

# Pastors Work to Keep Church a 'Well-Oiled Engine'

Most businesses have a “go-to” person who’s responsible for the overall workings of the enterprise—a “buck stops here” person. In the church, that person is the pastor.

When people ask me what I do all day, I find it impossible to describe the amount of energy it requires to insure that every part of the church is working like a well-oiled engine. In reality, it rarely does. There’s usually a squeaking part somewhere.

I often hear people compare the running of a church to the running of a business. There are some similarities. Financially, a church has to balance a ledger. It cannot spend more than it takes in for very long without serious consequences. As in a business, people need to have a high level of satisfaction regarding the way they are treated or they will not come back.

Like a business, a church must have leaders and visionaries to move successfully into the future.

However, the church doesn’t run like a business. First of all, businesses don’t change leaders every few years. Most churches change ministerial leadership every four years or so. Not only do paid leaders change often, but lay leaders turn over even faster. Most churches rotate their leaders, allowing different people the opportunity to exercise their gifts and responsibility to serve God through the church.

The downside of this constant turnover is that the administrator is constantly forging new relationships, adjusting to different personalities, recasting visions, and reacting to different agendas that people bring to their work.

One of the biggest differences between the church and a business is that the workers in a church comprise a volunteer army. Those of us who oversee volunteers in the church cannot be field generals who bark orders and boss people around.

A business leader who has people working under him or her can demand an accounting of employees. They have some leverage to insure that workers stay on course and accomplish their jobs. Pastors who operate like field generals usually have their stripes removed before leaving office.

Pastors are charged with leading the church, but our leadership style cannot be autocratic without fallout. We must lead with conviction, but lead gently. Rather than demanding, we must inspire, motivate, challenge and praise the church's workers. Although these people are working for the Lord and not for us, the quality of their work and the depth of their commitment ultimately affect people's opinions about the pastor's leadership abilities.

Even though the church is an army of volunteers, the one wearing the administrator's hat is ultimately held responsible for any lack in organization, communication and progress toward the church's mission.

Even though many pastors are not given the same authority to solve administrative problems as business leaders would have, in most cases the pastor is still held to the same standards of success that business leaders are held. For this reason, the pastor usually gets too much credit when things are going smoothly and too much blame when things are going badly.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:2-3). So what do we do all day? At some point in almost every day, we put on our administrator's hat and work to keep the church unified through the bond of peace, headed in a common direction, achieving common goals.

There cannot be unity without cooperation; cooperation isn't usually achieved without a coordinator; and coordination doesn't happen without wise, well thought-out plans and strategies. Even then, there is no guarantee that the ship will sail smoothly.

But when it does, we are the first ones to give thanks.

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*This column is part two of a five-part series exploring a pastor's work.*

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