

Mandrell focuses Lifeway on local churches, leaders

By Chloe Newton

Staff Writer

Ben Mandrell, President of Lifeway Christian Resources, joined "Around the Table" podcast hosts Tanner Cade, MCB Director of Communication Services, and Jon Martin, MCB Chief Strategy Officer, to discuss the necessity of change and leadership in a large organization.

Before stepping into his role as the President of Lifeway Christian Resources (LCR), Ben Mandrell served as a pastor for 17 years, five of which were spent as a church planter in Denver, Colorado. When Mandrell returned to the South, Southern Baptist life was changing. As a whole, Lifeway knew it would need to shift.

"When I came to Lifeway, Lifeway was in a really dark and scary place. I felt like it was a lot like a church plant in terms of whatever had worked before, we need not rely on any of that, and it's time to start a new kind of company. It wasn't like, 'How do we keep the old Lifeway alive?' It was, 'What is the new Lifeway going to look like and are we courageous enough to accept that?'... Chasing fear is a prerequisite for ministry," Mandrell said.

Mandrell first focused on having a clear understanding of LCR's core mission – serving local churches and their leaders. Close relationships with churches and leaders informed Lifeway of the specific resources churches needed and wanted.

"If we're cozy with church leaders, and we know what's going on in their churches, we're not going to go build a house that doesn't fit their needs," Mandrell said. "So that's what we do. We study churches, we study trends, and we have

conversations with church leaders... We want to make sure that we are set up in such a way that we can build resources more efficiently and more effectively.”

As Mandrell began implementing change at LCR, Covid-19 added to the pressures of leadership. The pandemic caused churches to cut expenses, which ultimately caused Lifeway to reform resources. The organization took a good look at the areas in which it excelled and desired to make those ministries stronger. Additionally, Mandrell emphasized the importance of being a proactive company, looking ahead to prepare for future needs.

“I always use the illustration of leading the receiver in football,” Mandrell said. “If you throw the ball right where he is, he’s not going to be there. So Lifeway has to do a better job of getting out ahead of the receiver and thinking, ‘Okay, in three years a lot of churches are going to need this.’ So let’s start building it now so it’s ready.”

For over 130 years, LCR has provided quality resources for church leaders. Its various ministries have been an integral part of many churches. As Lifeway’s leader, Mandrell has experienced what happens when churches do not agree with decisions made by the organization.

“With canceling Lifeway Worship, the whole thing blew up. I was told, ‘Hey, this is going to be a little Twitter fire for about 24 hours, then it’s going to go away.’ It was not. The number of churches that were relying on that tool were Legion. They just don’t create a lot of capital because they’re not big churches. We realized that we made a decision that was good for us, but bad for most of our churches. We had to back up and be like, ‘What can we do to help these churches without increasing the technology?’ When we blow it in ministry, it’s amazing how forgiving people are.”

To listen to the full “Around the Table” episode visit

Podcasts – Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (mbcb.org).