

10 keys for a great start in a new ministry position

September 22, 2021

The [“Finding the Right Fit” articles](#) addressed the increasingly difficult task of locating, vetting and hiring staff ministers to serve in the various ministries of the local church.

Here, we will discover the best way to get a new staff member off to a great start.

False starts

In the recent Tokyo Olympics, Andre DeGrasse, a Canadian sprinter, literally was surrounded by false starts. First, he watched two competitors false start before he won his heat. Then, in his semifinal, another athlete was guilty of committing a false start. Finally, in the actual medal race, there was, of course, yet another false start. In the end, despite being surrounded by the “bad starts” of his peers, DeGrasse brought home the bronze.

When a new minister joins our team, Robby Barrett, our staff coordinator, hands our new team member a typed list titled: “Ten Things for a Great Start at First Baptist Church Amarillo.” They have worked well over the years and have proven to chart a good beginning to a long-tenured ministry.

Starting well

In no particular order, the 10 keys are:

1. Be available. Return every phone call and every email on the same day you receive them, if possible.

Volunteers and church members are eager to meet and engage their new team player. The old adage, “First impressions are lasting impressions,” comes into play in the first few weeks of ministry.

The *last* words I want to hear uttered—as your pastor and supervisor—by a church member are: “I reached out to our new student minister last week, but he didn’t respond. Is he out of town?”

Every phone call, every email, every hallway visit must be followed up in a timely and accurate fashion.

2. Call people by name. You have a great advantage as a new staff member: No one can expect you to know his or her name. Take the first few weeks to learn the names and family relationships of the people who relate to your ministry area.

Only when you are able to call a church member by name have you begun a meaningful relationship.

3. Contact every prospect family. Nothing impresses your pastor or church prospects more than you offering a timely acknowledgement, thanking visitors for attending your new place of service.

Quite frankly, the average church does a poor job reaching out to prospects. Therefore, you’ll look like the “blue ribbon winner” with every phone call or handwritten card.

As pastor, I expect my staff to be in front of me on reaching out to prospects. When I call a family following their visit to First Baptist Church of Amarillo, I am glad to hear: “Well, the student minister already called my son yesterday. That’s impressive, pastor!”

4. Listen to leaders. Most importantly, explore how you can equip leaders to carry out their ministry. Listening is more important than talking in your first few months of ministry.

Once you have actually heard your leaders, follow-through is very important. If you agree to do something, make sure it is done timely and with excellence.

Also, cultivate relationships with other staff members, inviting them to dialogue about how your ministry works alongside theirs.

5. Prepare and have ready a devotional thought, sermon or your personal testimony. Regardless of your formal role or area of service, the entire church is eager to get to know you.

It is not unusual for a senior adult Sunday School class to ask the new children's minister to lead the devotional at their monthly class luncheon. This is a great opportunity to sell both yourself and your vision to a captive audience.

6. Encourage chronic absentees. Inviting the "no-shows" to breakfast, coffee or lunch offers a one-on-one chance to show you care. And, if you listen carefully, you may learn ways to re-engage inactive members with their community of faith.

As you listen, consider the question: "Are there any barriers the church put up that discouraged their participation? If so, how can we remove them?"

Everyone will be impressed you have "hit the ground running," reaching out to those others have long forgotten. Who knows, God may have prepared you to connect with the very people no one else has been able to reach.

7. Balance your time. As you begin your ministry, you probably will have

many invitations to be part of church and family activities. My first year in Amarillo, I was invited to 12 Christmas parties. Participate in as many of these as you can, while maintaining a balance of ministry planning and personal and family time.

8. Be present. Attend Sunday School parties, ministry events and church-wide activities. Be visible by positioning yourself in the hallway or at the door, greeting members as they arrive for a planned activity.

Never underestimate the power of a first impression. A warm handshake and genuine smile will leave church members saying: “I really like our new staff member. She seems to care!”

9. Spend time with families. Invite members into your home, to a meal out or for coffee. If you really want to make a long-lasting impression, show up to a child’s activity—a sports event, choir concert or school play.

When you invest in someone’s child, you make an unforgettable connection. Sit with the family at their child’s event and foster a new friendship.

10. Plan a high-impact ministry event within your first few months. If you are a student minister, plan a “Fifth Quarter” after a local high school football game. If you are a young adult minister, offer a high-quality parenting program, showing your young parents you are there to support them. If you are the senior adult minister, plan a day trip and ride the bus with the senior adults, allowing them to share their stories.

First impressions matter

Stumble at the start, and you’re not likely to win an Olympic race. Just so, it is difficult to overcome a bad first impression in ministry.

Control the messaging around you and your area of ministry by following

Dr. Barrett's 10 keys to a great start. Starting well makes the rest of the race much easier.

In our next article, we'll deal with staff development, going from good to great.

Howie Batson has been the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Amarillo more than 25 years.

See related articles [here](#) and [here](#).