

Is Your Staff Prepared To Build A Church?

It's hard to believe but your building project has finally begun. The strategic analysis is complete, the permits are posted, and the church body has warmly embraced the concept of spiritual giving. And for some reason the equipment operators seem to converge outside your window to rev their engines or drive in reverse (with that ear-piercing beeping) every time you pick up the phone or open your Bible.

The sounds of construction equipment should be a gentle reminder that it is time to begin a parallel phase of your building project focusing on your staff. Just as the foreman can't drive every yellow tractor, no pastor can do everything, especially in a growing church. Your own construction crew--your staff and lay leadership--must be prepared to handle increasing levels of responsibility that accompany a larger facility and a growing flock. To ensure your organization is ready to take on this challenge, you need to "get" a few things.

Get away

First, you need to get away from the demands of church administration for a few days. Take time to pray together, play together, restate the vision and discuss the future of your church. These activities don't require a week long visit to an Arizona spa. A church-affiliated camp, a decent hotel with a conference room or a church member's lake cabin should provide the right atmosphere.

Get a grip

Begin your retreat by getting a grip on your vision. It may seem redundant to restate the vision to a staff who has heard it before and even repeated it to newcomers, but they need to hear it from their pastor and leader. Be ready for them to ask questions and even make recommendations for improving it.

Get a glimpse

With the vision as your starting point, it is important to get a glimpse of your future so that you can plan toward it. Ask and answer questions with your staff to define exactly what kind of "business" you are in.

- What are we called to accomplish?
- What elements of our ministry should stay?
- Which don't fit and should go?
- What will our church look like in one, three, five, 10 and 20 years in terms of:

1. Ministry focus

2. Anticipated numbers (in service, in child care, in Sunday school or small groups, of ministries)

You might be startled at the wide variety of mental pictures your staff members have of your church in 20 years. A clear goal will minimize misunderstandings while providing a framework for staffers planning their own ministry segment. Of course God will take your church in whatever direction he needs, but people need a plan.

Get practical

Take your inquiry in the other direction and discuss where the church will be in the next 90 days. Bite-size time segments enable people to create and embrace a plan of action.

Take this time to talk about "people" issues like managing the flow of car traffic into the parking lot or foot traffic through the nursery. Discuss training on everything from the new sound system to the newfangled coffee makers. Explore how you'll build awareness of your new building. Will you run advertising, write press releases or arrive at your first service in a monster truck? Identify members of your congregation who can help with these issues.

The preceding steps should easily fill a two-or three-day retreat. Having identified your challenges and roughed out a plan of attack, it's time to make sure your team can handle it. The following aspects of team development might best be undertaken with the counsel of a respected business leader from your congregation and/or a reputable consultant.

Get a handle

To get a handle on your staff's capabilities, begin by assessing overall team chemistry. Simple, confidential surveys of staffers will reveal:

- Do they trust each other?
- Can they work together?
- Do they need each other?
- Do they have confidence in the team?

Pinpoint nagging, divisive issues then address them. The challenges ahead dictate a team effort, not individuals striving alone, unwilling to ask for help or share credit.

The next step is a strength assessment (also called psychological profile or spiritual gifts inventory). Can a staff composed entirely of high-minded visionaries and no worker bees get you where you're headed? Your football team may have 10 dependable linemen, but who will take a hand-off or run a pass pattern? This exercise may reveal the unpleasant fact that your church may have outgrown certain staffers.

Get a plan

You're now ready to get a plan for staff development. Look at hiring patterns and discern whether you hire up, laterally or down in the skills area. If you really want your venture to succeed, be willing to "hire up." This can be a tall order if you wrestle with pride or control issues, but great organizations are great because they dare to hire up.

Next take a look at your training program (if you even have one). What skills do your people need to administer better programs or use your new equipment? Can a staffer or church member instruct them or should you retain a professional trainer?

Review your performance measurement process. Do your staffers have clear-cut objectives and standards they must meet? Do you have regularly scheduled evaluations that are tied to compensation?

It's not a popular topic with churches, but staff compensation also deserves a long look as well. Rare is the person who is drawn to the ministry for the fabulous pay and benefits. However, few things can sap a person's spiritual strength and energy like a family that is suffering because of his or her calling. At the same time a pay raise may be impossible from a financial or denominational perspective. You might explore other options like paid vacation, bereavement packages, sick leave arrangements, donated health club memberships and the like.

Consider other financial incentives. Although the Spirit should be the guide for a person in ministry, dollars can provide a remarkable incentive for excellence in certain, more "secular" areas. Instead of punishing free spenders, contemplate a financial incentive for staffers who complete their projects under budget and on time. Also set aside budget dollars for staff celebrations, gift certificates for on-the-spot rewards and simple birthday gifts. Your creativity and caring will be returned to you in the form of an energized staff that looks to improve performance.

Finally, examine your requirements and programs for spiritual development. Are your people burned out, stumbling around with empty spiritual fuel tanks? Do you have guidelines for your people in terms of study and prayer time? Are you teaching your own staff? Are you setting standards for spiritual growth then leading by example?

Get going

The final step in your process is to get going. Over planning can be as bad as no planning at all. Lead your staff, your lay leaders and your church and help them prepare for the changes that will accompany your new or improved facility. Rather than scowl next time a backhoe interrupts your study time, smile and remember that you are a foreman of your own skilled crew.

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