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Secrets of Effective Communication

LEADERS & STAFF



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SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**Leader's Guide**

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources and Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This specific theme is designed to help equip church leaders for more effective communication. You may use it either for a group training session or to give individually to people who lead in the church and help make key decisions regarding the church's future. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For example, to see a useful communication covenant for church leaders to use, see "Ten Rules for Respect" (p. 3). To learn how to communicate better and empower staff and volunteers, see "Giving Up Control" (pp. 8–9). For ways to effectively lead a staff and congregation with a diversity of opinions, see "Communicating in a Kaleidoscopic Ministry" (pp. 13–14).

We hope you benefit from this theme as your church leaders study effective ways to communicate with each other, as well as with staff and congregants. We pray it helps empower your people and strengthen relationships.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**Ten Rules for Respect**

A healthy contract for communication that staff and congregation members can use.

2 John 12

A mentor once told me that I would need some rules of the road for communicating with my congregation. The list I drew up has evolved into ten principles that have transformed the way our church communicates. They now form a covenant signed each year by all the leaders, including me:

1. If you have a problem with me, come to me privately.
2. If I have a problem with you, I'll come to you privately.
3. If someone has a problem with me and comes to you, send them to me. I'll do the same for you.
4. If someone consistently will not come to me, say, "Let's go together. I am sure he will see us about this." I'll do the same for you.
5. Be careful how you interpret me. On matters that are unclear, do not feel pressured to interpret my feelings or thoughts. It is easy to misinterpret intentions.
6. I will be careful how I interpret you.
7. If it's confidential, don't tell. (This especially applies to board meetings.) If you or anyone comes to me in confidence, I won't tell unless (a) the person is going to harm himself/herself, (b) the person is going to physically harm someone else, or (c) a child has been physically or sexually abused. I expect the same from you.
8. I do not read unsigned letters or notes.
9. I do not manipulate; I will not be manipulated; do not let others manipulate you. Do not let others try to manipulate me *through* you. I will leave conviction to the Holy Spirit (he does it better anyway).
10. When in doubt, just say it. The only dumb questions are those that don't get asked. We are a family here and we care about each other, so if you have a concern, pray. And then (if led) speak up. If I can answer it without misrepresenting something or breaking a confidence, I will.

While they have not eliminated every problem, the principles have provided a strong foundation for loving, Christlike communication.

—CHARLES W. CHRISTIAN; copyright © 1999 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. If we don't have a communication covenant, why should we adopt one? Why not?
2. Do we understand the fine—but important—line between communication that should happen privately, and communication that requires others?
3. How can we foster an environment that encourages people to speak up when they feel led to do so?

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Six Important Skills

Effective leadership often requires these key communication abilities.

1 Corinthians 14:18–19

At least six communication skills play a substantial role in the emotional intelligence required of church leaders to effectively lead.

Skill 1: Clearly express ideas and goals. Although few leaders excel at all forms of communication—conversation, speeches, and writing, for example—every leader should be capable of expressing concepts clearly.

Ineffective communication takes three primary forms:

1. *Overcommunication that lacks focus.* Some poor communicators sound like an entire newspaper instead of an article focused on a subject.
2. *Unclear communication that creates confusion.* Effective communicators do more than focus on one subject; they are clear, accurate, and specific about it.
3. *Insufficient information that causes paranoia or misunderstanding.* When members of congregations are consistently uninformed about major issues, their imaginations invent and distribute information to fill the vacuum.

Skill 2: Show genuine interest in people and concern for their needs. Caring is not just a characteristic of an extroverted personality; it is true compassion. Caring alone, devoid of the other leadership qualities, does not produce an effective leader. But church leaders who lack a caring attitude will eventually be disliked by so many people that their leadership light will dim.

One way church leaders communicate caring is by being fully present in conversations with people while enmeshed in numerous responsibilities. Effective religious leaders can do two things at once—care about organizational goals, and care about people.

Skill 3: Understand people and their patterns of reaction. Effective leaders can see things from another’s perspective. One pastor wrote in his prayer journal, “Sensitivity to feelings is as important as IQ. Stop trying to succeed and start trying to relate.”

Sensitivity includes recognizing manipulative behavior in others. Sensitive leaders also can assess people and relationships with a high level of accuracy.

Skill 4: Willingly gather information before making judgments. Effective leaders convey a “why not?” attitude and listen carefully to those who offer ideas. They operate on the assumption that this is a good idea—unless further conversation demonstrates otherwise.

Those who lack this receptive listening trait produce three negative consequences:

1. Instead of feeling that the leader likes them and appreciates their suggestions, people feel personally rejected;
2. People stop communicating new ideas to the leader, thus cutting off the leader from a major source of grist for the innovation mill;
3. The leader becomes disconnected from what people in the congregation think about its ministries.

In conversations, effective leaders do two things: they ask questions, and they listen. This makes people like them, respect them, and want to bring them information. The more the leader listens, the more people feel affirmed. The more questions the leader asks, the more people perceive him or her as genuinely interested.

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Skill 5: Possess the courage to sensitively communicate concerns to others. Insensitive people fail to distinguish between forthrightness and abrasiveness. In general, forthright people have earned the right to express a concern because they have a long-term, positive, trusting relationship. A friend is someone who can be honest with you without breaking the relationship.

Skill 6: Sharpen the ability to help people work through differences of opinion. Leaders take people in directions they would not otherwise go. Some people prefer the security of mediocre but familiar territory. To be a leader is therefore to experience some conflict. Effective conflict management, however, goes beyond the ability to tolerate personal criticism. Conflict managers continually assess circumstances, work with the limits of their organizational structure, and stay in communication with people of diverse opinions.

—HERB MILLER; copyright © 1998 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Of the six skills discussed above, which ones are we best at? Which ones do we struggle with?
2. Do we inform our congregation enough to minimize inaccuracies through the grapevine? Why or why not?
3. How can we schedule the time needed for the one-on-one relationships most of these skills require?

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Developing Your Discernment

Watch and listen carefully when you speak with people.

2 Samuel 20:17

I have known many excellent leaders who were not given the gift of discernment. They could not read people. They read figures. They excelled in science, engineering, mathematics, and administration. They depended on management skills and organization.

Those blessed with even a little discernment, however, could develop significant sensitivity and intuition. I am one of those, having used discernment for many years both in manufacturing (overseeing 2,500 employees) and in ministry (chairing several national ministries). If I could read my people correctly, I could make the most of their productivity and minimize their mistakes.

Catching What Others Miss

Productive listening is active and intense. It is hearing more than words. Most of the time we get a general concept of what people are saying—just enough to maintain conversation. Using our discernment to lead requires much more.

- First, make sure you understand the *meaning* of words, both dictionary and colloquial. Slang is part of colloquial listening. For example, when young people say “bad,” they many times mean “exceptionally good.” And if you’re unsure about a meaning, ask.
- Next, listen to the *selection* of words. Word choice discloses several things, including a person’s reasoning ability, prejudices (using pejorative words), and desire to impress (inappropriate use of large words). Words give clues whether a person is primarily intellectual or emotional. Individuals with precise minds use precise language. Often, sensitive people use poetic words.
- You can often determine whether individuals think in principles or techniques. Can they explain things several ways? How broadly do they illustrate? If a person illustrates from many different areas, he can see a similar principle running through the different experiences.
- The use of words and accents also gives us a glimpse into someone’s past.
- People who have a public vocabulary different from their private one sometimes let a private word slip into the public expression, and that opens a window into the person’s thought process.
- Then notice the *manipulation* of words. Does a person put a “spin” on descriptions of people or events? For instance, those who use diplomatic language ordinarily want to avoid offending anyone, which to a discerning leader means you’re probably not getting the whole story.

What They Don’t Say

I call this “latent listening.” With this, we try to learn why the person says what he says and why he says it at this particular time and in this particular way. Listen for three things: tone, pace, and rhythm.

- **Tone** generally is driven by underlying emotions. A negative tone generally denotes a negative feeling about the subject. Interpreting laughter among associates is instructive, revealing situations where communication is open and free, or suffering from discord.
- **Pace** is also affected by emotion. Generally, an excited person speaks more quickly and the pitch rises. Talking excessively is always questionable and generally is born of a desire to impress, intimidate, or ingratiate. Talking too loudly can be a control factor.
- **Rhythm** is harder to interpret. An interesting conversationalist or speaker always has an interesting rhythm. A boring person has a sonorous rhythm. Rhythm many times indicates personal involvement with the subject. Sometimes rhythm suggests a dramatic performance rather than personal communication.

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Sometimes it's important to interpret interruptions. These vary from discourteous to respectful. We normally think that a person interrupting is indicating that what he wants to say is more important than what is being said. On the other hand, it could be a subtle attempt to change the subject to protect someone or to add a different line of thought to the original one. Occasionally it just shows enthusiastic agreement that can't be withheld.

What's the Rest of the Body Saying?

People not only talk with their mouths, they speak with their bodies. Reading body language has been oversimplified by charlatans. I've attended seminars on the subject that defined specific body movements generically and applied them universally. This is quackery. Nevertheless, body language is important and should be carefully observed, investigated, and verified in each specific instance.

Gestures and words should agree.

—FRED SMITH SR.; copyright © 1999 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in *Leading with Integrity*.

Discuss

1. How much attention do we pay to the words people use? Where can this skill help us?
2. What are some ways we can monitor tone, pace, and rhythm?
3. How can we subtly note body movements that may contradict what a person is saying?

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Giving Up Control

The right communication strategy can empower staff and volunteers.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

One of the men in our church is a recognized management consultant to Fortune 100 companies. He suggested that we do a management audit of our top staff and lay leaders. He would gather them in groups of eight to ten and ask them three questions:

- *What are the church's greatest strengths?*
- *What are the church's greatest weaknesses?*
- *What steps, if taken, would most improve the quality of our ministry?*

Participants were promised anonymity and access to the full report (with no edits) in a large-group forum. The first section contained actual comments from the participants, grouped according to theme. The second section offered recommended action steps in providing solutions.

Then I came to the section titled “Senior Management Style.” Sixteen comments in all were directed at me (the pastor), the elders, or some portion of our senior leadership team. Many dealt with how much control we held. And they came from friends who loved me and wanted to see my leadership prosper.

I have always tried to live by my father's threefold outline for successful pastoring: (1) feed the people; (2) love the people; and (3) admit when you are wrong. Over the years I have seen many a pastor go over the edge by failing at number three, and so I knew that was not an option for me. I decided to admit publicly that our leadership, and mine in particular, had been too controlling.

“From our elders down to every level of leadership, we need to find ways to empower those under our servant leadership to do the ministry God has called them to,” I told them.

We defined empowerment as “the capacity to bring one's gifts, skills, and knowledge to bear on one's responsibilities without undue checks, balances, and approval levels, resulting in more effectiveness on the job.”

To balance my fears, we made it clear that we would not be moving to the days of Judges 21:25 where “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

The meeting was extremely positive, and the leaders left enthused.

In an effort to increase empowerment at every level, we required each staff member to meet one-on-one with three or four close co-workers. We asked them to discuss three aspects of their work:

- “Keep doing these things—they help increase my effectiveness”;
- “Do these things more or better”;
- “Do these things less, or stop doing them altogether.”

These discussions have been well worth the time and effort. Since then, our staff members have experienced greater openness in their communication and increased authority and freedom in their respective areas of service.

My conclusions

As I reflected upon the lessons I was learning, I formed several conclusions:

1. **Some complaints can be ignored.** An effective leader does need to “consider the source.”
2. **Some complaints must be heard.** When mature people are given an opportunity to give feedback, they will do so in a loving way that helps the leader grow.

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3. **Leadership styles must be adapted.** Church planting is different than church leading. As situations change, leadership styles must adapt.
4. **Proximity promotes control.** In order to release and empower others, I have found it necessary to withdraw from certain areas. Simply being there makes it almost impossible to keep from inserting myself and my preferences. Steering clear is the easiest way to limit my tendency to control. The key becomes knowing when to step in and when to stay out.
5. **Control can hurt, even when unintentional.** Though it is not my nature to injure others through control, the “security” benefits of controlling others often makes that my default position. It’s not my heart, but it happens under pressure if I do not intentionally pursue a different course of action.
6. **Personal growth takes time.** Attitudes are patterns of thinking formed over a long period of time, and they don’t change overnight. I am working hard on the matter of control, but victory comes in increments that include occasional relapses and the need to apologize.

—JAMES MACDONALD; copyright © 2001 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. In what ways might our leadership structure encourage us to “overcontrol”?
2. How might a management audit help us identify weaknesses?
3. What communication tools can we implement to empower our people while ensuring they stay on track?

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How to Run a Great Staff Meeting

The best practices of ministry include keeping the key people in touch.

Romans 12:10

What makes a great meeting? Generally, each week we focus on one or two specific ministries (in addition to the repeating staff business), which allows for variety as well as covering the necessary recurring details.

Our staff meetings always begin with 10 to 20 minutes of prayer, though the time can vary as the needs of the day dictate. Prayer may also take place at other times in the agenda, especially when we need wisdom for a specific area.

Then, a number of items are a part of every staff meeting. Here's our **repeating agenda**:

- *First-time visitors and new regular attenders*: Reviewing reports of calls to first-time visitors and new regular attenders allows us to track newcomers' reactions to services and ministries, flag items for follow-up, and be aware of any emerging trends.
- *Program inserts/display ads and public announcements*: To coordinate communication efforts and establish priorities for the staff.
- *Future dates*: Before adding any new ministry event to the calendar, we review and discuss the merits of the idea and try to minimize scheduling conflicts.
- *Name clearing*: We review all potential ministry leaders before they are offered a specific ministry position. This allows the head of a particular ministry to benefit from the collective wisdom of the full team about the skills and character of the potential leader. It also helps prevent burnout of a volunteer who may already be involved in other ministry areas.
- *Weekend review*: Time is allocated to discuss the weekend's worship services and special events. We try to affirm what went well and to identify what could have been improved.
- *Current projects*: We monitor the development of a priority ministry, such as a new church start, staff search, or capital campaign.

Next comes what we call **priority business**, listed in three categories:

1. *General discussion*. Issues about which staff must be informed, and reminders of upcoming priorities.
2. *Proposals*. We review the development of new ministry ideas and plans for addressing problem areas. Each idea or problem is assigned to a specific staff person, and a date is designated for the staff member to present a report.
3. *Deferred matters*. These are any items previously tabled.

Then comes **new business**: If an issue surfaces during the staff meeting and needs attention, it is listed under new business. If time allows, this item could be discussed immediately, tabled, or assigned to a staff member or team for study.

Finally, the meeting concludes with **reports**, an opportunity for staff members to offer a ministry update, new ideas, or anything else that might be of interest to the entire team. This can be just a few minutes or an extended time, depending on the time available.

Ground rules

We have several principles for effective staff meetings:

Have a regular time and place (and don't cancel!). This builds a pattern that reaps long-term benefits. Most staff teams find it best to meet early in the week. We expect all staff to be there.

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Start (and end) on time. Starting late is disrespectful to those who have made it a priority to be on time. The discipline of the end time moves the meeting along and allows people to plan the rest of their day with confidence.

Have an agenda and stick to it (most of the time). Most meetings fail when adequate thought has not been put into what the group should discuss. Place priority items at the top of the agenda.

Be prepared. Those with assignments must come prepared. If this discipline breaks down, participants begin to consider preparation optional.

Have an established leader. Consistent leadership enhances the effectiveness of the meeting. If the senior pastor doesn't lead the staff meeting, some churches delegate it to another pastor skilled at meeting management.

If possible, decide. Meetings lose their usefulness if the participants discover that process, not action, is the primary activity.

Maintain task orientation (with human sensitivity). The meeting must move briskly through the agenda, but with sensitivity to the relational dynamics. Build a sense of team around the task of ministry.

Be realistic. Groups generally have energy for one or two significant issues in any one meeting. It is best to avoid the temptation to add too many agenda items besides the routine business.

Set aside additional time for experiences and long-term thinking. Weekly meetings alone will not be sufficient to address all the issues. On occasion, time must be set aside for brainstorming, planning, and for experiences designed to build community, perspective, and skills.

Keep confidentiality. When discussing volatile issues, particularly related to people within the church, the conversation must not leave the room. When a difficult issue surfaces, it's often wise to table the discussion until later and include only those directly involved.

Be unified. At times it's impossible to have complete agreement, but it is important that, once a decision is reached, the staff not air any differences elsewhere.

—JOHN SOMMERVILLE; copyright © 2004 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Does our current way of doing meetings work? Where can we improve?
2. How can we best focus on one or two key areas and table other matters that arise as we meet?
3. How can we build in other meetings for brainstorming, planning, and team-building?

SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**Where to Hold a Discussion**

The place you meet can say a lot about what people will say.

Luke 6:43–45

The physical setting for a discussion can either contribute to the vitality of a dialogue or it can take the life out of it. Here are some tips that I've found can make a positive difference:

Meet in a room small enough to put you in touch with each other. Bank lobbies and church fellowship halls may be impressive, but the cavernous space they allow between people kills intimacy. You aren't looking for the detached contemplation distance affords. Furniture also can cause trouble. Tables and overstuffed chairs can effectively block close contact. You'd gladly trade elegance for the quick response that comes from immediacy.

Seat people in a circular fashion so everyone can see all the faces in the group. Theatre-style seating is fine for focusing attention on the leader, but you don't want that. Your aim is to make each member the star. It's their reaction that counts. You're much more likely to get it when people can eyeball each other.

Make sure there's enough light. You certainly don't want the harsh brightness of a police interrogation room, but neither do you want to lull folks to sleep. Although the soft, low lighting of an intimate restaurant affords privacy, dim lighting doesn't give members the chance to pick up nonverbal cues. There's such a thing as being too comfortable.

Unless stuffiness is an unbearable problem, stay indoors. My students clamor to hold class out on the lawn at the first sign of spring. I'm tempted to give in, but sad experience dictates that I resist the pressure. There are so many distractions—people walking by, the sound of a lawnmower, an ant crawling up a leg, damp grass—that the topic at hand gets lost in the shuffle.

You'll come up with your own checklist tailored to your specific situation. Just make sure you don't lose sight of your ultimate goal. Structure the physical setting to stimulate lots of "back and forthness" between people. You'll have a winner if they temporarily forget where they are and lose themselves in the excitement of stating their beliefs.

—EMORY GRIFFIN; copyright © 1981 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Does our current meeting space help or hinder communication?
2. What are some tangible ways we can improve the spaces we use to meet?
3. What else might we add to our checklist of good traits for meeting spaces?

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Communicating in a Kaleidoscopic Ministry

Diversity in a church can produce either discord or harmony.

Romans 12:16

Believers usually react negatively to the word plurality. We suppose if we really love the Lord and each other we will all agree. But do we always agree with our parents? Our spouse? Our best friend? Ourselves?

Differences and disagreements are part of the business of living. Common sense tells us these do not have to mean antagonism or division, yet many churches and individuals fear diversity is an evidence of disunity and even unfaithfulness.

The mobility of society means the constant relocation of church members. Many cross denominational lines to join the church that most appeals to them. They bring to their new church different ideas and practices.

The tensions created by this diversity often make us uncomfortable. We desire to serve God in a pure, orderly way. And when diversity stirs disagreement, it's difficult to remind ourselves of its benefits.

But we need each person's viewpoint. The joy comes as we listen to, appreciate, and affirm each other. Yes, diversity causes friction, but that friction produces warmth.

Boil down to the basics. Does acceptance of diversity mean you open the door to *any* viewpoint of theology or ethics? Certainly not! In any object or activity we find a mixture of essentials and nonessentials. Certain central beliefs must be shared as the basis for a working relationship.

- Personal conversations with the pastor can help spell out central beliefs;
- A new members class helps prospective members understand the basic viewpoint of a congregation. We call our class the "Explorations Class," with the understanding that participants are exploring what it means to be a Christian and a member of this congregation. The six-week class is required for membership, but people take the class with no obligation to join. We have found this an invaluable means of building a solid relational and theological foundation for church life.

Open channels of communication. The leader's task in handling diversity can be likened to taking a picture. Two technical factors contribute to taking a fine photograph: light and focus. Too little light means the image will not register on the film. Incorrect focus produces a blurry image.

A primary means of bringing light and focus to a situation is conversation. When challenged, most people avoid a problem or react aggressively. Neither resolves the problem. The leaders of the church need to open channels for communication, especially on highly charged issues.

- At some meetings, we regularly discuss letters and comments from the congregation.
- Congregational forums, group discussions, retreats, and newsletters also enable the dialogue that keeps diversity constructive.
- Gauge the beliefs of the congregation, asking them to do these things:
 - List three to five primary beliefs you think ought to be central to the life of this church.
 - List three to five issues you know are currently discussed that you personally consider less than central to your life in this fellowship.
 - List three to five areas of belief and/or practice in which you are unsure. What would help you resolve your uncertainty?

After people at a struggling church I worked with answered these questions, they began to see their differences were not as great as first believed, nor were they rooted in the essentials of the faith.

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Appreciate others' experience. Many conflicts are aggravated because people fail to take seriously the emotions involved. Emotions arise from our experiences.

Differentiate style and substance. Too often we mistake style for substance, rejecting or accepting both without distinguishing the two.

- Evangelism is a frequent victim of this. I often encounter resistance to evangelism based on a person's unpleasant experience with a particular evangelistic method. The way to soften resistance is to focus clearly on the substance of evangelism and be creative in the style it might take in a particular situation.
- The teaching of church history and tradition can broaden people's outlook and help them accept others' viewpoints and practices.

Combatants may win occasional battles or achieve some gains as heroic martyrs, but they seldom motivate lasting change. The critical need in situations of diversity is to clearly reason through issues and lovingly care for people. Above all, we need to hang in there.

—DOUGLAS J. RUMFORD; copyright © 1986 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Based on our current situation, do we view diversity of opinion as an opportunity, or a sign of weakness?
2. In what ways can we do more to state our church's central beliefs as a way to create unity in our congregation?
3. How can we facilitate conversations that allow multiple viewpoints to be shared on matters not central to our central beliefs?

SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**How Much Should I Let On?**

Every church leader needs to balance between disclosure and discretion.

Ecclesiastes 12:10

A biblical principle of management, often neglected in the Be-real-be-transparent philosophy, is this: Emotions are more contagious than typhoid fever. A leader's negative emotions can infect followers like the plague. Because of the risk involved, where's the balance between disclosure and discretion?

Right Proportions

In disclosing pain and sorrow, wisdom dictates that the degree to which we open our hearts should be in inverse proportion to the size and scope of the group we're addressing.

The one. With God, we can say anything. He's the Wonderful Counselor, and following biblical models, we can ventilate our feelings to him with abandon. Consider Moses: "If you are going to keep doing this to me, then kill me now." Or Jonah: "I am so angry I could die." Or Elijah: "I have had enough, Lord. Let me die." Or John: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?"

Most of my discouragements, I've found, are best resolved in a quiet room with a Bible, a hymnbook, my journal, and some old books.

The few. The second audience is composed of a few. I'm never quite as honest and open with my few as I am with my One; but close friends can shoulder deep disappointments. We need an audience of one or two or three such people—and if we're married, one of them should be our spouse.

The team. My third audience is the church staff and lay leaders with whom I work side by side. Here, I'm more cautious, for my leadership role implies a responsibility to encourage them, boost their morale, and refresh their vision. I can share my sorrows and sins with them, but too much toxic dumping will contaminate the very ones I'm responsible for encouraging.

The congregation. With my fourth audience, I'm more cautious still. My congregation isn't just my flock and my mission field—it's my constituency and my employer. Few churches enjoy seeing their leader emotionally undress. Some church leaders have lost their jobs because their constituents lost confidence in them.

There's nothing wrong with occasionally telling an audience, "I'm tired today. I'm a little discouraged now. This has been a tough week." Nothing wrong—and everything right—with saying, "My heart is breaking for our nation." Far from being detached and dispassionate, a leader needs to have an emotional investment in the message and ministry.

Right Timing

My second rule of self-disclosure is this: The more lapsed time since a trauma has occurred, the safer it is to discuss. Nothing disheartens a church like a leader who broadcasts his darkness before he has discovered the source of light.

Sometimes I don't feel like preaching or cheering my leaders. I don't feel like uplifting the spirits of my listeners, for my own spirit is enveloped with fatigue, hurt, or hopelessness. What can I do?

I can stand, set my jaw, fix my eyes on Christ, and use my frail voice to communicate hope and optimism that may rise beyond my immediate emotion.

Is that deception?

No, not necessarily. It's knowing my audience, watching my timing, and thereby doing my duty.

—ROB MORGAN; copyright © 1996 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. Are we doing a good job of balancing disclosure with discretion? Where can we improve?
2. Do our church's key leaders have a few individuals to share ups and downs with?
3. How can we, as leaders, maintain authenticity without demoralizing our staff or congregants?

SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**Communication Worth More Than Money**

Sometimes simple gestures say a lot to volunteers and others.

Proverbs 3:27

“It’s tough to lead people who don’t get paid for what they do.” How many times have you heard a colleague in ministry say that?

What people get paid (or don’t get paid) may contribute to dissatisfaction, but it really can’t contribute to satisfaction, which usually comes from internal motivators.

So what makes people stay and produce if it isn’t money?

“Psychic income” refers to what motivates people other than money—such things as respect, recognition, and challenge. Psychic income may be the only earthly benefit people receive from serving in the church, yet it’s often in short supply.

These simple things can make volunteers feel their service was worthwhile, part of something great:

- A thank-you note;
- Clear communication and expectations;
- A leader who’s excited about the work.

I was recently asked to participate with an “interpretive movement” team in our Sunday worship service. (Interpretive movement, in my opinion, is a euphemism for dance.) A men’s chorus sang “The Lord’s Prayer,” and our team used simple arm-and-body movements to express the meaning of the prayer.

The worship experience was powerful.

I’m not an interpretative movement kind of guy; my wife gasped when she heard I had said yes. Yet from the moment I was asked to participate in the service, through the long rehearsals, to the thank-you note I received in the mail a couple days after the service, I felt appreciated and important. I believed my involvement contributed to the worship of God.

Why? Because our leader, a volunteer whose full-time job is nursing, kept us focused on why we were doing this: to lead people in holy worship. Plus, she did the little things that translated into psychic income for the team: the warm invitation, the follow-up phone calls, clear expectations, well-directed rehearsals, and the brief but heartfelt thank-you note.

—DAVE GOETZ; copyright © 2000 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in LEADERSHIP.

Discuss

1. How are we communicating the steps outlined above in our work with volunteers?
2. What can these steps tell us about interactions with others, including paid staff?
3. What are some other ways we can motivate staff and volunteers, or show them our appreciation?

SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Further Exploration

Books and resources to equip church leaders for better communication.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “Building the Team” Assessment Pack
- “Answering Tough Questions” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Marketing and Public Relations” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Working with the Opposite Sex” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Confidentiality” Training Theme and Power Point
- “Creating Community” Training Theme and Power Point
- “Handling Conflict” Training Theme and Power Point
- “Leadership Environment” Training Theme and Power Point

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Breakfastwithfred.com. This website provides leadership and communication insights from Fred Smith Sr.

Building Your Church Through Counsel and Care *edited by Marhsall Shelley*. This book collects the wisdom of 30 church experts to explore how to give effective counsel and care in a wide range of critical areas using person-to-person ministry, care groups, preaching, and teaching. (Bethany House Publishers, 1997; ISBN 978-1556619663)

Leading the Team-Based Church *by George Cladis*. George Cladis offers a leadership model built on a process of collaboration that mirrors the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The model offers an exciting alternative to the traditional forms of church leadership, enabling pastors, congregational leaders, and staff to breathe new life into their ministries and unleash the full potential of the entire ministry team. (Jossey-Bass, 1999; ISBN 978-0787941190)

Church Communications Handbook *by Wendy Vassallo*. A communications specialist discusses communication in the local church—advertising, talking with the media, communicating with members, and utilizing technology. Includes forms, checklists, and examples from churches. (Kregel Academic & Professional, 1998; ISBN 978-0825439254)

The Vital Congregation *by Herb Miller*. A look at a variety of ways for churches to improve their health. (Abingdon Press, 1990; ISBN 978-0687437962)