

Christa R.:

Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership podcast. My name is Krista Reinhardt and I'm your host and senior marketing coordinator here at Vanderbloemen. Today, we will be continuing in our current series, New Year, New Rhythms, where we are walking through what you can expect to change in the new year and how you can prepare for those changes. In this week's episode, I get to sit down with Sarah Robbins, VP of client relations and our founder and CEO, William Vanderbloemen, to learn how you can complete your team after a year of transitions. We hope you find this conversation encouraging.

Christa R.:

All right, well, hello everybody. Today, I'm sitting down with Sarah Robbins, our VP of client relations and our CEO William Vanderbloemen. And we're talking about how you can complete your team after a year of transitions. Thank you guys for joining me today.

William V.:

Yeah, no, thanks for having us. It has been a year of transitions.

Sarah R.:

Yeah, it's been a few years. [crosstalk 00:01:07]

Christa R.:

Yeah, it has.

William V.:

I think I've been telling most of my clients and people that we get to work with, you'll have to forgive me, this is my first pandemic.

Christa R.:

So true.

William V.:

But we did call, as a team, sort of call it actually a year ago this week, we said there's going to be a bunch of job churn because of this COVID thing and it's happened. It's happened in every job sector. Doesn't matter what you're looking at and it's in the news. Somebody coined the phrase, the great resignation but like a year ago we said, it's coming. I would imagine if you're listening today and you're part of your team, your team looks different than it did a year or two ago.

Sarah R.:

And it's still in flux too. Everybody's still trying to figure it out.

Christa R.:

Completely. So like you mentioned, William, we have seen a lot of transitions and we at Vanderbloemen, we see this all day, every day. We know that having an incomplete team really can disrupt that mission that we are on. We've seen it, we've known it and moving into the new year, what do you think the organizations can do to change that course?

William V.:

Yeah. Well, call it, some things change, some things stay the same. Krista you've been with us for a while as an intern and now on our team, but you don't remember that back in the day, Sarah's OG around here. We did, I think the last time we did a podcast here, it was the old office.

Sarah R.:

Oh, probably.

William V.:

And in this little broom closet. I think we were so proud that we'd done like 500 searches or something and that was forever ago. When I look at what we've learned over the 13 years we've been doing this and the thousands of churches we've helped find staff, churn is going to happen. And, and we've been saying it, we say it in our succession book, every pastor's an interim pastor. I think I'm just getting where, it's all interim work, it's like Carrie Underwood, isn't she the one that said it's a temporary home or whatever [crosstalk 00:03:06].

Sarah R.:

Yes.

William V.:

It's just kind of, it's all temporary work. So the churn is not, don't be surprised when people leave you. If there's a pattern and you are part of the reason people are leaving, that's a different thing. So, it's a year of transitions, but some things go all the way back to when Sarah was flying around, doing searches before her current job to when I started a long time ago, and didn't even know some of the denominations that we serve now existed. I would say this stakes have been raised on a couple fronts in the last year. One of them being culture. And I sound like a book hawker, I'm really not. But when we wrote Culture Wins, which I guess came out all three years ago now, we were saying man, creating, and it was just for workplace, is really going to matter, and there's a reason for that. It's not just, you need to have a sliding border of foosball table or corn hole or whatever the thing is. There's a generation that is taking over the workforce.

William V.:

The millennials are now the dominant sector in the workforce gen Z's coming, so watch out. I think, did you tell me you were a geriatric millennial?

Sarah R.:

Yeah. They're calling us geriatric millennials now and it's a real bummer, I'm being honest.

William V.:

I don't know. It sounds kind of cool.

Sarah R.:

Do I sound distinguished?

William V.:

Yeah, exactly. I just think as this generation takes over the workforce, it's not a generation that is prone to stay places very long, right? And that's not because they're unreliable or demanding or what, we could do a whole nother podcast on that. But the reality is they're going to leave.

William V.:

So winning workplaces, whether you're a church or a school or a nonprofit, or if you're just listening and want to pass this on to a board member who runs business, turnover is going to happen more frequently in the next 20 years than it happened in the last 20 years. And the winning workplace is going to be the workplace that can retain employees just a little bit longer than their competitors. Because, this is kind of dumb, I'm talking them out of hiring us here and here you are like William... But when turnover happens, you are going to need help, probably a search firm. But if you can increase the culture, the irresistibility of coming to your workplace, you're going to be winning.

William V.:

I would've said that before the pandemic. Now I say it five times over because you A, you've got people who didn't come into the office, maybe some still aren't. And you remember when we came back to the office, I was, I think I was Darth Vader for a little while. [crosstalk 00:05:42].

Sarah R.:

It was hard.

William V.:

Yeah. What do you mean? Come back to the office? So you got to get people used to coming back to the office. We had, so we saw fortunately, our lead team foresaw that this was going to be a longer pandemic and not a two week shutdown or whatever. So we made some pretty massive restructuring happen overnight. And as we have grown back, I think this year may end up being our busiest year ever.

Sarah R.:

It's trending that way. It's pretty incredible.

William V.:

Yeah, it's pretty amazing. But as we've added back, we've added some new people. And I remember when we had our first sort of after work, get together, in person and a lot of us hadn't even met each other and some of us didn't know what to say to each other. And I joke, I mean, I love our people on our team. It felt like when I was the awkward kid at the middle school dance and you just stared your shoes and hope nobody... So I think a lot of workplaces are dealing with a more fractured culture than they had before the pandemic. And if it was already the thing that we need to do work on to retain people and you add a pandemic where people don't know each other and you add a pandemic that's caused a lot of turnover, I just think if companies, churches, schools will double down on what they're doing to build a workplace that's irresistible, then they'll go a long way. What would you add Sarah?

Sarah R.:

Well, I mean a couple things you said that I think are worth addressing. Number one, the generational thing. I was on a call with a board of a church. They were replacing, I think it was a 26, 27 year pastor.

And one of the board members said on the call, well, we really want our next pastor to be here for 20 something years. And I said, okay, I hear your desire for that, but let's talk about what gen X and what millennials are doing. And here's the reality. So how do you guys start reframing? And they might not hire us because I said this but I said, "How do you guys start reframing what success looks like for your upcoming pastor?" How do we make five years of success? What do we do with our new pastor in the church in this.

Sarah R.:

Same thing goes for a head of a school. Same thing goes for a CEO at a nonprofit. All of that is going to look different like William said, but I do think there's some specific things. One of the thing I said is right now, anybody who's leading an organization, who's in a number one or a number two chair at an organization wants to hear from their board members, from their leadership to the side and above them. Hey, we know you're thinking about it. We know that you care. For a pastor, you want to hear, hey, we know that you have prayed a lot about the decision to come back or how many people should be here or what you should do with your staff. We trust you.

Sarah R.:

Hey, we know that you have prayed a lot about the decision to have masks in your schools or not, or how to do distance learning or... Because they're all having to make decisions they've never, ever made before. They're all having to make these decisions in an environment that they've never ever been in before. And they all feel like an island because nobody agrees with them and the people that do agree with them are... It's a wild situation. So a lot of them just want to hear like, hey, we know that you care about this mission and we're with you. That's a big one.

William V.:

Yeah. I think encouragement will go a long way. If you'd ask me in July, when we were serving literally thousands of institutions that needed PPP money and we had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time and just kind of picked up a mantle that we weren't looking for and started helping people figure out how to get some aid. Back then, I'd say the majority of the pastors I talked to were about to quit. They were depressed and just about done with it all. I do see some difference now. People are tired, but I think people have kind of realized, sooner or later we're actually going to run out of Greek alphabet letters before the virus is over. So it's kind of here and how do we live alongside it and how to... So it's a different feel.

William V.:

And I'm hoping that the criticism level has dropped some because I don't know a single leader that has gotten straight A's for how they've handled the pandemic. I mean, doesn't matter what you did, they're people mad. So I would say those words of encouragement will go a long way. A year ago or even eight months ago, I would've said people are so tired, be really careful, you're not going to burn them out and they'll leave. I think now a little encouragement just goes a really long way. And I'd just say, back in the day, when you did searches with me, what were you thinking?

William V.:

When we were much smaller, we only had a handful of people. [crosstalk 00:10:31].

Sarah R.:

I was young. I didn't know any better.

William V.:

We didn't have, I mean, we got it done. We didn't have a repeatable process. Now there's some repeatable things. One of the things, no matter which consultant comes to see you, because we've got a bunch of them. There are some basic line questions that they'll all ask and one of them, I don't mind sharing. It's not like secret sauces. Hey, Krista, your chair of this board that we're helping you find your new headmaster for your school, how much time has to pass before I'm back here doing this search again?

Christa R.:

Right.

William V.:

And you're not mad at me. That's the way I see that. So it's well, 25 years. No, how long before you're not... And it shifts the conversation. You might use that next time you're doing your own hiring for something or if we're there and we don't ask that, say, William said, you're supposed to ask. You go ahead and tell them that. But it frames the expectation. Oh, well, a seven year run would be really good, or a five year run. [crosstalk 00:11:28].

Christa R.:

Sarah, I think you wanted to add something.

Sarah R.:

Yeah. I think this sounds stupid, so here, let me get to the nuts and bolts of what I'm going to say, but I think the need for communication has increased across the board. And again, yes, that sounds really obvious. But we have seen that leaders and organizations who were great communicators in their, just pulpit or great communicators with donors and that's it. But weren't great communicators on the day to day, weren't great communicators to their team, bottom down are really struggling and everybody has been struggling. So I think when we're thinking about what do we do to change that course? So how do we communicate better with our people? How do we communicate better with our team members? I have heard of, and I think this is really valuable, instances where there are some listening of like, hey, what are you looking for? What do you need?

Sarah R.:

We have our culture tool that you can take and get, and that's a way of communicating. But even sitting down with the people that you know are exhausted. Like what do you need? What do you want from us? Where do you want to be in five years? Think about the fact that we've been looking at each other on screens for several years and more and more of you are in person now, which is wonderful, but the ability to communicate like that is huge and I think will make a big difference. Even just be asked from your folks, long term.

William V.:

Yeah. It's amazing, the older I get, the more I realize Jesus asked a whole lot of questions. He even, he'd get asked a question and if you read it in the Greek, because we had to learn that in seminary from 100

years ago when, before I was even a pastor, back in seminary at Princeton, in the Greek it says, they asked Jesus a question and the Greek reads, and he answered the question by asking them a questions and then he asked them saying... Like it's super repetitive, pointing out, good leaders ask a lot of questions.

Sarah R.:

Yeah. I mean, we've even in our, we've had to up our communication with our clients because I think there's just a need for that. So we have. Part of my job is to make sure our searches are going well and if they're not going well, how do we fix it? And how's everybody doing? So it's pretty high touch.

William V.:

And I've said, we get asked a lot on, whether there's symposium or a podcast or now conference talks, like what does the post pandemic pastor look like? Because it is going to be an entirely different kind of person that is fruitful or effective or successful, whatever adjective makes you happy and not sad. It's different for everybody, right? We have some clients, like don't talk about growth. We have others that they're totally driven. Whatever. The winning pastor going forward will be more of a people person than the winning person, the winning pastor before the pandemic was. What I mean when I say that, now that we've all learned how to stream online, all of your people at your church or your school can get fantastic content anytime they want, anywhere they want.

William V.:

What they can't get is someone who shows genuine handcrafted care for them and interest in their life. So whether you're talking to your faculty, if you're running a school or you're talking to your parishioners, if you're a pastor or you're talking to your volunteer base, if you're running a nonprofit, any of those circumstances, the people who lead, who show direct personal care and hyper contextualized sensitivity to what's going on in every person's life, those people are going to win. And that doesn't mean somebody out there's going to say, does that mean I have to know everybody in my church through and through because there's too many people?

William V.:

No. Does that mean I have to go to every hospital that anyone's in ever? Well, first of all, you haven't had to go to a hospital in a year and a half. [crosstalk 00:15:12].

Sarah R.:

Good point.

William V.:

So you're probably looking forward to it when you can actually go. But here's a great turn of a phrase that when I was pastor at First Presbyterian in Houston, the search committee chair, I said, I'm concerned. I've been able to do all the hospital visits, no way I can cover 5,000 people. And he said, William people don't expect to be at the hospital. They expect to believe that you wish you could be at the hospital. And so if you can find a way to engender that level of, my leader cares about me as an employee. My pastor cares about me as a parishioner. That caring or priestly gift as we call it. When we talk about the threefold office of Christ and how it relates to leaders, that's going to be the calling card of the people who are going to succeed in this post or alongside pandemic world that we're in.

Christa R.:

Great. Well, I have another one I was curious and I kind of thought of this earlier, but with the new year, we have a new year, we have resolutions. We're thinking, how can we change? How can we be better this year? How can we further our mission this year? And with that, what is something that you think organizations or leaders can do that would have lasting effect? Whether that's focusing on mission values, pouring into that team, what are things that you think would be worthwhile?

William V.:

Well, I hate to grab the mic again, but I would say, I tell you where my focus is. It's securing the long, long term future of this mission that we have. We're on a mission to help church teams be able to move full speed. And when I say church, that can be a school that's pushing the cause of Jesus forward. It could be a nonprofit, it could be a congregation. But there's nothing that's slow down a mission driven organization, more than people problems. We're in the business of trying to help solve those people problems. That's why we've done however many searches we've done now over 13 years.

Sarah R.:

It's like 2000 something, I think. [crosstalk 00:17:10].

William V.:

Yeah, and frankly, I feel like we're just getting going.

Sarah R.:

Oh yeah, 100%.

William V.:

I'm committed to trying to make this movement of Jesus go farther and faster. I can't be the lid for that. I can't be the, when it stops. So me as a leader, what I'm going to focus on more is how do I make sure I'm not the lid? And that means good succession planning. I'm 51 years old, but you wouldn't think succession planning. No. We're going to keep finding ways to make me a little less essential to the day to day operation. I want to take on our friend, Dave Ramsey, who we've done a ton of work for in his company, helping find staff. I said, "Dave, what's your job description." He said, "Oh, I work on new things and broken things." [crosstalk 00:17:54].

Sarah R.:

Love that line.

William V.:

And I'm like, "I am stealing that." He said, "You should." A good leader should be out of the weeds enough to work on the brand new initiatives and the stuff that's broken. My resolution's going to be more of this movement to try and help the church move forward past people problems and less of William having to be involved in every little piece of it. I think that translates to any leader that's listening right now. Your days are numbered, sorry. That's the way it is. Your work is interim and the best thing you can do for your organization is secure the long term legacy after your time as leader is over.

William V.:

And that maybe you're a student pastor listening right now. How are you securing the long term future for when you're no longer there? Are you reading about succession? Are you studying it? It's going to be a very big deal for the next 10 years. That's why we took time seven years ago to write the first book. I think it's in every seminary I've been to now. I'm such a nerd and I go to seminary libraries and I look to see who, do they have our book? Yes, I'm that insecure that I need to know and sure enough, they do. So I'm not forced to have, they have to tolerate me sending pictures from libraries. They're like... So anyway, I would say most critical task of every leader is to secure the legacy of the organization they lead after they're done leading it and you can't start that too soon.

Sarah R.:

Yeah.

Christa R.:

That's good.

Sarah R.:

I think we were touching on this earlier, but I think at the end of the day, the biggest focus for you right now, if you're leading an organization is retention. The hiring, I've never, I've been doing this eight years now, I've never seen anything like this. The hiring market's insane. It used to be that we would bring our clients, here's five candidates for the role. One of them is exploring outside opportunities. And let me be clear, we never present, we're not for Vanderbloemen, we're not going to present a candidate to multiple places. We just don't agree with that philosophy. But that candidate is exploring outside opportunities on their own. Now, at least half of every group, they have multiple opportunities and it's just a different market.

Sarah R.:

I think you have to be focused on retention. You have to be focused on culture. You have to be focused on reevaluate what your PTO, reevaluate what flexibility can you give. I know money, doesn't always solve issues and you might not even have the money right now. What do you, how do you create a communication line? How do you open that up? How do you create an intern pipeline sitting next to Krista, who was an intern?

Christa R.:

I was part of it.

Sarah R.:

We, it might surprise you to know at Vanderbloemen we are a fan of internal hires.

William V.:

Yeah.

Sarah R.:



I mean, we love you to hire us to help you with your hires, but we think it's a great idea to have Krista's. That our interns are spectacular and now get to work with you full-time. So how do you focus on retention? And then from there, then I would say follow it by recruiting. How are you putting yourself out there? How are you being realistic about what you can recruit, looking for the right people when you're tapped out, outside help. I think right now- [crosstalk 00:21:03]

William V.:

I disagree with you.

Sarah R.:

Oh, go ahead.

William V.:

I don't think when you're tapped out, outside help. I don't think there's any more critical decision. By critical, I mean, needs judgment. That's what critical and crisis or the same word and they go back to like a moment of judgment. Nothing requires more discernment and judgment than making T hires. And if you're trying to do that all alone, I mean, you could go to a swing coach for your golf swing. Come on, you're going to do that. Or if you're going to pay somebody to teach you yoga, or you're going to... Why in the world would you not invest in who the person you're going to add to your team, that's going to be someone you've not met before, and I don't want to be like Mr. Doomsday, but let me just tell you the most expensive strata for hiring is hiring on your own and hiring bad people.

William V.:

That's way more expensive than us. I hate being the bearer of bad news, but you can have lost momentum. You're going to have a disruption in your mission. You're going to have lost revenue. You're going to have soft costs of you having to sit down and go find out what... So getting it right. I told my son who he's a teenage boy, which means he knows everything. And he was rushing through something the other day and I just remembered a line somebody told me, and I said it and it got through to him. I thought, well, then that's worth repeating.

William V.:

And what I said was, "If you don't have time to do it right, you really don't have time to do it twice." So I'm going to respectfully disagree. You don't call when you're tapped out. I've seen that change over 13 years. Where we were a brand new idea, and we don't know about that, and is that spiritual or not, and all that. To, we know we need to use a firm, let's talk to you and see if you're the right option. It's pretty cool that God called us into this at a time when he was kind of raising up the whole idea.

Sarah R.:

Well, actually that's a good point, because if I think... Part of my job is to do follow up calls after our... And we send out surveys, like how did we do? Where can we get better? And a lot of what we are hearing right now, my team is hearing is, hey, you found us a great candidate. We're happy about that but at the end of the day, this was a new role or we were replacing a beloved person. We needed your consulting advice. You were a guide to us. And I think that is often the biggest value ad that I'm hearing.

William V.:

Oh totally. No. If you run into a search person who says I've got a great network, a great... Everybody does, it's called LinkedIn. [crosstalk 00:23:28].

Sarah R.:

Yeah. It's called the internet.

William V.:

Finding names, like that's ridiculous. I think what we get hired to do, and I didn't mean to turn this about us, but it's not that we are like some superhero that goes and climbs Mount Everest. No, actually you guys who are doing the hiring are the ones that are making that climb. We're just a little Sherpa that's been up and down the hill 2,500 times and can tell you we're not to step and where to... That's what I hear people saying is, is the real value.

Sarah R.:

That's exactly right. And that's not something we could do 10 years ago.

William V.:

No.

Sarah R.:

But it's still something we're learning to do more and more every day. Like you said, we're just getting started. It's pretty [crosstalk 00:24:05] special.

William V.:

That's right.

Christa R.:

Yeah. I'm glad Sarah, you touched on, not to plug this in, but you hit on kind of two of our other teams, the recruiters and helping with recruiting as well as the consulting piece. And I'm glad you mentioned that because last week we talked to recruiters and next week we're talking to consultants. So if y'all, haven't tuned into that, go back and listen to those because we have some awesome team members that do this day in, day out. They are wonderful at what they do and they have a lot to share on kind of those points you were making earlier.

William V.:

They're pretty rare because I honestly don't know any other team where you have people that full-time all day, every day, all they do, not side hustle, but this is all we do, is focus on helping you get back on mission by having your team made complete.

Christa R.:

Exactly.

Sarah R.:

And they, man, you've got to really love the church and schools and nonprofits to do this for a living.

William V.:

Yeah, I go home some days and say, Jesus, you just have the most interesting taste in brides.

Christa R.:

[crosstalk 00:25:01] I think it was the other day you were like, yeah, we've seen a few things around here. [crosstalk 00:25:04] We've been up and down.

Sarah R.:

We've seen some stuff.

William V.:

Yeah. It's a beautiful thing though.

Sarah R.:

It really is.

William V.:

It's a humbling job to get to be in a really, frankly it's a sacred space and that's why Sarah says we don't let people do it this way. We have a way we do things because I'm just convinced, Krista's not tired of hearing me say this yet. Sarah probably is. I'm convinced when we have our, when I have my sit down with Jesus, that it's not moveable, right? One of the things he's going to ask me is why did you do that to my chess board? And I'm really hoping it's a good conversation. So we take a little bit of time to make sure we get it right.

Christa R.:

That's great. Well, thank you guys so much for joining me today. Before we wrap up too much, I have kind of a fun question I've been asking everyone, what are your resolutions for the new year? Do y'all have any fun ones?

Sarah R.:

I think my poor chicken brain right now was just going to say that I have a two year old and a seven month old. So I think my goal is to just wash my hair a little bit more this next year and [crosstalk 00:26:12] try and keep up.

Christa R.:

That's awesome.

William V.:

Yeah. Maybe the goal could be that this time next year you have a three year old and a one year old.

Sarah R.:

Yeah. That's the goal. Yep. A three year old and one year old. That's the goal. [crosstalk 00:26:21].

Christa R.:

Keep them alive.

Sarah R.:

Keep them alive, keep them fed.

William V.:

I don't know. I think Krista, I think this whole pandemic thing, I think it's probably happened for a lot of people, but it's just made me realize how fragile life is. I think it's that frankly, going to lead to an awakening in the church, it's going to be pretty cool. But for me that means, I am more focused now on getting my bucket list for life made. I've kind of always just sort of said, oh, that's a... No, but I really want to have it made so I can start working on it in a strategic way.

Christa R.:

That's great. Well, thank you guys so much for joining me today and tune in next week to everyone else, we hope you join us back here when we talk to our consultants.

Christa R.:

Thanks for tuning in. We hope this conversation and series will show you a glimpse of the kingdom work that we have the privilege of being part of keep tuning in to hear, We've seen God Move and learn tips for walking through each part of the hiring process. If you don't want to miss any upcoming episodes of New Year, New Rhythms, make sure to subscribe to the Vanderbloemen Leadership podcast, wherever you listen to podcasts.