

1 Bob Buford Dies, Leaving Legacy of Leadership 2 Network, Halftime Institute, Drucker Institute and 3 Bestselling Books | Leadership Network

4 leadnet.org · by Warren Bird

5 Bob Buford, age 78, died April 18, 2018 after a lengthy illness near his home in
6 Dallas, Texas.

7 Through philanthropy and personal engagement, Buford significantly contributed to
8 three of American Christianity's major landscape shifts over recent decades.

9 First was the rise and proliferation of large-attendance Protestant churches led by
10 innovative, entrepreneurial leaders.

11 Second was the empowerment of Christian lay leaders making a second-career shift from
12 "success to significance" through a "halftime" transition—terms that trace their popularity
13 to Buford's writings.

14 Third was the formation of the Drucker Institute, a network of organizations designed to
15 further the teachings of management expert Peter Drucker.

16 Drucker not only extensively mentored Buford, but through introductions by Buford, also
17 mentored several high-visibility pastors like Saddleback Church founder Rick Warren. ¶¶¶

18 These three major emphases weave together under the umbrella of Buford's later-life
19 mission: to transform the latent energy of American Christianity into active energy. ¶¶¶

20 Buford, born September 16, 1939, in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, achieved considerable
21 financial success as CEO of Buford Television, Inc., a business started by his mother.

It had begun with a single ABC affiliate in Tyler, Texas.

It grew it into a network of cable systems across the country.

In 1999 Buford helped sell the family business interest in order to create philanthropic
initiatives designed to serve churches.

He often joked that he hoped the last check he wrote just before he died would bounce—
because he had given away the last of his millions. ¶¶¶

15 **Leadership Network** ¶¶¶

16 At age 42 Buford began a parallel career of television and of creating a new pathway for
17 the second half of his life.

18 "I had resolved that if I was blessed by skill, Providence, and rising markets, I would
19 someday turn my illiquid interests in Buford Television, Inc. into cash in order to follow my
20 calling to serve God by serving others," he told me in recent years. ¶¶¶

21 In 1984 Buford—at age 45—and Fred Smith, Jr. started Leadership Network, along with
Gayle Carpenter, as a way of trying to help the newly emerging wave of pastors who were
breaking worship attendance barriers of 1,000 and sometimes 2,000 or more.

During his business years, Buford had spent countless hours talking with and seeking
guidance from Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, and he now tapped into
Drucker's guidance for how best to frame Leadership Network.

He later remarked that Leadership Network would not be the same—in fact, might not
exist at all—were it not for Peter Drucker.

(Buford later developed that 23-year mentoring relationship into a book, *Drucker and
Me.*) ¶¶¶

22 Leadership Network started in 1984 with a budget of \$5,000, and held its first forum with 55 churches that had attendance of 800 and higher.

23 By 2017 the organization was annually serving more than 400 larger churches through in-person events which included more than 1,500 leaders.

24 Online conferences reached upwards of 25,000, and Leadership Network *Advance* subscriptions exceeded 50,000. ¶¶¶

25 “Bob continued to serve God through Leadership Network as a board member, influencer, encourager to countless pastors and a dear personal friend to me” says Dave Travis, CEO of Leadership Network since 2011. ¶¶¶

26 “Bob Buford was a mega-force behind the megachurch movement,” said Robert Lewis, former chair of the Leadership Network board and himself a large-church pastor.

27 “Bob’s unique life influenced thousands and transformed American Christianity by inspiring God-glorifying innovation and real-world results.” ¶¶¶

28 **The Halftime Institute** ¶¶¶

29 In 1995, Buford wrote *Halftime*, a best-selling book that came out of his mind and heart on how to find fulfillment in the second half of life.

30 The amazing response to the book led to a follow-up title in 1997, *Game Plan*, which presented more about the endeavors in which Bob Buford was involved as a result of his own “halftime” experience.

31 The attention led to the founding in 1998 of a sister organization to Leadership Network known today as the [Halftime Institute](#). ¶¶¶

32 As the Halftime Institute grew by teaching, coaching and connecting marketplace leaders to discover God’s calling on their lives, Buford continued to write.

33 A third book, *Stuck in Halftime: Reinvesting Your One and Only Life*, came out in 2001.

34 An updated *Halftime* was released in late 2008, along with *Beyond Halftime*, a collection of Buford’s musings on the things that matter most in moving from gaining success to leaving a legacy.

35 Next in 2014 was *Finishing Well: What People Who Really Live Do Differently!*

36 a compilation of over 60 inspiring interviews threaded with Buford’s own experiences. ¶¶¶

37 The Halftime Institute continues to serve high-capacity leaders from all over the world through its unique Fellows Program and Halftime One on One Coaching program.

38 Bob’s vision of activating latent Christian energy in individual leaders was made manifest through the work of the Halftime Institute.

39 Bob often said, “The Halftime Institute is the leading authority on creating a second half of life defined by joy, impact, and balance.” ¶¶¶

40 “Bob was a mentor and close friend,” says Dean Niewolny, CEO of the Halftime Institute since 2010.

41 “He treated me like his own son.

42 Words cannot express what an honor it was to work with him to establish an organization that will serve leaders from all over the world for many years to come.

43 He truly finished well.” ¶¶¶



44

45 **Drucker Institute**

46 In 1988, Dick Schubert, Frances Hesselbein and Bob Buford convinced Peter Drucker to
lend his name, his great mind, and occasionally his presence to establish an operating
foundation for the purpose of leading social sector organizations toward excellence in
performance.

47 Bob served as the Founding Chairman of the Board of Governors.

48 Through its conferences, publications and partnerships, The Drucker Foundation, which is
now titled [The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum](#) at the University of Pittsburgh, is
helping social sector organizations focus on their mission, achieve true accountability,
leverage innovation, and develop productive partnerships.

49 Leadership Network has provided a forum over the years for sharing Drucker's wisdom
with churches.

50 As Drucker said, "The purpose of management for churches is not to make them more
business-like, but to make them more church-like."

51 In the 20 years Drucker consulted with Leadership Network, the number of
megachurches (over 2,000 attending) grew tenfold.

52 Buford's final and most recent book, *Drucker & Me*, published in 2014, is his personal
story of that friendship and the lessons learned, including ways it impacted church
leadership like Willow Creek's Global Leadership Summit.

53 In 2015 there were more than 250,000 paid registrations for the Global Leadership
Summit.

54 Willow Creek credits this to Bob Buford getting Peter Drucker into the lives of church
leaders and encouraging them take leadership and management seriously.

55 **Education and Family**

56 Buford is a graduate of The University of Texas and the Owner Management Program at
Harvard Business School.

57 He played active roles in Young Presidents' Organization and World Presidents'
Organization.

58 He is the recipient of numerous leadership and ethics awards.

59 Buford suffered many personal losses in life.

60 His father died when Buford was in fifth grade.

61 His mother was lost in a fire.

62 He and his wife, Linda, lost their only child, a son named Ross, who was tragically
drowned at age 24.

63 “Bob Buford has been many things to many people,” reflects Bob Roberts, founding pastor of NorthWood Church in metro Dallas, “but to me, he was a spiritual father that I will deeply miss.

64 Several decades ago, Bob lost his own son, but in an unusual turn of events he became a spiritual father to me and to many of us.” ¶¶¶

65 Buford is survived by Linda Buford, his wife of 56 years.

66 He also has a brother, Jeff Buford of Tyler, Texas, who has two children, Christopher and Lauren.

67 Another brother, Jerry Buford, pre-deceased Bob Buford. ¶¶¶

68 **Ongoing Influence** ¶¶¶

69 Buford influenced the culture of the organizations he founded until his dying day.

70 His favorite question, “What can we do to be more useful to you?” remains an oft-asked question and one reason why after over 30 years Leadership Network is still growing, helping pastors and their executive teams foster innovation movements that activate the overall church to great impact for the glory of God’s name.

71 “Bob Buford loved Jesus, loved his family and loved the world.

72 He will be missed but his legacy will last forever,” reflected Gayle Carpenter, a co-founder who remains Leadership Network’s longest-term staff member. ¶¶¶

73 “Beyond his intellectual gifts, Bob gave the pastors we serve at Leadership Network a profound sense of blessing from an outsider who was always cheering them on to great things” added Dave Travis.

74 He recalled: “Even when pastors would come up to thank him in his final years, he would quietly just point upwards and whisper ‘Yay God.’” ¶¶¶

75 Many leaders well-known in evangelical circles point to Bob Buford’s influence on their ministries.

76 One example is popular author and management expert Ken Blanchard.

77 “Bob made my faith come alive.

78 Without his influence I might never have become a loving follower of Jesus, and the organization Lead Like Jesus would not be having the impact it is having around the world,” he says. ¶¶¶

79 “Bob was always about changed lives, whether they occurred through churches or halftimers,” says Tom Luce, longtime family friend and Buford Foundation board member.

80 “Bob always acknowledged that his two partners in this endeavor were his wife Linda and Peter Drucker.” ¶¶¶

81 “Some invest in fame and fortune.

82 Bob Buford invested in the lives of leaders,” says Leith Anderson, one of the many pastors Buford helped through connections and resources.

83 Anderson pastored a Minneapolis church that grew from the hundreds to thousands, and he has also served as president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

84 “New ideas, new relationships, new opportunities-Bob Buford opened the way for me and many.” ¶¶¶

85 For more on Bob Buford’s life story, see halftimeinstitute.org ¶¶¶

86 **For those who wish to leave a legacy memorial gift or condolence note in Bob**

Buford's memory, one option is the Leadership Network Legacy Fund: leadnet.org/memory/. ¶¶¶

87 **Updates Coming** ¶¶¶

88 *NOTE: This blog will be updated with details as soon as they are released about the funeral and ways to express condolences.* ¶¶¶

89 Media inquiries should be directed to Leadership Network's CEO, Dave Travis, at Dave.

90 Travis@leadnet.org or 770-315-6304. ¶¶¶

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