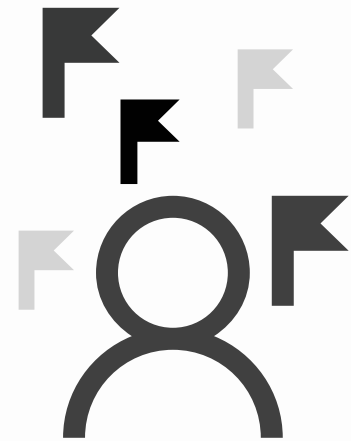
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**OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**



DR. ROB MCKENNA,  
 WILD LEADERS

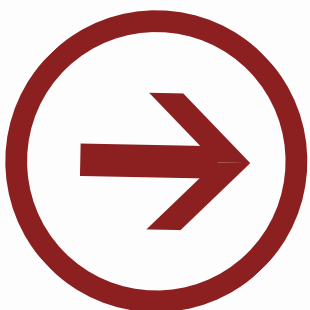
# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MULTI-VOCATIONAL LEADER AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO INVEST IN THEM?



To be a multi-vocational leader is to be a person who is called to be a leader or a contributing member in more than one context of our lives - the number of contexts being defined by the number of different calls to serve that we may receive and the number of times we respond with a “Yes, I will serve there” answer.

Those contexts are oftentimes organizations or roles, but not always. In some cases, they are simply places we are called to serve. We may feel a sense of call to a specific leadership role within one organization, or feel a call to serve in two or three organizations. Even further, those calls are not always to organizations, but to roles within our life that will likely include caring for family, raising children, community service, or even a time when we are called to be a good friend to those close to us.

**Whatever the case and number of calls, to be multi-vocational is to be open to and responding to multiple roles in multiple contexts, while being true to our primary vocation.**



**AS MY DAD HAS ALWAYS TOLD ME, “OUR JOB IS TO BE OBEDIENT TO THE CALL UPON OUR LIFE WHILE REMAINING OPEN TO BEING CALLED ELSEWHERE.”**

While it would be clean and simple to imagine us being singularly vocational - maintaining a sense of obedience and calling to one job or role - most of our real lives and stories don't look like that. While being called to serve in one place is a lot simpler to consider, most of us serve our world and those within our sphere of influence in multiple ways while maintaining a rooting in one job, role, career path, or call.



**HOWEVER, THAT REALITY MAY CHANGE AS MORE AND MORE LEADERS ARE SEEING A NECESSITY OR NEED TO SERVE IN MORE THAN ONE PLACE.**

*My use of the word serve is intentional, because the rooting of our work as vocation is a call to serve, and not simply a job to have. The reason for responding to more than one "call" could be as simple as needing additional income to support the primary call, or being called to serve in more than one role because we feel that is what we are supposed to do.*

## THE IMPACT OF TIME



The reality is that the question of whether or not I may be called to multiple actual "jobs" is often a question of time. If we had unlimited time and bandwidth, we could serve in an infinite number of ways. But, it is clear that time is a limited resource that is so often ignored because of the pressure we feel to do more and more with less and less. And, that feeling is sometimes, if not often, a choice we made and not a pressure put upon us. The reality of our singular, co-vocational, bi-vocational or multi-vocational world is that there is only so much time in a day, and we must rest sometime.

# THE MULTI-VOCATIONAL CONTEXT

While it would be naive and even reckless to assume that people either can do one job well, or that they must do multiple jobs well, the reality is that different jobs require different things and in the end require us to make choices as freely thinking and deciding beings. In other words, in many cases (not all) we have a say in the matter of whether or not we will serve more deeply in one context, or serve in multiple contexts.

**ONE OF THE MOST OBVIOUS AND WELL DOCUMENTED EXAMPLES OF THE TENSION BETWEEN HAVING ONE JOB, BEING BI-VOCATIONAL, BEING CO-VOCATIONAL (SERVING IN TWO ROLES INTENTIONALLY), OR BEING MULTI-VOCATIONAL IS IN A MINISTRY CONTEXT.**

In that context there are many opinions about whether or not a clergy member, pastor or priest should, can, or must be bi-vocational. Some would suggest that being bi-vocational is necessary for leaders because in our modern world it would be better to secure financial resources outside of ministry to free up the deeper sense of call within ministry. In some circles, that thinking is described as a co-vocational call that is intentionally chosen. Others would suggest that clergy should not have another role outside of the church - at least if possible. And still others would suggest that the option to take on a second job beyond being a pastor is out of necessity due to financial constraints on a local ministry.

**CONTRAST THAT MINISTRY CONTEXT WITH THE REALITY OF MANY BUSINESS LEADERS.**

In a business context, resourcing often (not always) comes from that job in business. What people in business settings often describe regarding being bi-vocational is about their desire to serve outside of the business in order to respond to a call to serve a population they feel drawn to serve. While the term bi or co-vocational isn't often used in those discussions, maybe it should be. In the same way that a ministry leader may need a second role to play to resource their life, a business leader may desire a second role to play to resource their sense of call.

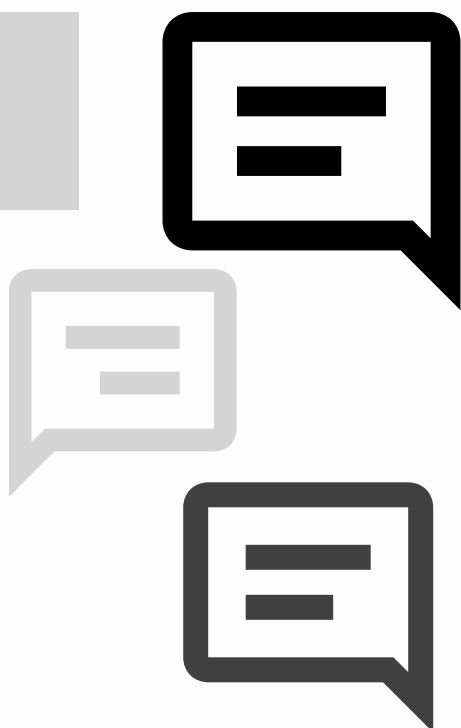


**IN THAT WAY, BEING BI-VOCATIONAL IS LESS ABOUT WHAT SOMEONE OUGHT TO DO, BUT MORE ABOUT THE BROADER SENSE OF CALL ON THEIR LIFE THAT WILL HELP THEM TO DISCERN DECISIONS RELATED TO TAKING ON MORE THAN ONE ROLE, AND FOR WHAT REASON.**

# RECLAIMING THE ROOTS OF VOCATION

While a vocation is oftentimes associated with a job in our 21st century context, the meaning of the word vocation is rooted in the concept of “voice” or the “call” we have received to serve in some way in our world. Reframing that is so critical when we think about being multi-vocational from a more whole and real perspective. The whole story and real story of leaders across the not-for-profit, educational, governmental and business worlds is that vocation is about a role or a job. It wasn't always that way. While a vocation may be a job, the foundation of a vocation is a call to serve.

**Responding to those calls on our lives oftentimes requires us to consider the sacrifices that may be necessary to respond to that call to serve in a specific context. If our vocation is deeply rooted in the place we feel called to serve, why has so much attention been given to the argument regarding being in one role or being “bi-vocational”. Without dealing with all of the complexities behind that question, here are some possible reasons.**



Sometimes we are called to multiple roles because we simply are. Different leaders are drawn to different things, and different numbers of places where they will serve. For some, serving in multiple contexts keeps them fresh or even allows them to understand the perspective of normal working people. For others, the choice to be bi-vocational comes out of a financial necessity. In the economics of our lives and in different moments in history, it can be more or less challenging to resource our lives and families. In that way, a second role or job plays a critical role in our overall vocation by providing the financial margin necessary to be free to serve in places where resources are thin.

**AND FINALLY, FOR SOME LEADERS, THE GOAL IS TO AVOID THE NECESSITY OR EVEN TEMPTATION OF SERVING IN MULTIPLE WAYS. IN ANY OF THOSE THREE CASES, THE CHOICE AND OPTION TO RESPOND TO THE DIFFERENT CALLS ON OUR LIVES AND WORK DEMANDS A MORE WHOLE AND INTENTIONAL PREPARATION.**

# A WHOLE AND INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO THE SINGULAR OR MULTI-VOCATIONAL LEADER

A whole and intentional approach to our calling and vocational choices starts with a deep investment in understanding who we are as leaders, listening for the call, and making choices regarding the call to respond to given the needs of others, and ourselves.

## Developing a whole person is powerful in at least three ways.

- 1 It prepares to them to lead strong and effectively in their role - keeping open the possibility that their organization will be successful enough to do that one job.
- 2 It makes them aware that they have a choice, and it gives them more choices going forward. Being bi-vocational, uni-vocational, co-vocational, or multi-vocational isn't something we should prescribe, but something we should help leaders discern with intention.
- 3 In that way, it is perfectly appropriate to be co, or bi, or multi-vocational out of a choice, a need, or a higher summons on our life to serve in more than one way, but is less healthy to choose out of compulsion or desperation - especially when better preparation may have given us more options down the line. Whenever possible (and I'm fully aware sometimes we must do what we must do to resource our families in desperate times), getting intentional about developing our leadership and personal capacity will give us more choices, and the ability to develop other leaders so that they too will have more possibilities and choices.

I have spent most of my adult life invested in leaders who are willing to take a whole and intentional look at their lives and leadership. And, much of that time has been spent working with leaders in ministry and business contexts - and those leaders are more alike than they think. If you feel called to have one role or job, it is necessary to lead well enough that the organization within which you will serve can sustain you and other leaders and those receive a paycheck effectively. While we want to separate financial resourcing from issues of the heart, the two are connected.

SO, UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LEADER IS CRITICAL. MOST SEMINARIES DON'T TEACH IT, AND IT SHOULD BE REQUIRED EVERYWHERE. AND, IF YOU MUST FIND A SECOND ROLE TO RESOURCE YOUR LIFE AND FAMILY, GETTING INTENTIONAL ABOUT INCREASING YOUR EMPLOYABILITY IS SO CRITICAL. INCREASING OUR EMPLOYABILITY MEANS UNDERSTANDING THE SKILLS I HAVE GAINED AND THE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE TAUGHT ME IMPORTANT LESSONS AND HOW THEY APPLY TO CONTEXTS OUTSIDE OF MY CURRENT ONE.



# SO WHAT ARE WE TO DO???

- 1 Be Open to Change:** Responding to the vocation and call on our lives requires us to be play an active and intentional role in that response. While it is necessary to be open to the places you will be called to serve, equally important is understanding who you are, your blindspots, personality, competencies and skills, and developing your capacity as a whole person and leader.
- 2 Identify Your Primary Vocation:** For most leaders, a movement toward a singular focus is important. Having multiple jobs is challenging for most people. It is no wonder that according to some research, 50% of all pastors will leave ministry within 5 years of being in ministry. Being a pastor is already taxing enough having one job. Add a second or a third job and it is difficult for even the most resilient leaders. Identifying your primary vocation gets you beyond thinking of vocations as jobs, because you may have one job that is fulfilled through multiple roles.
- 3 Get Intentional:** If you must have more than one professional role, be intentional about why and where you are going next. Responding out of choice is ideal, but sometimes preparing for the possibility that we may need a second job is going to be necessary.
- 4 Commit to Whole Leader Development:** Maintaining the choice to serve the world in the way we feel called requires intentional preparation for that moment. Understanding our competencies, key experiences, support networks of opportunities, motivations, and blindspots plays a huge role in the possibilities into which we may be called as well as what it will take to serve well in our primary call.
- 5 Identify Your Agency:** Encourage leaders in ministry or in business to consider that it is the whole story of their life that is playing a role in their ability to choose the path that feels best for them. A leader without options because they do not know themselves well and have not developed their leadership capacity will find themselves forced into multi-vocational options that they may or may not have chosen if we had started our investment earlier.
- 6 See Jobs as a Part of Vocation:** Avoid the temptation to confuse individual vocations with jobs, and move toward a more whole perspective on vocation. While a call to a role like pastor or business leader may be a call, a more whole perspective on that role may be to see a job as the vehicle through which the call is ordained and fulfilled. And yes, if business leaders and every person working in an organization saw their role as an ordained responsibility, what would change? These are not jobs, and lives are not simply lives. These are moments and lives into which we have been called to serve. Every moment. If our goal is to respond to the calling on our lives at any given time, other factors will play important roles in our capacity to respond, and to respond well. And, that response will be different for different people with varying levels of financial, social, or career support at any given time.
- 7 Establish a Strategically Sustainable Life:** If the goal of being bi-vocational or multi-vocational is to serve across multiple contexts or to understand and expand your exposure to people outside of your current context, then make choices that will help that way of life be sustainable. If you respond to multiple calls out of compulsion to serve and not intention, the research is clear that the pressure you place on your life and family and service may be too much to sustain.

# WHERE DO WE BEGIN AS THOSE ATTEMPTING TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO THE CALL AND VOCATION DRIVING OUR IMPACT ON OTHERS?



We must start with intention, and a deeper and more systematic dive into our wild journey - our whole and intentional leader journey. It's not complicated, but it does take an intentional pause at regular intervals on our competencies, weaknesses and blindspots, our character formation, the needs and motivations of our families and team members, and developing our capacity to lead and contribute.

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**With that knowledge and practice, we become more able to respond well to the calls on our lives, to be effective and employable when we start to serve, and able to make agentic choices on how we will serve and what we will sacrifice to respond to the call.**

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Dr. Rob McKenna Founder + CEO of WILD Leaders

Recently named among the top 30 most influential I-O Psychologists and featured in Forbes, Dr. Rob McKenna is the founder of WILD Leaders, Inc. and The WILD Foundation, and creator of the WILD Toolkit. His research and coaching with leaders across corporate, not-for-profit and university settings has given him insight into the real and gritty experience of leaders. His clients have included the Boeing Company, Microsoft, Heineken, Foster Farms, the United Way, Alaska Airlines and Children's Hospital. He is the author of numerous articles and chapters on leadership character, calling, effectiveness, and leadership under pressure. He served as the Chair of Industrial-Organizational Psychology at Seattle Pacific University up until 2020, with a total time at SPU of 25 years. His latest book, *Composed: The Heart and Science of Leading Under Pressure*, focuses on the specific strategies leaders can use to stay true to themselves and connected to others when it matters most. Rob lives in Washington with his wife, Jackie, and their two sons.