Excerpts – Switch Off – Grogan & Bradley

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Excerpt 1

*I lie awake at night thinking of my congregants. How are they doing? How can I help them?*

*My friends are uncomfortable with my role – they grew up thinking the pastor is untouchable. I have to make them feel comfortable.*

*No one taught us to read contracts or manage staff in seminary.*

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### The Challenge

As a member of the clergy, you occupy a special place in our society. You come to the role to serve, and in many cases, you may be asked to serve 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This passion and caring is inspiring, but potentially exhausting.

Even the most energetic congregational leader does not have unlimited energy. Structured free time, such as a weekly day off or periodic sabbatical, are a great start, but may not always be practical. Even if you are able to have time “off the clock,” your mind can drift back to your role now and then!

### The Solution – The Off Switch

Like a light, if you don’t allow yourself to turn off from time to time, burn out will catch up with you. Finding your Off Switch means identifying the issues that keep you on, examining them in a fresh light, and giving yourself permission to address them in a way that will allow you to relax and refresh. Re-soul, if you will.

As we sifted through our interview notes, we came to the Off Switch metaphor as we noticed three themes floating in the background of every conversation.

* My work never ends.
* Whatever I do, it’s never enough.
* I have to do it all.

As coaches, we’ve seen over and over how useful questions lead us to challenge our assumptions and open up new possibilities. So we’ve flipped the identified themes into questions to consider.

1. Where am I taking on stuff that isn’t mine?
2. How much is enough?
3. What do I need to say ‘yes’ to? What do I need to say ‘no’ to?

The Off Switch questions create an opportunity to address these concerns, allowing you to shine your light on a greater vision of what is possible from your pulpit.

Excerpt 2

With so many competing calls for our time and attention, many of us find ourselves operating on autopilot. When we’re on autopilot, we abdicate control of our choices and allow ourselves to be buffeted by other forces, worrying about other people’s demands and the pressures of “shoulds.”

As a result, we lose focus. We waste energy complaining, leaving us too spent to address the things we want or need to focus on. Our switch becomes permanently stuck in the On position.

To increase your ability to switch Off, establish clear boundaries between Off and On. Remember every action or reaction—even no action—is a choice. Every time we say ‘yes’ to one thing, we say ‘no’ to another. Likewise, if we say ‘no’ to something, we say ‘yes’ to something else. When we make conscious and intentional choices, we’re better able to reclaim our sense of control.

*Our whole world is 24/7 now. I don’t take vacation. I don’t have downtime.*

*I feel guilty when I do.*

When a well-intentioned pastor says ‘no’ to vacation and downtime, she may say ‘yes’ to feeling tired and overwhelmed. Perhaps this choice serves her and her congregation. Our guess is this devoted minister will not be able to sustain her current pace.

*I don’t know when to say ‘no.’ The congregation has reasonable expectations. I don’t want to say ‘no’ because I love what I do.*

Even when we love what we do, we must use our Off Switch on a regular basis. Without self-care, we are likely to face burn out and then cannot be of service to anyone. An extreme yet true example is a minister we know who loved his congregation and worked around the clock supporting his community. Unfortunately, he passed away suddenly at the age of 42 from a massive heart attack. While his family and congregation took comfort in their belief that he had gone to meet his Maker, there was also shared sadness for the loss of his potential impact, guidance and love.

Like his colleague in the first example, when this person says ‘yes’ to one more thing for the congregation – even though he likes it, he says ‘no’ to something else. Perhaps he says ‘no’ to being home with his family for dinner or going to the gym.

We don’t know which decisions are “right” or “good.” The merits of these decisions are relevant only to the individuals, their families and their congregations. The important thing is making the choices, rather than the choices making you. Because *not* making a decision is a decision to leave things just as they are.

The first step to regaining our sense of control is to become aware of the choices we’re making, whether consciously or on autopilot. As you become more aware of the choices you are making and the circumstances you are tolerating, you may decide you need to make different choices. Maybe you can't change your circumstances, but by consciously and intentionally choosing the way you *approach* them, you reclaim control of your experience.