



## Shift Your Stewardship Talk



**T**he old axiom is oft quoted: “Actions speak louder than words.” In fact, this is such familiar wisdom that one might be tempted to put down this StewardCAST newsletter and move on to something else, since it will likely not say anything new. But to quote the old ESPN college football analyst Lee Corso, “Not so fast, my friend!”

### The “talk shift”

In his recent book *22 Talk Shifts*, Krister Ungerbock challenges this assertion. Ungerbock offers some helpful tips on making intentional changes to how one talks to help redefine and reshape relationships in the workplace and in the home. In his “Talk Shift #21,” he writes, “The words we use when we make commitments to ourselves and others set the stage for the action that will follow, and our word choices can have a significant impact on whether our actions

will match our words.” Our words direct our actions. Our subsequent actions can either validate or invalidate our words. This is true of how others see us. It is true of how we see ourselves. When words and actions agree, the stewardship of all of life and life’s resources is advanced. When words and actions do not agree, the discordant melody is offensive to others’ ears and to our own.

This “talk shift” has a clear application to stewardship. When the words and actions of the steward are in harmony, God is glorified, and the neighbor is served. In some congregations, any talk of stewardship commitments is seen in a negative light. However, every capital campaign and every stewardship program utilized in congregations usually culminates with the steward making some kind of commitment. The ubiquitous “commitment card” is a staple. This commitment is often used to assist the local congregation in its

execution of corporate stewardship. In some congregations, this commitment is seen only by the eyes of the individual steward. There has been and will likely continue to be debate about the use of this process. Yet, in spite of this debate, the process of making commitments will remain a key part of individual and corporate stewardship.

### The rules of commitment making

Ungerbock makes some compelling suggestions in this area which could well serve as a call for congregations and individual stewards to make a “talk shift” when it comes to commitment making. He asserts, “When you make commitments to others following the rules ... you’ll find that people are more likely to believe that you will follow through on your commitments.”

Ungerbock’s rules for making commitments include:

**Be Specific.** In stewardship, this would mean making a clear commitment in a concrete fashion. In dealing with financial stewardship, it would mean writing down a specific number. In service, it would mean making written commitments in areas of service for the coming year. Whatever the case, a specific target is essential for the steward.

**Speak Your Commitment to Others.** Ungerbock writes, “If we tell others about our commitments, we are more likely to follow through.” In stewardship, this would be a

*StewardCAST* is published monthly by:  
 LCMS Stewardship Ministry  
 1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
 St. Louis, MO 63122  
 888-THE LCMS (843-5267)  
[infocenter@lcms.org](mailto:infocenter@lcms.org)  
[lcms.org/stewardship](https://lcms.org/stewardship)

*StewardCAST* may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

#### STAFF

- Rev. Heath Curtis  
Coordinator (contracted),  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry
- Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador  
Assistant Coordinator (contracted),  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry, and  
Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church,  
Plymouth, Wis.
- Robbie Clasen  
Administrative Assistant,  
LCMS Stewardship Ministry

#### CONTRIBUTOR

- Lisa Moeller  
Designer

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strong argument for the use of the traditional commitment card that is shared with the congregation. A secretive approach to commitment is likely no commitment at all.

#### Pre-Commit to Accountability.

When commitments are spoken to the congregation, the accountability process is there. Many church management programs allow the commitment to be recorded in the giving record of the individual. If congregations are using fully online processes, they are easily managed. If contribution statements are still printed, a form of accountability might well be a quarterly statement sent to the individual steward as a reminder of this accountability that has been established.

### Stewardship’s high stakes

As stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ using good, created gifts to carry out that Gospel ministry, this is not child’s play. There is an ultimate accountability that has been wired into and washed over every steward. Whether we write down our stewardship commitments or not, the steward is still ultimately accountable to God. The trust which the Lord has given to the steward is unmistakable. And the consequences of poor stewardship are unmistakable as well. Remember, poor stewardship of all of life and life’s resources is not just a matter of sloth or greed or selfishness. Poor stewardship is ultimately idolatry. The soul is at stake in stewardship. The congregation, as stewards of the people entrusted to their care, cannot take a pass on this.

When a congregation commits to this kind of “talk shift” in stewardship, it is for a good

reason. It is not so that the congregation can balance the budget, pay the staff and build up an endowment. The real reason is the care of souls. In the same way that pastoral care would address the adulterer, thief, murderer or gossip in a call to repentance, the pastoral care of a steward in calling them to make a commitment and keep it is also a matter of a call to repentance. It is the call to repent of an ownership mentality and embrace the interconnectedness of the body of Christ as stewards of all of life and life’s resources for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Modeling stewardship talk

Ungerbock concludes, “As leaders, when we model making commitments in ways that hold us accountable, we set the expectation that everyone on our team makes commitments in a similar way, we reduce drama and improve results.” While this is spoken from a secular position of organizational management, it does translate well into stewardship. As steward leaders, it is important that this shift in stewardship talk is modeled. It is modeled through teaching and practice. Steward leaders are called to lead. They are to be the ones who make commitments, embrace accountability and live it out. When this pattern is clear in the local congregation,

others will follow. The improved results are not about numbers. The improved result will be a shift in the pattern of stewardship. It will no longer be seen as a chore, but rather as living out our lives as the people who God has created and redeemed us to be.

Ungerbock is correct. “Actions don’t speak. Words do.” It was true of Jesus, the Word made flesh. It is true of His stewards too.

