

Peer power

By [David Heim](#)

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Some years ago, medical researchers at Vanderbilt considered how best to intervene with doctors whose patients had complained about their unprofessional behavior. What worked in most cases, [they found](#) (pdf), was not an official reprimand, but the "cup of coffee" method--a one-to-one conversation with a peer, who simply pointed out to the doctor what had been observed and urged them to reflect on it.

Learning excellence in the art of doctoring turns out to have a lot to do with the influence of peers.

This finding is even more relevant when it comes to the art of ministry. A decade-long project funded by the Lilly Endowment to support pastoral excellence [concluded](#) that pastors flourish when they have sustained, honest conversations with peers in ministry.

Pastors need other pastors with whom they can share their wisdom and resources--and their conflicts and failures. Pastors also need peers to whom they are accountable not as employees but as friends and fellow believers.

Some evidence [suggests](#) that having such a peer group helps pastors avoid behavior that leads to a professional reprimand. Abundant evidence suggests that having a peer group keeps pastors energized for ministry and helps them avoid the morass of lonely frustration.