

Hiring Church Members

Written by Steve Marr
Sunday, 03 March 2002 17:00

Should you hire a member of the congregation to work in the church office? That's a dilemma for any pastor or board, but it doesn't have to be a snare. As long as you hire based on sound principles, the outcome should be favorable.

Hiring a member of your congregation can have its advantages. Presumably, you will already know this person and have insight into his or her gifts and abilities, demeanor, spiritual maturity, and ability to maintain confidences and avoid gossip, thereby alleviating many potential problems. On the other hand, if you hire someone for the wrong reasons and it later becomes apparent that the person does not fit the position or has insufficient job skills, or if feathers get ruffled, the entire congregation can become embroiled in the situation. As tensions mount, the potential increases for a backlash, hard feelings, and other repercussions.

Hiring a church member always presents a risk, but the difficulties can be minimized and the blessings maximized if the church leaders will establish and follow an orderly hiring process. The first step is to develop a job description and determine the skills and competencies required for success. Sadly, most churches have either vague job descriptions or none at all. To avoid problems and pitfalls, write a complete description of the duties, responsibilities and expectations for each position. Review the office workflow for a month and make notes as you go. Discuss these job descriptions with other staff members, church board members, and members of the congregation whose business and management experience might be helpful.

When an opening in the office occurs, follow an orderly process in filling the position. My recommendation is that you consider candidates both from inside and outside the church. Hiring only members of your congregation limits the talent pool and may leave you with little room to maneuver if no members fit the needs of the position.

When you advertise, make it clear to everyone that the position is open to all qualified applicants. Some members might believe that they should be the only ones considered, so nip

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that potential conflict in the bud by clearly announcing your intentions up front. Nobody likes surprises.

Before you schedule any interviews, distribute copies of the job description to all interested parties. A well-written job description will clearly enumerate the required skills and aptitudes. Be realistic, based on the salary, hours, and other demands, but establish a minimum standard of qualifications in advance and stick with it. No matter how much urgency you feel to fill the position, do not hire anyone who fails to meet your minimum requirements. Lowering your standards will come back to bite you every time, especially if you hire a church member.

When interviewing, be honest and forthright with every candidate. Don't string anyone along. It's always better to explain to someone where their qualifications fall short, and thank them for expressing interest, than to raise expectations even by silence only to douse them later. If you know right away that someone doesn't fit, be courteous enough to say so immediately.

At the outset of your interviews, explain the job requirements and disclose any additional strengths or skills that you would prefer. Ask questions about the candidate's experience and skill in each key area of responsibility, and discuss any areas where he or she falls short. Identify strengths, but be careful not to make commitments. At the end of the interview, give each applicant an opportunity to add any additional information. This eliminates the possibility that applicants will leave the interview feeling as though they didn't have a chance to fully express themselves.

Always thank candidates for their interest in the job, and tell them when you will make your decision. Above all, keep your commitments and close the loop with every applicant, especially those you choose not to hire.

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Before you hire a member of your congregation to work in the church office, consider these four essential keys:

1. Don't allow your personal feelings to influence your decision. Always follow the objective standards developed earlier in the hiring process. Dr. James Dobson warns that our feelings will fool us every time#and he's right. 2. Don't allow pressure or the opinions of other members to dictate your choice. Your responsibility is to lead, not to make everyone agree with you. 3. Don't allow financial need to be the deciding factor. Make your decision based on the applicant's qualifications. If you hire based on need, not only will you have a poor staff member, you will block God's plan for meeting that person's financial need.

4. Before you hire someone, use sound judgment in determining whether the person is capable of handling confidential information and withstanding the pressure of staff responsibilities. Some excellent church members are unable to separate issues and maintain discretion.

Ultimately, developing a solid evaluation and selection process#including well-written job descriptions#will help you determine whether hiring a church member will work or whether you're better off looking outside the congregation.

Steve Marr, Your Christian Business Coach

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