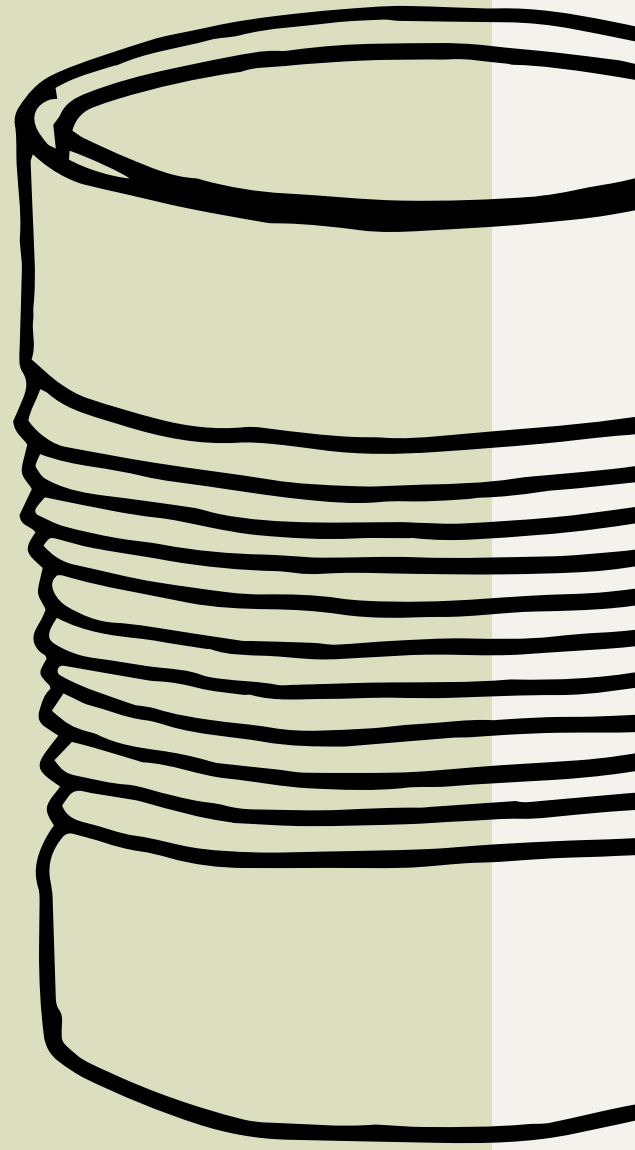


TAKE THE LID OFF YOUR CHURCH

SIX STEPS TO BUILDING A HEALTHY
SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

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FOREWORD

More than anyone else, Jesus understood that He needed the right people around Him to spread the gospel and to impact the future church for generations to come. He carefully selected the right people, invested in them sacrificially, and developed a team that would eventually change the world.

Jesus' model of leadership must be duplicated in every form of organizational leadership—especially within the church. While every team within a church is important, it's critical that healthy teamwork is modeled by the team at the top. When your church isn't operating at optimum levels or a culture shift is needed, too often the attention is addressed by tweaking programs, ministry strategies, or events when the real attention needs to be given to the senior leadership team.

As LifeChurch.tv has grown, our senior leadership team has had to pivot at many points along the way. These changes were never easy—but always necessary. I'm completely convinced that if we hadn't faced our internal organization lids and made some intentional changes to the who, what, and how we approached our senior leadership team, we would not be the church we are today.

Thankfully, Tony Morgan has written an extremely practical e-book that will help churches, ministries, and businesses around the world. His experience in leadership, consulting, and studying church leadership makes this an invaluable resource for any organization that needs to develop a stronger leadership team.

Before you start, I want to be honest with you. The journey you take may not be easy. Self-examination never is. But [Take the Lid Off Your Church](#) will help you dive into deep waters—waters that you probably should have jumped into before but haven't due to fear or simply because you've been consumed with the daily grind of ministry.

Let me encourage you to make assessing your senior leadership team your number one priority over the next few weeks. Use this e-book as a guide to help you navigate through these waters as a leadership team. Include it as part of your staff meeting time and conversations. You'll learn more about the character, impact, and sustainability of your church as you understand more about the significance of a healthy senior leadership team. And I know you will reach more people, build more spiritual leaders, and bring more glory to God along the way.

INTRODUCTION

"A leader is a dealer in hope."

—Napoleon Bonaparte

A personality might draw a weekend crowd, but it takes a team to create healthy systems that foster sustained growth and opportunities for life change. The people who hold the senior leadership positions of your church are the only chance your church has to achieve the vision and mission God designed your church to accomplish at this moment in time. You may think this position to be too strong. My concern is that we aren't thinking deeply enough about the people who hold the most influential positions within the life of a church.

In order for a leadership team to evoke hope, it must first earn trust—trust of the entire staff, volunteer leaders, and average attendees. Without trust, there is no hope for a church to move forward. This is why when a key leader is removed because of poor decision-making, a moral failure, or any ethical concern, it disrupts the entire body.

This begs the question: How do you build trust? You build it through relationships, good decision-making, consistency, and leadership. If your staff, volunteer leaders, and congregation see that your top team trusts you, then they will follow you in the direction and manner in which you press forward. If they don't, you will kick up a lot of dust and get nowhere.

With so much depending on the senior leadership team, I think it's worth outlining a few ideas around how to build a healthy leadership team that will take the lid off your church. If you feel stuck in your ministry, you might want to stop looking at your frontline staff, volunteers, and general membership and spend a little more time evaluating the health of your senior leadership team.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TIME TO CHANGE IS NOW!

The Capacity of Your Team Will Determine the Potential Impact of Your Ministry

As a consultant and leadership coach with churches, I often am involved in conversations about shaping and empowering the team at the top of a church's organization. I've seen this team called several different names. It might be the senior management team, the executive team, or the directional leadership team. For the purposes of this e-book, I'm going to refer to it as the senior leadership team.

This is the team of leaders that usually includes the senior or lead pastor and the group of leaders that oversees the day-to-day operations of the church. In some instances, the church's governance also recognizes this group as the elders. Scripture identifies a number of specific responsibilities of elders in the church. Every church needs elders, but that's not what this e-book is about. Instead, I want to focus on the role of the senior leadership team. That may or may not also be the elder team in your church.

Additionally, I know some churches have a board of overseers that includes people from outside the church. Again, that's not the team I'm referring to when I'm talking about the senior leadership team. An outside board will never have enough knowledge of the local church to provide the leadership and influence required to oversee day-to-day ministry. (As a side note, I'm not a big fan of outside boards of overseers. I've seen too many situations where senior pastors lack support and accountability because they don't have other leaders directly involved in their ministry and life. But that's a topic for another day.)

The bottom line is this: It's never too early to begin developing your senior leadership team. The primary reason for believing this is because Jesus modeled team-based ministry from the very beginning. Jesus hand-selected twelve disciples ([Mark 3:13–19](#)). Then He invested even more time in His relationships with Peter, James, and John ([Mark 5:37](#)). Jesus also routinely sent His disciples out in teams ([Luke 10:1](#)). I firmly believe God designed ministry to be done in teams primarily because Jesus modeled it.

Because of that, leaders need to begin identifying and mentoring leaders from the very early



stages. Of course, that may mean you are mentoring people with leadership capacity who aren't currently ready to lead. You may be discipling people with leadership potential who may not yet be spiritually mature or even Christ followers. The question is, who are you mentoring?

Over time, you will begin to select people who have demonstrated spiritual maturity and leadership capacity to help lead the day-to-day ministries of the church. Do not settle for people who are available but not spiritually mature. Do not settle for people who will give you time but do not have the leadership gift. The capacity of this team will determine the potential impact of your ministry. If it's just you and no one else, your impact will be limited. If it's just you and a group of people who aren't qualified to lead, your impact will certainly be limited.

As the church grows, this team will also need to change. Early on, it's common for everyone on paid staff to serve on the leadership team. At some point, that becomes impractical, though. You'll eventually have too many people sitting at the table. Once you have more than seven or eight people, it becomes difficult for everyone to be fully engaged in the conversation and in decision-making.

Additionally, the team will have to change because God designed us to have different levels of leadership capacities. Some of us have the leadership gift; some of us don't. In Exodus 18, we clearly see that God has created some people to be leaders of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. As the church grows, it will require different leaders with more leadership capacity to serve on the senior leadership team.

The church will always need leaders with different levels of leadership capacity (and certainly people who have different gifts other than leadership), but these people will have a bigger ministry impact and ultimately be more fulfilled if their ministry role better matches their gifts. That means many people in our churches, including those we pay as pastors or directors, should not be on the senior leadership team.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION YOUR CHURCH WILL MAKE

Who Is on Your Senior Leadership Team Will Shape Every Other Decision

The most common questions I receive are about building a senior leadership team—the team at the top of your church. If I had to identify one question that everyone seems to want me to answer, it would be this: Can you help me find these leaders?

The short answer is yes. The reality is that the decision about who will be on your senior leadership team is probably the biggest determining factor of health and success for your church. This decision is much bigger than those about discipleship strategies, series plans, buildings, budgets, etc. Determining who is on your senior leadership team will shape every other decision.

I'm still a big believer in identifying people from within the church, either current staff or lay leaders, whenever possible. They're more likely to embrace the vision, values, and strategy of your church. You'll have a better sense of how they'll fit the chemistry of your existing team. You should have a better awareness of their skills and capacity. In theory, your leadership development strategy has been working and you're raising up leaders from inside your organization.

The reality, though, is that many times inside hires just don't work out. Sometimes it's because there hasn't been enough time or forethought to truly develop leaders. Sometimes you need a leader from outside the organization to help make a philosophical or strategic shift. Sometimes you need an outsider with a specialized skill, experience, or leadership capacity.

For those churches who need to look outside their organization, I recommend [Vanderbloemen](#) or [Slingshot Group](#) to assist with the process.

I've seen firsthand how the right person can propel a church forward. I've also seen how the wrong person—though talented and gifted by God—can truly disrupt culture and growth.



There is simply too much at stake for a church not to do everything within its power to make sure they understand who needs to hold the senior leadership positions in their church.

Because of this, it's important that you go slow in the hiring process, particularly for people on your senior leadership team. There need to be multiple interviews with many different people in distinct settings. You need to give careful consideration to their past successes and failures—it's the best predictor of their future performance. You need to have conversations with people who know them well. You need to pray for God's wisdom.

Remember, these decisions about who should be on your senior leadership team will likely be the most important decisions you make in your ministry. Be diligent and lean on God for His direction.



CHAPTER THREE

7 ROLES THAT CAN'T BE DELEGATED

*Make Sure You Are Performing
at Your Highest Capacity*

What makes a great senior leadership team is when everyone on the team shares responsibility and ownership for these roles. When it's a team rather than an individual, it leads to a healthier organization. These critical roles apply across any organization, so it's common for the senior pastor or CEO to own these responsibilities.

For an organization to be healthy, these are the seven roles of a senior leadership team that can't be delegated:

1. **Modeling team-based ministry from the top of the organization.** It gets very difficult to challenge other staff and volunteer leaders to build and develop teams in the church if it's not being modeled from the top. More importantly, the senior leadership team needs to model what "healthy" team-based ministry looks like. This includes both healthy conflict and unwavering unity. (You can have both.)
2. **Identifying and implementing the strategy for accomplishing the vision.** This, of course, assumes a clear vision for the church has previously been established. The senior leadership team, though, is ultimately responsible for identifying the strategies that will be used to accomplish that vision. They fill the gap between vision and execution.
3. **Leading the staff and volunteers.** Every person, whether in a staff or volunteer role, needs to be connected through your organizational structure back to someone on the senior leadership team. There shouldn't be any staff members, volunteers, or ministries floating out there without leadership and direction connected back to the vision.
4. **Keeping everyone aligned and focused on the vision, strategy, and execution priorities.** In the early days of a church plant, this is much easier. Because there are fewer people initially, church plants stay very focused out of necessity. As churches

grow, though, the senior leadership team will have to work hard to keep everyone focused on the church's overall vision and ministry strategy. (As a side note, that means God may call someone in your church to launch a great ministry that's not part of the church's vision and strategy. It just means that may be their personal mission and not the church's mission. When that happens, you need to encourage the individual but protect the church's mission. We need more of that.)

5. **Considering and responding to the opportunities and threats that might impact the health of the church.** Many times these come from outside the church. The senior leadership team needs to keep its eyes on the environment where ministry is taking place. It's similar to engaging missions in a foreign land. We need to be aware of our surroundings to maximize the opportunities for change in our strategies. This is what will distinguish the churches that last for generations.
6. **Facilitating communications with other staff, volunteers, and the church.** No, once the church grows beyond two people, everyone won't be included in every conversation that shapes the direction of the ministry. That said, every healthy organization needs good communication. Of course, since the rest of the staff and volunteers can't be involved in every conversation, they have to be willing to trust their leadership.
7. **Monitoring key metrics and making sure the ministry is moving in a healthy direction.** It does no good to continue "doing church" without knowing whether or not what you're doing is helping people take their next steps toward Christ. You need a reality check. Is the church healthy? Are people taking steps? Are you reaching new people? Stories of life change are important, but as the church grows, you'll need more than intuition and feelings to measure the health of your vision and strategy. I've been with churches, as an example, who felt like the value of serving was strong. The numbers showed their volunteer engagement was below average, though. You can't always trust your gut.

How is your team doing in each of these areas? It might be helpful for you to take fifteen minutes in your next senior leadership team meeting to have some honest discussion about how your team is working in each role. Are you performing at your highest capacity?

CHAPTER FOUR

7 QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY WHO SHOULD BE ON THE TEAM

*Don't Just Focus on Positional
Leadership or Length of Ministry*

When considering who should be on the senior leadership team, many times, we try to answer the wrong questions. Sometimes we ask, “What positions should be represented on the team?” In the church world, we may think anyone with “Pastor” or “Director” in their title automatically qualifies. That’s not always the case, regardless of the position.

Sometimes we ask, “Who has been around the longest?” Tenure does not necessarily equate with the profile of the person you want serving on this team. In fact, I’d argue that if you’re stuck and gaining a fresh perspective is one of your needs, sometimes the newest person should be added to the team.

It’s not about positional leadership or length of ministry. It’s not necessarily about the people at the very top of your current organizational structure. However, once you identify the right people for your situation, you should build your structure around your senior leadership team. In other words, every person and every ministry needs to be connected to one person on your senior leadership team.

With that preface, here are seven questions to help you identify who should be on your senior leadership team. This assumes, of course, people have already met the qualifications of leadership defined by Scripture.

1. **Do they have leadership gifts?** This is the key question that shapes everything else. If they aren’t leaders, they shouldn’t be on this team. You also need to consider leadership capacity. We know from Scripture that there are leaders of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. For this team, you ultimately need leaders of hundreds and thousands.
2. **Are they big-picture thinkers?** In other words, these leaders prioritize the church’s health over what’s happening in their specific ministry areas. They are more concerned

with alignment to the overall goals rather than defending their turf. They won't let their passion for specific ministries get in the way of making decisions that help the entire church take a step forward.

3. **Are they strategic thinkers?** You need people who can think beyond the daily details. There are places for managers on your team. You need people who can take the game plan and make it happen. Your senior team, though, isn't the place for managers. Find people who think about the future and then can strategically propose how to take you there. One of the primary roles of this team is developing ministry strategy to accomplish the church's vision.
4. **Can they build teams?** In ministry, this is primarily about building and equipping teams of volunteers. As the church grows, you also need people who can develop staff teams. These are the folks who have demonstrated they can identify and empower other leaders. If their instinct is, "I need to do this myself," you have the wrong person.
5. **Do they share the vision and values of your organization?** This is no team for people who perceive they need to provide checks and balances. Maybe they pride themselves on being the "devil's advocate" in your organization. The devil already has an advocate—you don't need one on your senior leadership team. Every leader at this level needs to be 100 percent on board with the church's vision and values.
6. **Do they help us reflect the diversity of our ministry?** Sometimes we falsely assume every leader is wired up just like us. That's absolutely not true. Leadership comes in a variety of shapes and sizes based on someone's gift mix, background, personality, and experiences.
7. **Are they lifelong learners?** Ideally, you'll identify people who will grow with your organization. It does no good to have someone who has all the answers because tomorrow the questions will be different. You need people who embrace leadership development for themselves and their teams

By the way, especially for smaller or newer churches, you don't necessarily need to be paid staff to be on the senior leadership team. For lay people, though, they still need to be fully engaged in ministry and serving in a leadership capacity. If volunteer leaders can't invest the time to do that, you may need to move them into more of an advisory capacity or just pull them in on specific projects.

The other thing to remember is that this team needs to change over time. As the church grows, your senior leadership team needs to reflect that ongoing change. It would be highly unusual for the same team to remain in place year after year. With that in mind, every eighteen to twenty-four months, you may want to ask yourself, “Do we have the right people on the team?”

CHAPTER FIVE

7 STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER LEADERS

You've Got To Let Your Leaders Lead

Once you've assembled the team, the next opportunity is to create a culture that empowers these leaders. It does no good to invite leaders to be part of your team if you're not going to let them lead. In fact, not letting leaders lead is a surefire way to ensure they will soon leave your church. Here are seven empowering strategies to help leaders leverage their gifts and maximize the potential of your organization.

1. **Agree on the vision and values, and let your leaders make decisions.** If the senior pastor has to make all the decisions and come up with all the new ideas, that's an indication of micromanagement rather than empowerment. The objective is to push decision-making to the front lines of ministry. By clarifying vision and values and implementing systems that facilitate next steps, you can free both staff and volunteers to engage ministry without having to wait for permission.
2. **Invite conflict privately.** Demand unity publicly. It's impossible to have unanimous agreement on every decision. The goal is not consensus. There will be rare instances, in fact, when leaders have to make tough calls and the majority of the people in the room think it's the wrong decision. That's leadership. At the same time, though, you have to create an environment where pushback or alternatives are welcomed but unity is still expected.
3. **Hold leaders responsible for outcomes rather than dictate the execution.** As long as the execution fits within the framework of your vision, values, and strategy, leaders should have freedom when it comes to the path from here to there. If you can't trust them with executing the tasks, you have the wrong leaders. On the other hand, the expectations need to be quite clear. What's the win? There should be no confusion over the expected outcomes.
4. **Determine what the team needs to process together and what you need to monitor together.** What you want to avoid is the situation where every decision has to

rise to the top of the organization. Your agenda should be action-oriented. There should be honest assessment of current numbers and trends. Your meetings should be relatively short and full of engaging conversation where everyone participates. If everyone isn't needed in the conversation, that's an indication you should be processing the decision in an e-mail message or a sidebar conversation instead.

5. **Give leaders ownership and accountability.** Managers wait for orders and then go make it happen. Leaders grow frustrated over time taking orders. You need both managers and leaders in healthy organizations. Leaders, though, want a voice in setting the goals and establishing the strategy. They want real responsibility for building the team and setting direction. At the same time, though, everyone needs clear expectations and accountability.
6. **Invest time in the future rather than the urgent.** What's the strategy for accomplishing your vision? Are you working as a team to move the ministry toward that vision? Analyze your meeting agendas or notes from recent months. Have you invested more time moving forward or putting out fires? Leaders can get addicted to the urgent because the challenge is right in front of us and there's immediate gratification when we fix it. It takes discipline to stay focused on the vision.
7. **Expect your team to look outside the organization for opportunities and threats.** The culture around us is changing. People are changing. Families and communities are changing. Your "competition" is changing. The senior leadership team, in particular, has to look beyond the four walls of your organization to consider how your systems and strategies need to evolve over time.

Good leaders will leave your organization if they aren't empowered to make decisions and lead. That means you get to decide who stays and who leaves. Are you embracing an approach that empowers leaders to be who God created them to be, or is your approach pushing them away?

For those of you who consider yourselves leaders, what would you add to this list? How are you best positioned to use your leadership gifts to accomplish your organization's mission? (By the way, if you're interested in reading more about my thoughts on leadership, you may want to download my e-book on [Developing a Theology of Leadership](#).)

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT TO STOP (AND START) AT THE TOP

*Tough Conversations Are Often the
Best Way to Resolve Issues*

Over the last few years, I've had the opportunity to work with numerous churches. There are many, many healthy situations when it comes to senior leadership teams. Healthy leaders are, of course, in the best position to lead healthy churches. Along the way, though, I've identified some traps that can create challenges for both leaders and the ministries they lead.

With that in mind, here are eight things to stop doing:

1. **Adding a family member without considering his/her capacity or counting the cost.** To improve the chances for success, let others make the hiring decision and provide leadership to that family member. And, frankly, I think it's best if both family members are not on the senior leadership team together.
2. **Hiring for personality rather than leadership capacity.** There are lots of good people (fun people!) who aren't necessarily the best leaders. There are roles for those folks, but it may not be on your senior leadership team.
3. **Elevating seniority over leadership capacity.** I've been friends with some people for twenty years or more. The length of our relationship, though, doesn't necessarily mean they are best positioned to serve in leadership with me. Just because you've served with someone for twenty years doesn't mean they're the right person for your leadership team either.
4. **Hiring to fill roles.** Think leadership capacity before job titles. You need the right people rather than the right positions.
5. **Giving someone leadership responsibilities before they've proven they have the capacity for the role.** This is a biblical principle. "Never be in a hurry about appointing a

church leader” ([1 Tim. 5:22](#)).

6. **Allowing complainers to stay too long.** You want healthy conflict—that’s part of healthy teamwork. Constant complaining from someone who doesn’t fully embrace the vision, values, strategy, and authority of the church, though, is never healthy.
7. **Failing to empower the other leaders.** This includes leaders on the senior leadership team and leaders in other staff and volunteer roles in the ministry. When we try to control people, we’re denying them the opportunity to fulfill God’s mission for their lives and God’s plan for the church.
8. **Meeting too often and too long.** The best resource you can read on this topic is [Death by Meeting](#) by Patrick Lencioni. We need less talk and more action.

Some of you read that first part of my list and thought, “I have a problem.” Being in ministry, this is obvious—but your first step is to begin praying about that situation. God wants healthy leaders and healthy churches as well. He’ll answer that prayer.

Your second step is to engage the tough conversations—without delay. Here are five things to start doing:

1. **Start by asking questions.** What’s working? What’s not? Are you fulfilled? Don’t be surprised if they open the door to the difficult issues you were avoiding.
2. **State your clear expectations for the role.** Be honest. Be clear. Explain what success looks like for the person in the role.
3. **Provide coaching.** Offer training resources or experiences. Outline mentoring opportunities.
4. **Establish a timeline.** When will you check in? When will you consider next steps?
5. **Follow up.** Follow up in writing with what you’ve discussed. Follow up with conversations to make sure appropriate progress is happening.

These tough conversations will not always lead to resolution of the issue, but many times they will. In other instances, you may have to follow tough conversations with tough

decisions— that's leadership. To help you discern when tough decisions are required, check out the book [*Necessary Endings*](#) by Dr. Henry Cloud.

By the way, it's possible for your team to have the right people on it but not be performing at its highest capacity. You may need outside help and a fresh perspective to make sure you have the right people and that you're maximizing your potential.

CONCLUSION

It takes courage to look in the mirror and choose to see what is rather than what you want to see. The most difficult type of evaluation is when we are asked to evaluate ourselves. Give a leader an idea, and he or she can chop it to pieces. Give a leader a plan, and he or she can determine what's missing and what isn't. But ask a leader to assess his or her effectiveness—and that of the senior leadership team—and all certainty and clarity quickly evaporates.

I'm not on a witch hunt to tell you you're doing everything wrong. It's likely that if you're reading this eBook, you're already doing a lot of things right. My plan is to help you move forward without feeling tethered to limitations that directly result from a lack of performance at the top.

The possibility that your senior leadership team might be the lid that is holding your church back from greater ministry impact also comes with the realization that it doesn't have to remain that way. But before any change can take place, you must establish a baseline from which progress can be measured. This is where you begin—and it is only a beginning.

So much is at stake. Don't miss the opportunity to propel your ministry to new levels of kingdom work by creating a healthy senior leadership team that—in turn—is creating a healthy church culture. Those two realities could not be more interrelated. The keys to overcoming what's holding your church back are not “out there” but “in here”—within your senior leadership team.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe your senior leadership team is your best (or only) chance to achieve the vision and mission God designed for your church to accomplish right now? Is that too strong a statement? Why or why not?
2. When have leadership team hires not worked out as well as you had hoped? Were decisions made too quickly or without proper knowledge? Should you have hired an insider instead of an outsider, or vice versa?
3. What has your leadership team looked like in the past? What does it look like now? What do you hope it looks like in the future?
4. How can the capacity of a church's leadership team determine the potential impact of its ministry? How has your church's ministry been impacted, positively or otherwise, by its leadership team(s) over the years?
5. A team, rather than an individual, creates healthy organizations. How does everyone on your leadership team share responsibility and ownership for their roles while moving together in unity?
6. Looking at the list of seven roles a senior leadership team cannot delegate, what on that list is a challenge for you or your team? What would you add to this list?
7. What individual or type of person should be on your senior leadership team but isn't yet? Who can you mentor right now to add to your team later on?
8. Teams need to change over time. As your church has grown, how did the senior leadership team grow and expand and alter itself? Do you still have the right people on your team?
9. How are you creating a culture that empowers your leaders so they are able to lead? In the past, when have you lost leaders from your church because they weren't able to operate as necessary?

10. Are you embracing an approach that empowers leaders to be who God created them to be, or is your approach pushing them away?
11. Look at the list of traps that can create challenges for both leaders and the ministries they lead. Which of the eight mistakes do you need to do a better job avoiding?
12. What leadership situations do you need to pray about so that God raises up healthy leaders and makes your church healthy as well? What tough conversations do you need to have this week?
13. Does your team have the right people on it but is not performing at its highest capacity? Depending on your answer, how can you determine whether you need outside help and a fresh perspective?
14. Last, tough question: Is your senior leadership team the lid that is holding your church back from greater ministry impact? If so, what do you need to do next?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tony was the Founder and Lead Strategist of [The Unstuck Group](#). Started in 2009, The Unstuck Group has served over 700 churches throughout the United States and several countries around the world. Previously, Tony served on the senior leadership teams of three rapidly growing churches, including NewSpring Church in South Carolina. He has five published books, including [The Unstuck Church](#), and, with Amy Anderson, he hosted [The Unstuck Church Podcast](#), which has tens of thousands of listeners each month. Tony passed away in 2024, leaving behind a legacy of thought leadership, innovation, and a deep commitment to helping churches thrive.

ABOUT THE UNSTUCK GROUP

At The Unstuck Group, we help pastors grow healthy churches by guiding them through experiences to align vision, strategy, team, and action. Over the last 10+ years, we've led over 600 churches through a [proven process](#) to help them assess ministry health, clarify the vision God's given them for the future, and create the team structure and action plans needed to see it through. [Start a conversation today.](#)

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