

Building a staff team: Going from 'good to great,' Part 1

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The previous articles addressed the [process](#) of [finding staff](#) members and getting staff members off to a [great start](#). This article and the next deal with developing a healthy staff team—going from good to great.

Church staff is a team

Because a church staff is much more than a simple gathering of talented individuals, it never should appear to be an all-star team so packed with attention-grabbing superstars it fails to function collectively.

Before calling a new staff member, you have to ponder: Will he or she complement our present staff? Can we envision her at a staff meeting, giving healthy input into the church's ministry?

The pastor must be very careful not to create a sense of competition among the staff. When one staff member enjoys a successful ministry event or program, the entire staff should be able to rejoice together.

A staff member who is not a team player never grasps the vision of the pastor for the congregation. He is much like the selfish basketball star who takes a shot every time he touches the ball. Refusing to listen to the game plan, he stays on the court, raises his hands, and shouts, "Give *me* the ball!"

Our present ministry team certainly has moments of disagreement, and we often debate behind closed doors. When we leave a staff meeting, however, we all are "on the same page," with the "same game plan," supporting each

other much like a family. While we might bicker among ourselves, we will not tolerate church members berating another staff member, for in doing so, they have criticized our entire team.

Incompetent staff members bring the pastor more headaches than help. Veteran pastors often have expended much energy and effort putting out the fires their “helpers” have created.

As Winfred Moore, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, was overheard saying, “It takes a real good education minister to beat none!” There is much truth to Dr. Moore’s adage.

No staff member is much better than an incompetent staff member. Therefore, it is completely puzzling to me why some pastors—consciously or unconsciously—hire weak team players. It is almost as if they are intimidated by staff members who might be successful. Could we, as pastors, possibly have a fear of sharing the spotlight?

Instead of being threatened by staff members the congregation praises, the pastor should glow in their successes, because the staff is an extension of the pastor’s own ministry.

Be a team captain

When our staff is doing well, I am doing well. I try to seize every opportunity to praise our staff members publicly. For example, I have used my pastor’s column in our weekly newsletter to report the successes of our staff. The congregation begins to feel good about their ministry team when they see the staff members thriving under the leadership of the pastor.

Our staff members also know as they are loyal to me, the loyalty will be reciprocated. If a church member wants to attack a staff member, then he must come through me first.

If staff members operate in accordance with our agreed upon team plan, then church members are not unhappy with the staff member; they are unhappy with me. I will take the blame for the failures of a team member.

Put bluntly, when things are going well, praise your staff. When things are not going well, absorb the blame.

The staff will learn to function under your supervision and protection and feel much more at home under your leadership. They realize very quickly you have not abandoned them or left them unprotected from the congregation.

Adjectives for excellence

How do you develop a good staff member into a great staff member? I challenge our staff to form their ministry according to 13 adjectival categories. If our staff members conduct their ministry using these professional guidelines, we are confident they are developing not only themselves but their volunteers also.

1. Loyal. A staff member must be loyal to the pastor, the staff team and the congregation. Opportunity-seekers never will give the pastor the support needed to serve the congregation well. The pastor and other staff members never should have to look for daggers behind their backs.

2. Timely, accurate and dependable. Allegany Community College offered a free course to senior citizens titled "How to Improve Your Memory." The instructor was supposed to arrive 30 minutes before the 9:00 program was to begin. A student remarked: "When we didn't see him by 8:50, we called his house. He had forgotten!" ("Improving Your Memory," *Speaker's Idea File*, September 1994)

Achieving success within the community and earning respect from

community professionals depends upon our being timely, accurate and dependable. Staff members must return all phone calls, answer all letters and accomplish all tasks in a timely manner.

Timeliness shows a respect for other people. Accuracy demonstrates a staff member is not satisfied with less than excellence. Dependability enhances trust and confidence in the team member. A congregation and pastor soon lose respect for undependable, tardy and sloppy staff members.

3. Appreciative, encouraging, supportive and sensitive. The most powerful words in all the English language are “Thank you.”

At the height of his popularity, Rudyard Kipling was one of the most widely read authors of all time. At one point, it was estimated each word he had in print was worth 25 shillings.

The story circulates that a group of students at Oxford University pooled their change and sent 25 shillings to Kipling. Their accompanying letter read, “Send us your best word.”

Before long, the reply came. With great anticipation, the students opened the envelope from Kipling to find a single word printed on the piece of paper, “Thanks.” (Kevin Conrad, “The Holiest Word,” *Sermon Notes and Illustrations*, November/December 1995)

Staff members who communicate their appreciation to lay leadership will find themselves with eager and enthusiastic volunteers. Everyone wants to feel appreciated for volunteering their time, expertise and energies to the church. The staff member who does not write thank you notes every day is probably falling behind in the category of being appreciative.

An encouraging staff member acts as a catalyst to raise volunteer leaders to the next level of excellence. Supportive staff members enable church volunteers to know they are not “out on a limb” alone. The staff member is

willing to provide the expertise and materials necessary to allow the volunteer to do her job in a rewarding fashion.

Sensitive staff members are aware of the personal issues and struggles that might be affecting the performance and commitment of their volunteers.

Stay tuned [next week](#) for 10 more adjectives for excellence.

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