

# **Building a staff team: Finding the right fit, Part 1**

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The church's success or failure often will depend on the talent and commitment of its staff. Successful ministry is dependent upon successful programs; successful programs are dependent upon a successful staff.

A pastor will soon find no matter how stimulating and insightful his or her sermons might be, no one person can build a large church in today's culture. Unfortunately, families "shop" for a church today, looking for the best programs. Young families look for a strong preschool department; middle-aged families with teens look for a dynamic student ministry; and musicians look for a strong choral program.

This article begins a series on building a staff team. In this series, we will discuss searching for staff, developing staff and transitioning staff off the church team. Here, we will address how to begin the search process in such a way as to end with success.

## **Consequences of poor hiring**

Some pastors invest little time and energy into the selection and design of their ministry team. Any pastor who has tried to rid himself of an incompetent or misplaced staff member knows hiring the wrong person for the position is unfair to the ministry team, the congregation and the staff member him or herself.

Poor hiring creates an atmosphere of tension, frustration, disappointment and trauma on the part of both the pastor and the staff member. In the haste to "fill a position," pastors and search committees may make poor

decisions without conducting a thorough search before selecting a staff member.

Remember, the same church members who push you into a “quick hire” are the first ones to carp and complain should you hire someone less than successful in his or her new staff position.

## **Creating space for a search**

The pastor and search committee often are able to earn the time necessary to conduct a thorough search by informing the appropriate church members or committees that a thorough process is underway. Periodic progress reports to stakeholders will keep frustration at bay.

### **Getting started**

The process for seeking a staff member begins by gathering many appropriate names from many diverse sources. Writing seminaries, contacting universities, and calling upon colleagues and other successful ministers serving in similar positions in other congregations are all valuable sources for gathering resumés.

Even in this beginning stage, the pastor and search committee should bathe the entire process with prayer. The pastor, the congregation and the potential staff minister all want God’s hand at work in this mysterious process.

Looking for God’s hand in the process, however, does not excuse the pastor or committee from doing their tasks to ensure an appropriate hire. This work begins with a list of possible candidates.

### **Playing private investigator**

Investigating possible candidate’s is a critical phase of the search we will

focus on [next week](#).

## **Avoiding faulty logic**

Do not assume a decline within the candidate's current congregation is a sure indication his or her ministry with your congregation will yield the same results.

Conversely, do not assume growth in the candidate's current or previous congregations assures future growth in your community of faith.

Your candidate may, for example, be serving in a geographical area of explosive population growth where church growth is more dependent upon location than a staff member's gifts.

## **Treating candidates fairly**

The church should treat potential employees as professionals. As a minimum standard, the church must make every effort to reimburse candidates for expenses incurred during the hiring process.

Also, churches are notorious for failing to keep potential employees informed. On many occasions, potential staff members send resumés to churches and never receive even a simple acknowledgment. This is unfair and thoughtless treatment of anxious candidates.

The pastor and committee should be completely honest with the candidate regarding the challenges and difficulties that lie ahead. Promises should not be made that cannot be kept. For example, calling a minister to serve in the dual position of minister to preschoolers and children under the impression the combination is only temporary is unacceptable, unless a church has specific goals and plans for making the promise a reality by dividing the position.

Honesty also includes clearly communicating what will be expected of the

employee. For one potential employee, I created a mock schedule depicting an average week on the job. I included normal working hours, church activities, committee meetings, emergency calls, weddings and funerals as part of this hypothetical schedule.

Finally, to ensure a clear meeting of the minds, all arrangements—including vacation days, sick days, insurance and other benefits—should be communicated explicitly in writing.

[Next week](#), we will examine the necessary process of investigating possible candidates for your church's minister search.

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