

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Church Governance: The Role of the Board vs. the Staff - Episode 270

Effective Church Boards & Governance Models (Part 2)

There are three common factors of stuckness we see in churches: lack of unity, complexity, and a lack of strong leadership.

Poor governance structures and dysfunctional church boards contribute to all three. And more often than not, when a church is stuck because of their governance model, the issues come back to lack of role clarity for both the board and the staff.

This week, we'll focus on how churches can empower their pastor and staff by clarifying the qualifications for board members and role of the board itself.

Symptoms of Church Board Dysfunction

We often see these characteristics in dysfunctional boards:

- An unhealthy perspective of the role of boards and committees.
- An overemphasis on accountability/checks and balances.
- Very little encouragement and empowerment of the pastor and staff.
- A desire to decide HOW to do ministry and accomplish the mission (rather than empowering the pastor and staff to do so).

When the church board leans too much on accountability, rather than empowering the pastor and staff, these symptoms tend to occur:

- Additional layers of complexity are created around gaining consensus on the mission/vision of the church.
- Decision-making becomes increasingly challenging, and sometimes grinds to a halt.
- In difficult times, it becomes extremely hard to initiate the types of pivots that are required for a church to survive and ultimately thrive.

Especially in times of crisis, we need leaders to lead strong. And, in many instances, the governance of churches hinders the leadership of pastors and staff so that they are no longer able to leverage that spiritual gift to carry out the mission God has given the church.

On the other hand, **thriving churches are led by lay leadership teams that streamline decision-making and empower the pastor and the staff team to lead strong.**

The Qualifications & Roles of the Church Board

If poor governance is creating a dysfunctional environment where church boards are not empowering pastors and staff leaders, where should churches start?

Step 1: Lean into the biblical qualifications of leadership to select who serves on the board.

Have your lay leadership board and senior-level staff go on a journey through Scripture together (some obvious places to start are 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 & 1 Peter 5) and look for answers to three critical questions:

1. What are the characteristics of healthy leaders in a church?
2. What is the role God intended for these leaders?
3. What structure would best empower qualified leaders to engage this role?

The easiest way to improve the health of the relationship between the lay leadership and the pastor and staff is to increase the spiritual component of the selection process for lay leadership positions.

Step 2: Clarify the role of the board vs. the roles of the staff/pastor. A “job description” for a church board member would include:

1. Modeling spiritual leadership to the congregation.
2. Providing both encouragement and accountability to empower the Lead Pastor.
3. Protecting the established mission and vision of the church.
4. Making significant stewardship decisions.
5. Advising the Lead Pastor, as requested, on strategic decisions the staff leadership is processing.

The onboarding process for new board members is critical to maintaining this healthy view of the role of the board. Before stepping into leadership, board members should be clear that they are responsible for protecting the mission and vision, but not the day-to-day ministry (including defining the ministry strategy). That’s the responsibility of the senior pastor and the staff team.

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