Launch & Tend

Background for welcoming our foibles, reading early redemptive signals, and making timely, in-process adaptations as you advance from thorough planning into active 'Launch and Tend' mode

Why does hesitation so often arrive just as we get ready to launch?

If you have led a church or Christian organization through something new, you may have noticed a curious thing. The planning went well. People were heard. Options were weighed with care, and decisions were made through the right channels. And then, just as the work was about to become real, something shifted.

This is not a sign that something has gone wrong, and it is rarely a sign that anyone is acting in bad faith. Until now, the new ambition has been an idea—an imagined picture on a page. *Launch* is the moment it gets on a calendar, has a set of expectations, and a request on the time and hearts of real people. It is when we discover what the effort will actually ask of us, and who will be asked to carry it. Of course, feelings get real.

Hesitation takes many forms. Sometimes it is easy to see. Often it is:

- **In plain sight:** an honest objection voiced at a meeting, a heartfelt "we tried that before," a long-time leader who says gently, "I'm just not sure this is who we are."
- **Just beneath the surface:** agreement in the room that does not show up during the week; enthusiasm that quietly cools; a calendar that is suddenly full; a new worry about budget or timing; a joke with an edge; the familiar way slipping back in as though nothing had been decided; a good idea that waits until after the holidays, and then waits again.

It also tends to surface at the moments when stakes feel highest and patience feels shortest: on the eve of launch, when the first volunteers are asked to step in, when the first misstep draws attention, or just when momentum finally seems within reach. Those are the very moments when leaders feel the greatest pull to push through, or to pull back. Neither serves people well.

Here is a gentler way to see it. Hesitation is almost never opposition to the Gospel, and it is rarely opposition to you. More often it is love in an unfamiliar form: loyalty to those who built something faithful, grief over what might be lost, weariness from carrying more than one's fair share, or fear of being left behind or getting it wrong. Sometimes it is wisdom—someone noticing what the plan has overlooked. We have already named that some things should never change. The people who hesitate sometimes know what we missed affirming.

So, in *Launch & Tend* we do not treat hesitation as an obstacle to be overcome, managed, or outlasted. We receive it as information, and we receive the person carrying it as someone beloved and made in God's image. We seek to understand what is being protected. We let

our pace be set by people, not to stop, but to walk together. And we extend the same grace to ourselves, because leaders feel these pulls too, and may push or stall out of their own anxieties.

The rest of this brief guide helps you better understand and navigate this most-critical step in the *Redemptive Works* planning (and doing) process..

Why is "Launch & Tend" the critical test of redemptive work?

In many organizations, launching a new ambition is treated as a mechanical rollout. A first meeting date is placed on a calendar, and a program is seemingly launched. Yet a church or Christian organization is not a corporation selling a product or exchanging services for something in return. You are a community called by Christ to proclaim the Gospel, care for people, and participate in God's work of redemption and restoration.

Because your community relies largely on volunteers who give freely of their time, history, and hearts, moving from *"what is there now"* to *"what's coming soon"* is never just an operational shift. No claim of perfection is promised in the here-and-now. Even in the most well-intended communities, launching something new stirs up human complexity: the hesitation described above, along with confusion, fatigue, and quiet loyalty to familiar rhythms.

When these appear, leaders tend to lean toward one of two familiar responses. They push forward and wear their people out, or they stall and let momentum fade. *Launch & Tend* offers a third way. It pairs faithful forward movement with timely *check-ins* and *in-process adaptations,* so you can tend to people without losing momentum.

In the *Redemptive Works* framework, our methods must be as redemptive as our goals. The friction of launching is not an interruption to your ministry. It is the very place where grace becomes visible in ordinary practices, relationships, and decisions. That is why the whole process hinges on this step: the care with which you launch and tend will likely propel, or hinder, the ambitions that follow.

How should we think about change when introducing something new?

From the very start, Redemptive Works holds three convictions together:

- **Some things should never change:** Your confessional foundations and unwavering theological commitments remain the horizon for all that follows.
- **Some things can change:** Habits, structures, and rhythms may be gently adjusted when doing so serves your purpose and people.

- **Some things must change:** Where people are unseen, unheard, or hurt—even by well-intended habits—we must be willing to name them and respond with care.

When moving into Step 6 Launch & Tend, it helps to view new ambitions primarily as faithful additions rather than demands to abandon what came before. As organizational theorist William Bridges observed, *changes* (i.e. a new ministry rhythm or project, etc.) always trigger an *internal, human transition of some kind*—a gradual reorientation of our work in obvious and nuanced ways.

Rather than asking people to abruptly pay new attention to the 'new,' we begin by honoring what is already faithful. By checking in regularly, asking questions, and making small adjustments along the way, the "in-between" season (when the new ambitions start to enter reality) can become a source of rejuvenation rather than anxiety.

What are "redemptive signals," and how do we read them in motion?

During the launch period, we observe honestly what the community is seeing and experiencing. We pay close attention to *early redemptive signals*—the subtle relational and practical indicators showing whether our way of working embodies dignity, truthfulness, patience, humility, and restorative hope.

In volunteer-driven settings, the human challenges that surface during implementation are often redemptive signals, each one an invitation to a timely conversation and a thoughtful adaptation:

- **Hesitancy or quiet resistance:** This often signals unspoken loyalty to existing practices or fear of diminishing what is cherished. It invites us to honor people's stories, and asks us to understand what they hope to protect, before asking for more.
- **Last-minute questions, delays, or new concerns:** These often signal that the change has just become real. It invites us to listen for what is newly felt rather than hurry past it.
- **Confusion or uneven momentum:** This often signals unclear roles or invisible burdens. It reminds us to keep our efforts small enough to achieve and big enough to matter.
- **Tension between long-time contributors and newer voices:** This often signals an invitation to practice mutual dignity. It ensures that no one inside our walls goes unseen or unheard.
- **Early volunteer fatigue:** This signals a mismatch between dreams and human capacity. It calls us to adapt our pace so we care equally for those doing the work and those it serves.

When early missteps happen, we receive imperfection with grace. Instead of asking who is to be faulted, our first question is always restoration over blame: *How can people be cared for and relationships restored right now?*

Someone needs to be watching for these signals, and answering them. That is the work of a Producer.

Who will hold the launch ambitions together?

Somewhere between adopted ambitions and living practices, someone has to bring things together: people need to be invited, roles made clear, worries heard, resources found, and the redemptive commitments kept. When no one is named, the work tends to drift toward one of two defaults. It rests on a "committee or board" OR it falls to the pastor or one over-extended leader. Either way, it might be questioned if anyone is truly holding it.

The International Futures Forum offers a helpful picture of the ***Producer*** role. IFF director Graham Leicester describes the producer as the one who provides whatever is missing to carry an idea from imagination into reality, by finding, gathering, and arranging resources around it. His reflections draw on the experiences of Artichoke, a company that stages large, ambitious public events. That setting is far from a congregation, but the heart of it carries over. The role is as much about *being* as about *doing*, and it is relational rather than heroic. Leicester notes that the qualities that matter are qualities of relationship, not of one individual.

In a church or Christian organization, the Producer is either a committee/board that accepts responsibility for the selected ambition[1] OR one or two steady, trusted people, usually from within, who take up the launch as a shared charge. A Producer need not be the pastor or congregational chair, though either may be. A Producer is not a project manager and not a boss. A Producer is the person who says, "I will see that this is carried with care," and then does so alongside others.

What a Producer does

Leicester distills seven lessons from the practice of Artichoke. Several translate wonderfully to *Launch & Tend:*

- **Believe it is possible.** Beginning from "this is not going to work" defeats an effort before it starts. In our setting, belief is paired with realism: choose ambitions small enough to

[1] The complexity arises when a congregation adopts a number of ambitions that need coordination between them. When ambitions are more localized (for example, an outreach effort within the committee assigned to such work), the role is much more contained, yet essential.

achieve and big enough to matter, then hold them with quiet conviction.

- **Get the fears spoken.** Behind a "no" there is often a personal worry, and it can be addressed only if it can be voiced. The actions of Artichoke describe their role as almost therapeutic: helping people feel safe enough to say what they fear. They hold scenario sessions before major events, imagining the worst that could happen so that people are prepared rather than stalled. Ask early and ask again along the way: *What worries you about this? What could go wrong? What would help?* Then plan for it together.
- **Build relationships.** However much structure surrounds a launch, it is carried out by a human system, and things move through personal relationships. A Producer spends time with long-time pillars, committee/board members, quiet newcomers, and the hesitant, and builds bridges among them so that everyone shares ownership.
- **Take responsibility and seek contribution.** Leicester sees taking responsibility as the Producer's primary act. It frees others from hiding behind procedures or waiting on one lead person, so they can act out of care for the moment. It is not the same as dictating how things must go. It is a steady stance around which others' contributions can gather. And the lesson from Artichoke is clear: ask people only for what is within their capacity to give. That is a direct answer to early volunteer fatigue.
- **Watch your ambitions.** Leicester notes the temptation to compromise because something seems better than nothing. For a church, scale should stay modest. But the *quality of grace* should not. Do not trade away dignity, truthfulness, or fairness to people for the sake of "getting it done now."

A note as we borrow insights: Two of Leicester's lessons that we reject are that rules can be bent and that one should not ask permission. These come from a European producer working against institutional resistance in public spaces. They do not carry over for us. *Redemptive Works* honors your confessional foundations, your polity, and your governance, and leaves decisions with those responsible for them. The Producer, in our context, works within what has been adopted in Step 05. What does carry over is this: once those with authority have said, "Yes," someone should say plainly, "This is ours, and I will hold it," rather than returning again and again for reassurance. And it is wise to be clear about who can actually decide what, so no one is asked for something they cannot give.

How a Producer is

Leicester observes that every intervention carries a culture with it, and that Artichoke is conscious of this: how things get done matters as much as what gets done. In his words, means and ends are one. That is very close to our *Redemptive Works* conviction that our methods must be as redemptive as our goals. The qualities he describes include:

- **Respect.** A Producer tries to see things from another's point of view and to own their anxieties as if they were their own. It is easy to write people off as obstructive. The Producer does not, because the hesitant person is also made in God's image.
- **Trust.** Artichoke's experience is that when people are trusted to behave well, they tend to rise to it. Trust is earned by keeping promises, including the difficult ones.
- **Care.** A Producer does not push people too far, ask for what they cannot give, or add to their anxiety. Leicester adds an important caution: the Producer ends up holding much of the group's fear and worry. So surround your Producer(s) with care. Let them work in pairs on bigger ambitions, share the load, and have someone who checks on them.
- **Thorough groundwork, open hands.** Artichoke's preparation is meticulous, especially in its attention to relationships, yet its purpose is to create the conditions for good things to happen, not to control every detail. Do the quiet groundwork, then leave room for what emerges.
- **Expecting surprise.** A culture that expects surprise is more likely to be surprised by what it can do. Plan to learn, and to be glad when the unplanned arrives.
- **Just enough structure.** Artichoke names a time, a place, and a responsible person, and then makes space for others to contribute. People often discover gifts they had not recognized. This is asset-based invitation at work.
- **Hope.** Experiences of grace stay with people and can be drawn on again. A Producer helps the community notice them.

Leicester closes with the systems thinker Peter Senge's view that the success of an intervention depends greatly on the inner state of the one intervening. It matters where we are coming from. For a Christian Producer, this is a place for prayer: tending one's own heart so that the work flows from gratitude and not from anxiety or the need to prove something.

The Producer through the launch

- **Before launch:** Confirm the adopted ambition and the redemptive constraints and imperatives[2] that surround it. Gather the worries and imagine together what could go wrong. Match roles to gifts so workloads are fair. Name plainly who holds responsibility for what. Frame the first 30–60 days as a learning season.
- **At launch:** Introduce the new work as a faithful addition alongside what is valued. Honor the people who built what came before. Hold schedules, forms, and logistics lightly and your confessional commitments firmly. Stay present, and watch the early signals described above.

[2] See page seven for more information regarding this aspect of the launch.

- **After launch:** Lead the short check-ins described below. Adapt without blame. Tell the stories of grace as they happen. Leicester, drawing on the innovation thinker Max Boisot, distinguishes making a case through numbers from making one through a credible story. New work begins with the story. Once something real has happened, it becomes evidence too, and gives credibility to your next ambition. Then help the congregation take up the practice as its own, so that it is carried naturally, with or without outside help.

NOTE: *Redemptive Works* can walk alongside your Producers through the launch period, but the role belongs to you. It is the surest way a congregation grows into its own redemptive work.

Integrated Practices for "Launch & Tend"

Drawing together insights on human transitions (William Bridges), human-centered value (Umair Haque), adaptive stewardship (the International Futures Forum's "Producer" role), and asset-based community life, the following practices help churches and Christian organizations sustain momentum while tending to their people in real time. They are the Producer's everyday tools.

1. Guard with Grace-Filled Constraints and Imperatives

Thinker Umair Haque reminds us to trade the industrial-age "more and more" for genuine human flourishing, replacing business-oriented targets with *constraints and imperatives*.

- *Set **Redemptive Constraints** (What We Will Not Compromise):* Share early and openly any criteria, restrictions, resource limits, or other concerns that those leading will need to keep in mind. Establish clear boundaries that protect volunteer energy and relational warmth. Commit aloud that you will not build new efforts at the expense of others.
- *Orient Around **Redemptive Imperatives** (What Must Be True):* Measure faithfulness not by activity alone, but by visible signs of grace. Work together to name and affirm the behaviors and ways forward that support all involved. Observe whether those you serve are treated as neighbors made in God's image rather than prospects or data, and whether your volunteers and staff are experiencing community, clarity, and care as they serve.

2. Invite People Through Their Gifts, Not Empty Slots

In volunteer settings, burnout happens when leaders try to plug tired people into prefabricated roles. Instead, practice *asset-based invitations*. Begin with who is already before you, noticing the stories, passions, and God-given gifts members already carry. Frame new roles so that workloads are fair, expectations are considerate, and ordinary people can step in with genuine joy.

3. Make Room for Timely Check-Ins and In-Process Adaptation

Momentum is sustained not by rigid adherence to a plan, but by grace-filled responsiveness. Rather than announcing a permanent, high-stakes rollout, frame your first 30 to 60 days as a *faithful learning season* in which small adjustments are expected and welcomed.

- **Build in quick check-ins:** Gather volunteers briefly after early milestones—short enough to protect energy and preserve momentum, yet intentional enough to tend to what is happening. Reflect on three questions: *Where did we see visible glimpses of grace? Where did something feel heavy or unclear? What small, in-process adaptation would care for people better?*
- **Make it safe to say "I'm not sure":** Let people know that hesitation is welcome in these conversations and will be received without blame. What goes unspoken tends to surface later, and at less convenient moments.
- **Celebrate signs of life:** Share concrete stories of how neighbors were loved and how volunteers cared for one another, reminding the community that God was at work before you began and will remain faithful long after.

The Redemptive Ambition in Launch & Tend

At its heart***, Launch & Tend*** is not about proving that a plan worked. *It is about letting grace become visible in ordinary practice*—seeking humble, unforced glimpses of *"His will being done on earth as it is in heaven."*

When people experience new ambitions as genuine care, when early missteps are named and mended through timely conversations and check-ins, and when your community tends and carries these practices naturally in its own rhythm, you know the work is bearing redemptive fruit.

So many questions and thoughts are swirling!
Begin your conversation with Redemptive Works'
Planning Facilitator, Dr. David Hietala here.