

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Church Governance: Structuring for Unity - Episode 269

Effective Church Boards & Governance Models (Part 1)

We're kicking off a brand new series focused on practical ways that churches can create better governance models that help the church sustain health.

Why are we spending the next four weeks talking about boards and church polity? Because in our work with churches, we've found that time and time again, **poor governance structures lead to stuck churches**. In fact, our research has shown that stuck churches have 40% larger boards and twice as many additional committees.

In part one, we're unpacking four common church board mistakes and explaining how boards and governance models can be designed to encourage unity rather than division.

Four Common Church Board Mistakes

1. **Church leaders are elected based on popularity.** Every time we see churches voting, it creates division.
2. **The whole church is given a voice in decision-making.** If everyone expects to have a voice and a vote, there will never be unity within your church. This structure also allows nonbelievers or spiritually immature believers equal say in the spiritual direction of the church.
3. **There are multiple boards, committees, and subcommittees overseeing the church.** When every different committee feels like they have control, there will be a lack of unity and alignment in decision making. With this many voices, even simple decisions become challenging decisions and take an inordinate amount of time.
4. **The board oversees multiple staff members.** This structure makes it almost impossible to create unity and alignment among the staff. Instead, there will be an abundance of different leadership direction, development priorities, clarity around wins, and distinctive approaches to performance management and culture alignment.

Four Governance Shifts to Produce Health & Unity

1. **Rather than voting on board members based on popularity, leaders should be appointed based on gifting, biblical qualifications and alignment with the mission, vision and doctrine.**

Related to that, healthy churches follow through with the rotations of leaders that are probably already established in their bylaws. This forces us to be more intentional about raising up future leaders and creates more opportunities to expand our ethnic and generational diversity.

2. **Rather than voting, healthy churches create systems for appointing people who meet the biblical qualifications of leadership.** Then healthy churches let those people provide spiritual leadership and direction for the ministry.

Giving everyone a voice in decisions is a very American thing to do, but it's not a biblical approach to making decisions. If your denomination requires it, try to vote as little as possible to meet their requirements—If you have flexibility, avoid congregational votes completely.

3. **Rather than multiple boards and committees, healthy churches have one, unified board that combines all the responsibilities of previous boards and committees.**

The functions of finance, personnel, facilities, etc. should be combined with the responsibilities of the one board. Some denominations do require specific committees, but most denominations also provide flexibility for all those committee functions to be combined under a unified board.

4. **Rather than having the board oversee staff members, the senior pastor should be the only person accountable to the board.**

All other staff leadership positions should be the senior pastor's responsibility. The pastor should be able to select, lead, develop, clarify wins, manage performance and, if needed, terminate anyone who doesn't align with team culture or who underperforms. Additionally, the only staff member who should have a vote on the board should be the senior pastor.

Listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or at theunstuckgroup.com/episode269.

Free Webinar: How to Get Your Church Governance Unstuck

Want to dive even deeper into this series' topics? On December 1, Tony Morgan, Amy Anderson, and special guests will help you identify the governance issues that may be holding your church back from healthy growth in 2023.

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