

# EDITORIAL: Ten traits to teach today's ministers

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Just like so much of life these days, the way we train ministers is changing. This trend is vital, because even though Baptists affirm the priesthood of all believers, pastors' and staff ministers' influence is inversely proportional to their actual numbers. An exceptional minister cannot single-handedly build a great church, but he or she can impact hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. And a poor minister can bring a church to its knees and ruin its influence.

This issue of the Standard carries a [cover package](#) about creative new approaches to ministerial training. They supplement outstanding training provided by traditional Baptist seminaries and theology schools. Texas Baptists benefit directly from three—Baptist University of the Americas, Logsdon Seminary at Hardin-Simmons University and Truett Seminary at Baylor University.

Editor Marv Knox

With due respect to all these programs, here are 10 skills seminaries need to emphasize. Churches also need to support these skills with opportunities for lifelong continuing education. Most seminary graduates do a passable job of interpreting Scripture, preaching and/or operating church programs. But a vast majority of church travail traced to ministers involves failure touching on one or more of these skills:

- ***Spiritual discipline.*** *Seminary students spend so much time handling the sacred it can seem mundane. The same is true in ministry. So, a life of prayer and devotional Scripture reading is vital. Ministers can't survive without this.*

- **Communication.** *A huge number of church challenges stem from poor communication. Pastors and staff must be able to present ideas and vision and even basic information clearly. The often-overlooked key is learning to listen.*

- **Team-building.** *A church is an army of volunteers. Success often hinges on enabling members to pull together in the same direction. An equally important corollary of this skill is learning to motivate with integrity, not manipulation.*

- **Conflict mediation.** *Churches are going to experience conflict until “the roll is called up yonder.” Ironically, conflict can be a catalyst for many valuable developments, such as learning from one another, clarifying goals and expectations, healing old wounds and finding common ground. Unfortunately, many pastors waste these opportunities by either pretending conflict doesn’t exist and allowing it to fester or escalating the conflict into win-lose scenarios that damage their ministries and hurt their churches.*

- **Transparency and vulnerability.** *Pastors quickly learn to mask their weaknesses, because some church members will exploit them. But this skill set can strengthen and empower church members by enabling them to identify with and learn from their ministers’ struggles.*

- **Healthy families.** *Here’s a strength that becomes a weakness: Ministers are so committed to the church they sacrifice their families. Then, when their marriages corrode or their families crumble, everyone loses. Ministers’ families must come first, before church, just as marriage preceded the church.*

- **Financial management.** *Many—most?—churches should do better at compensating their staff. But in this materialistic, consumeristic age, ministers must exercise financial discipline and teach values by the way*

*they conduct their personal business.*

- **Basic planning.** *How can you get where you're going if you don't know the way? We need pastors who can lead, and it starts with the ability to conceive and execute plans.*

- **Healthy lifestyles.** *This is important on multiple levels. Like everyone else's, ministers' bodies are the temple of God. Ministers perform best when they're healthy. And church members need to see the example of fit ministers.*

- **Humble courage.** *Maybe neither of these traits can be taught, but they are essential. Both arrogant tyranny and passive cowardice ruin churches.*

*Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard. Visit his [FaithWorks Blog](#).*