

## Accountability With Church Staff

Written by Steve Marr

Wednesday, 01 May 2002 17:00

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Pastor Jeff had been the senior pastor for five years at his church of 250 members. While the church had not grown, most of his congregation gave him high marks for personal contact and preaching good sermons. But others had left the church, or never joined, because of problems with the other church staff members.

The office secretary, Annette, was often late, took many days off, and was disorganized. As a result key work was never finished, or was late, and Pastor Jeff failed to return the calls that Annette forgot to pass on to him.

Associate Pastor Ed also struggled. He just never seemed to be able to get to all his visitation calls, forgot to follow through on some assignments and was often late. Some church members declined to serve on committees headed by Pastor Ed. Privately, they shared their discouragement over his poor leadership and follow through.

Pastor Jeff never held either of his staff persons accountable, so the problems lingered year after year. As the senior pastor, Jeff would often get frustrated, and cover the extra work himself. However, this worked against him because, by completing the work of others, he gave up time with his family, time preparing sermons, and time to lead other church work. As a result, the church never grew to the potential God desired.

In spite of the fact that both Annette and Pastor Ed were failing in their jobs, Pastor Jeff felt he could not take action. Annette had been a fixture in the office for 22 years, and Ed was everyone's friend. Both spent more time being a friend to everybody than in following through

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on ministry assignments.

What is needed in this situation?

In a word, accountability is needed. Accountability is defined as "the obligation to give a reckoning or explanation for one's actions and responsibilities." Scripture instructs, "Teach us to number our days right", (Psalm 90:12 NIV) and Ephesians 5:21 reads, "be subject to one another". In the case of Pastor Jeff and his staff it also means clearly defining work, or ministry responsibility, and then insuring each staff member consistently follows through.

Delivery of good work focuses on three key factors. The quality of work, the quantity of work is easily determined and standards established. Dependability is the other key factor, attendance, punctuality and follow through on assignments.

Pastors often fail to confront poor performance because of fear or church reaction. This perspective, that ministry must be "nice" to all employees, often masks a personal unwillingness to tackle issues. This attitude is not worthy of the call of God on our lives.

Scripture instructs us to, "walk in a manor worthy of the calling with which you have been called." (Ephesians 4:1 NAS) Each Christian worker must be called by God and work in the area of his or her calling. Then the gifts and graces to be successful will operate in their lives and ministry. An inner city pastor was cited as a failure for only obtaining one new family for the church in a year. However, over 20 youths became new Christians under his leadership. Fortunately, he and the church came to realize he was not called to be a senior pastor, but was instead a dynamite inner city youth pastor. He took a youth pastor position with a large inner city church and his ministry blossomed. Had the original situation never been confronted, the church would have continued to struggle, and the inner city church would have been denied the youth pastor God called.

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While some workers are misplaced, others are simply not working up to their capacity. Just because someone is busy does not necessarily mean they are effective. Few would argue the point that Church workers are called to be diligent, but we need to be careful we do not confuse hours worked and mere activity with diligence. Diligence is more than hours and activity, it is work focus. Paul gave us a great example, "I run in such a way, as not without aim- I box in such a way, as not beating air." (I Corinthians 9:26 NAS)

As a way to begin accountability, sit down with each staff member, and outline in writing the ministry standards and results you and the church expect. Be willing to give and take during the discussion, but do not retreat from the minimum requirements. Confirm their understanding in writing, and outline the importance of each task in meeting the needs of the church. Help them understand the issue is not what you want, but what the church needs to fulfill God's mission.

For example, Pastor Ed might agree to make a minimum of four visitation calls per month, and be on time for each meeting. Annette might be instructed not to exceed her allowed sick and vacation days, and salary would not be paid for additional days worked because of her disorganization. (Perhaps a good time management course would be a wise investment for the entire staff).

Follow through is critical. Meet at the start of each week and evaluate how each person is doing with their goals. Praise positive results, and correct poor performance. Do not gloss over deficiencies. The church and the Lord's work will suffer if tasks are not done well. Most often, work will improve with clear direction, and enforced accountability.

If failure continues, again sit down with the staff person. Outline the previous agreement, and ask the person to explain what is keeping them from accomplishing the required assignments. Provide coaching, mentoring, and suggestions as support for accomplishing the goals, but reinforce the principle that the responsibility belongs to each person individually.

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When failure persists discern the reason. Often the gifts and talents are not a good fit with the job. A person may lack the ability to stay focused and disciplined enough to follow through on their assignments, but may be blessed with an abounding creativity which can be successfully used elsewhere.

Most often, performance will improve and their successes can be celebrated. Do not forget to let them know how their improvement has helped you as well.

When goals are set and follow through expected, the usual result is improved performance. When failure continues, help your staff person discern what position might offer more success and provide a helping hand of encouragement to move forward into a new opportunity. Taking a positive, pro-active approach gives the best possibility of protecting relationships long term. Failure to act will result in poor performance, increasing frustration for you and the flock, and will increase the likelihood of a confrontation in the future.

As God holds us accountable in our lives, hold your church staff accountable. The result will be personal growth for you, your staff, and ultimately for God's Kingdom.

Steve Marr, Your Christian Business Coach

Featured in "Clergy Journal"