

How Healthy is Your Leadership?

Every church is only as healthy as its leadership, and the healthier the church, the better the chances it will maintain sound financial management. Do you know how to assess the health of your leadership team? Do you have signs of trouble? Review the eight factors of healthy church leadership below and consider where your team is strong and where there may be weaknesses:

1. **Strong chain of command**

Employees should know to whom they should go for decision-making insights and to observe the church's hierarchy. This can be reinforced by emphasizing the importance of department heads and their roles during staff meetings. Keep everyone well informed by communicating the chain of command consistently and updating staff on any changes. If someone tries to work outside this structure, they should be reminded of the proper channels and encouraged to follow through appropriately.

2. **Open door policy**

Your church should have a policy or process by which staff can appropriately express concerns. Do your employees readily share opinions through the forums available to them, and does management act on employees' recommendations? These forums could include anonymous surveys, roundtables, and staff meetings. This allows for organizational growth because employees are the "boots on the ground" and therefore the best source for identifying improvements and making suggestions. When suggestions aren't implemented, be sure to communicate the reasons why so that employees don't get discouraged and stop providing input.

3. **Modeling of positive behavior**

Leadership should consistently revisit the organization's values in staff meetings, include the values in the completion of work projects, and consistently reflect those values in their words and actions. Values can be emphasized not only through departmental meetings but even be included in staff performance appraisals. Any deviation from values should be followed up on and possibly disciplined. You may also consider rewarding behavior that is consistent with living out the values of the church.

4. **Sensitivity to diversity**

Management demonstrates its respect for all people through its words and actions. There needs to be a high regard for all people on staff and in the ministry regardless of race, culture, gender, or generation. Be careful that you are not unintentionally communicating a different set of expectations. Consider whether your staff reflects this type of diversity. If not, is there a specific reason for it (for example, if it reflects the demographics of the congregation or community)?

5. **Positive view of promoting from within**

Does leadership consistently promote qualified internal candidates before hiring outside candidates? Investing in staff training and providing opportunities for advancement are two of the best ways to show that you value employees' contributions, as well as providing for the ever-changing needs of the church.

6. **Periodic compensation evaluation**

We realize that working for a church is not a "get rich quick" scheme. However, management does have a

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responsibility to ensure employees are paid appropriately. We want to make sure we are not taking advantage of the calling individuals may feel to ministry. It is also important to pay an appropriate amount so the best candidates can be secured. Sometimes you really do get what you pay for, and when you are paying far below market rate, you may receive far below market services.

7. **Emphasis on the value of employee and volunteer contributions**

It is easy for an individual to come into a ministry excited about the vision and purpose, only to become disillusioned or even bored over time. In direct ministry roles, it's more obvious how the employee's work affects individuals and contributes to the church's mission. When employees or volunteers serve in a support role, such as human resources, accounting, or information technology, however, the effect can be far more difficult to see. Over time, processing accounts payable for the church could start to feel the same as processing it for a local car dealership.

It takes intentionality to make sure each employee and volunteer continues to feel engaged and understands the real effect they have on ministry. Sometimes this can be facilitated by allowing employees in support roles to participate in ministry during work hours. They shouldn't be expected to do this in addition to their role, but rather as part of it. Another way to engage them is to share ministry stories with all staff, not just those directly involved.

Remember that without the computers working properly or the bills getting paid, everyone would come to a near standstill in their ministry. Those in direct ministry roles need to understand their dependence on the support roles and show an understanding and appreciation for those individuals.

8. **Adept navigation through change**

Certainly change is a constant. How we plan for and react to change is the only thing we can control. It is the leadership's responsibility to clearly explain the reasons for anticipated changes, how and why each person's role will change, and the organizational benefits of the change. Communication during the change process must be frequent and clear, and any deviations from previously stated expectations need to be conveyed and explained. Management can help minimize employee stress and anxiety by understanding that change is disruptive and creates apprehension for employees, and by working hard to ensure that employees feel valued and understand how the change will affect them.

After considering these factors, you can probably identify the areas where your church is strong, and others where work is needed. Celebrate together those things that are good, and prioritize — with specific action steps — how you will address the others. Then make sure to look back periodically and see where you have made progress. When change happens incrementally, it's easy to miss seeing just how far you have come.

As with our personal health, these changes and improvements won't occur overnight. Building good habits now, however, can lead to long-term positive results.

This article first appeared on ChurchLawandTax.com.

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