The Leadership Jump: Building Partnerships between Existing and Emerging Christian Leaders.
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Considering that Jimmy Long’s Leadership Jump was published in 2009, it reads like a latecomer to the conversation about the emerging culture and its impact on the church. However, a close look at its intent, format and author reveals that it is not so much a latecomer as it is written for newcomers to the issues, specifically for existing leaders who are either in denial about the changes that are happening in the cultural landscape or who see them as threats rather than opportunities. The optimal point of entrance for those leaders to a conversation about change is though an existing leader who understands them and their resistance to change. A regional director of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for more than 25 years, Jimmy Long is that person. As he says in a previous book, Emerging Hope (first published in 1997 under the title Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching The Postmodern Generation), “It is ironic that for the last fifteen years I have been involved in bringing about change in ministry, because I do not like change. I initially did not want to change the way I did ministry, having been successful in doing it the old way” (p. 18).

In Part One, titled “Changing Culture, Changing Leadership,” Long lays out the big picture of the “massive transition” facing the church. He recognizes the emotionally charged nature of the issues but points to the inevitability of the coming “redirection” due to two incontrovertible realities: first, within the next ten years there will be a significant turnover of church leadership as many long time senior leaders retire, and second, we are no longer asking longer if we are entering a new culture but how we are going to face the new realities of the cultural landscape (p. 187). As the subtitle indicates, Long hopes that this book will help existing and emerging leaders build healthy partnerships so they can work together both now and in the future. The first step towards this alliance is to “break the impasse” and “talk to each other instead of ignoring each other or throwing grenades at each other (p. 187).” Leadership Jump provides a structure for this dialogue as each chapter begins with a “question to ponder” and ends with a series of “changes to consider.”

Long foresees two possible scenarios for the future of the church which he depicts through an explanation of the development of a “nor’easter,” a type of winter storm along the eastern coast of the United States. These storms can be formed in two
ways with very different results. If the storm gathers force along the eastern seaboard, it drops a moderate amount of snow in its wake as it moves up the coast. But the nor’eastern becomes a powerhouse if the fledgling storm at sea is empowered by the remaining energy of a storm from the Midwest that jumps across the Appalachian Mountain range instead of simply dying out on the western side of the mountains. Long urges existing leaders to “make the leadership jump,” investing their resources in blessing and empowering emerging leaders so that they can “develop the powerful church of the future” (p. 22). If existing leaders do not make the jump, Long predicts that their leadership “will be handicapped” while emerging leaders will leave the existing church and create the church of the future with their own energy and creativity but without the maturity and resources of the existing church.

The remaining sections of the book detail three categories of “specific leadership jumps” that need to happen in order for the transition from existing to emerging leaders to occur smoothly. Part Two examines the divergent views of the nature of leadership. Long characterizes the existing leader’s perspective of a leader as a “heroic,” ruggedly individualist, highly guarded person who derives their authority from their position in a hierarchical leadership structure. Long explains that this “great man” leadership model is in decline both because it is losing effectiveness and because people no longer trust it. The emerging, “Post-heroic,” replacement is horizontal leadership where power is distributed among a team of people who are vulnerable about their weaknesses and who earn the right to authority through their character and compassion as well as their performance.

Part Three focuses on the leader’s role. The first two proposed “jumps”—from task to community and from directing to empowering—build on the previously introduced themes of collaboration, participation, coordination, servanthood, and partnership. Long explains that the basic management functions of the modern era, which included planning, organizing and controlling, fostered efficiency, loyalty and numerical growth at the expense of relationships, initiative and creativity; in his experience with emerging leaders, “my attempts to bring about order only brought disorder and resentment” (p. 128). It is the cultural setting, not the expectations of the emerging leaders, which demands a final “jump”, a shift in focus from destination to journey, as Long explains, “Experience today can actually be a handicap….An outdated map does more harm than good” (p. 157). The responsibilities of the “journey guide” leader include setting the direction, building commitment, taking risks, keeping others on the path and moving forward.