

HANDLING LEADERSHIP



HOT POTATOES

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Introduction: The Sherwin-Williams Leader

I was recently in a paint store buying supplies for a home improvement project. I noticed a color deck that contained every color this store carried for purchase. I was blown away at how they nuanced every imaginable color. I was looking for a gallon of pink paint to paint my daughter's room. What I got was a selection of over forty colors that were all technically pink, but in varying shades. I was not prepared to decide between "Party pink", "Merry Pink" or "Fussy Pink". Thanks to my six year old daughter's persistence, we ended up with a pink called "Priscilla", which Mia says is "way more pink" than those other pinks.

I had a similar experience when planted Calvary Fellowship in Miami in September of 2000. I was trained in Bible College to see issues in black and white. However, when I started leading a church, I found many topics that were not black and white, right and wrong issues. I'm not talking about theological questions. Instead, they were leadership challenges that required attention nonetheless. I discovered many leadership "hot potatoes" I needed to deal with that are common with most senior leaders. The pages that follow are my answers to three of the biggest leadership challenges that I've had to deal with and I know you will too. Enjoy!



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Hot Potato I –

The One Thing You Don't Want to Do

One of the biggest challenges of leadership is dealing with underperforming staff. Few church leadership issues will give you more indigestion, headaches, and sleepless nights than staffing problems. I know of churches that have specific ministries that serve as an “island of the misfit toys” for staff that aren’t pulling their weight. These leaders won’t release these underperforming staff members, which in the end hurts their organizations and the individuals in question. How to deal with people who aren’t a good fit for your organization in a way that’s right for the church and treats the individual with respect is an important balance. In my years as a leader, I have observed four key strategies to handling staff problems.

**How do you deal
with people who
aren't a good fit or
your organization?**

Deal with Problems When They Happen

One of the mistakes that are common with many leaders is a tendency not to deal with problems as they happen. If we’re a little more formal in our structure, there will be



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a problem, and our reaction will be, “It’s May, but I’m going to write this down because I’m going to deal with this issue during their December review.” I believe you can’t wait to handle infractions. The more serious the issue, the quicker it needs to be dealt with.

If a staff member isn’t keeping up with the rest of the staff in relation to job performance, this must be confronted immediately. If you hesitate, you are sending a message to the rest of the staff that this kind of behavior is acceptable. In addition, you

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are sending an equally misleading message to the staff member in question that their ineffectiveness is tolerated and encouraged.

The same is true with behavioral problems. A leader who will not deal with a staff member who disrespects the senior leadership of the church,

disagrees with the church’s primary mission, or simply has a bad attitude is inviting discord onto his team. When leaders handle such problems quickly, decisively, and effectively, they are showing the rest of the team how serious these infractions are and that there is zero tolerance for such behavior.



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Can They Be Reassigned?

Sometimes, an underperforming staff member is simply in the wrong position. Many times, this can be resolved by moving the person into a different position. When someone is the right person but in the wrong position, he will usually have to stay late to keep up with the rest of the team. This does not mean he isn't giving his best.

Rather, he will be working hard but will have difficulty keeping up. A person who isn't giving 100 percent doesn't need to be reassigned; they need to be released. A lack of gifting is not an excuse for laziness. Laziness is a cancer for any staff. When a person doesn't put forth his or her best effort, it sends a message to everyone on the team.

Sometimes, an underperforming staff member is simply in the wrong position.

The message is, "It's OK if you don't put forth your best effort here. There aren't any repercussions for not doing your best." I know you don't want to send that message to anyone, much less your team. If the person in question is in the wrong position, transfer them. If the problem is lack of performance, the person needs to be fired.



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You're Fired

I've only had to say these words a couple of times, and it never gets easy. In fact, even when the person had been disrespectful to me and had grossly underperformed, it was still difficult to say the words. Here's what I encourage you to do: Bring the person into your office, and tell them they have been terminated. Don't say it in anger. Instead, communicate in a very calm voice. You should speak confidently but

without gloating or spite. This person is about to enter one of the most stressful times in his or her life. For that reason alone, we should treat him or her with respect.

A Parting Gift

Severance can be given, but it isn't mandatory. A best practice in many business circles is to give a week's severance pay for every year served. However, these are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. If the person being released has been respectful and loyal to the organization, then severance may be the fair course to pursue.

However, if the person has been a destructive force on your team, you should not feel any obligation to give any type of severance.

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The Best Time to Fire

The old adage is true: the best time to fire someone is before you hire him or her. How can you tell if someone isn't going to work out before hiring them? Look at their job history. Are there gaps of time missing? This may be a sign there is a place of employment they want to hide. When calling previous employers, listen to not only what people are saying, but also what they aren't saying.

If they aren't saying, "_____ was a very hard worker. _____ didn't leave until the job was completed. _____ worked well with his fellow team members. I'd love to have _____ back."

You may have a future problem employee on your hands.

Firing a person is serious business because it is going to affect that person's life drastically. Will it give you sleepless nights, headaches, and indigestion as you agonize before making the decision? Let's just say you should stop at a drugstore before heading home from the office.



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Hot Potato 2 -

The World's Most Awkward Conversation

How do you ask someone to leave your church? No matter where you are in your ministry, at some point, it will have to be done. Unfortunately, there's no manual on how to do it outside of a few Bible verses. Few authors write about it, so most of us are left

How do you ask someone to leave your church? in the dark on how to do the one thing no pastor ever thinks he's going to have to do. Call it arrogance or ignorance, but I never thought I'd ever have to ask someone to leave our church. I assumed that all people would have the joy of the Lord in their hearts and a kingdom agenda in their minds.

To say I was wrong would be a gross understatement. I've had more of these awkward conversations than I'd care to admit, but I will say that every time I have one of these meetings, I leave more convinced about who we are as a church, and I've never regretted the decision. That doesn't mean I enjoy these talks. In fact, I hate them. I'm not even sure what to call them. Is it disfellowshipping? Is it church discipline? Or is it just "giving someone the boot"? It's probably all of them, but for our purposes, we'll call it asking someone to leave our church. I can't say I've learned



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everything about these conversations, but I do believe I have learned some principles for doing this in a God-honoring way.

So here are my ten rules for asking someone to leave your church:

1- The final conversation shouldn't be the first conversation. When you decide that someone needs to leave your church and find another place to worship, your meeting with him or her should not be the first conversation that a staff member has with the person. There should have been a series of conversations before this one. Is this cumbersome? Yes, it is. But the last thing that should be said of you is that you are “trigger happy” about kicking people out of your church. One of the points you need to bring up is that two, three, or four other conversations have led to this. To avoid due process will hurt your church in the end because people will find out you’ve asked someone to leave.

2-Document everything. There’s an old saying that says, “The shortest pencil is better than the longest memory.” That certainly applies here. Document every phone conversation, personal confrontation, and meeting a staff member or leader has with the individual. There’s confidence when you walk into a meeting with a file that has every meeting, infraction, and action that the church has taken with this person. Make



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sure you've reviewed this file and talked to the appropriate parties who have had contact with the individual. You don't want to walk into this meeting and be blindsided with new information about a conversation you know nothing about.

3-Handle it biblically. You should review every passage on church discipline before entering the meeting. You may have these passages memorized, but you need to read 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 before these meetings. It opens your heart before God and gives Him an opportunity to speak into our lives. Also, don't allow this to become a gossip session. Too many times, people in our churches will tell us when someone is sinning. That's fine, but they need to go to the person first. If they won't listen, take someone else. If that doesn't work, call the elders (Matthew 18). We need to make sure we're handling these situations biblically. I'm amazed at how people will sin as if it's going out of style, yet get bent out of shape over our approach if it's not in the Matthew 18 order. We need to be above reproach in these matters. So, even if they aren't honoring God, let's make sure we are by following the appropriate, biblical steps.

4-See this as a last resort. This is not a method to get rid of all the people that bother you from the church. This is last resort when you believe there's no hope here, but to "turn the person over to Satan" (1 Cor. 5). As pastors, we are shepherds.



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This means we need to be patient with people and bear with people's faults. It is only when we see people beginning to hurt those around them that we must act decisively, out of love for the rest of the church.

5-Get wise counsel. If you are going to be the one who meets with these individuals and asks them to leave, ask other pastors in the church for their wisdom on the situation. I am looking for any hope that these people may change. However, if I get counsel that this situation isn't going to get better, I act. Getting counsel also helps me not get emotional about the situation. I am able to stay calm and get the facts before I meet with the person being asked to leave.

6-Have someone with you. Do not meet, under any circumstances, with the person alone. You want to have another person, preferably another staff member, with you to be witness to how the meeting transpired. I personally prefer public places. A coffee shop near my office has seen many bad meetings over the years. I can't even walk in without getting a stomachache. Make sure the person with you is taking notes. This way, after the meeting, you have a complete file on the person from start to finish. You never know when you're going to need it.

7-Keep it short. These meetings can drag on for hours if you allow them. This meeting should be no longer than thirty minutes. It could be as quick as five minutes,



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but people want to be heard, and it's important to allow people to feel as though they've said their piece. Don't make a bunch of small talk before the meeting. This is a serious meeting. Pray before you begin, and then tell them why you've asked to meet with them. State the facts, and then let them know they are no longer welcome at your church. Answer the questions that arise. Hear the person out if they have a counterpoint. However, once that's done, repeat the facts, and let them know they are no longer welcome at your church. Don't argue doctrine, philosophy of ministry, or anything else. Inform them of your decision, and that's it.

8-Pray a prayer of blessing on the person. I always end the meeting by praying a prayer of blessing on the person that's leaving. The person has sinned, but God still loves him. My prayer is that this situation would be a wake-up call for repentance. I pray for God to reveal Himself to the person as he takes steps of obedience and turns from the wickedness. Let him know that while he is not welcome at your church, he should repent of his sin and find a church where he can grow. I don't hate anyone I've asked to leave. In fact, I have found that in the days and weeks after asking them to leave, I pray for them often. I wish them nothing but blessing as they turn from sin and turn to God.

9-Leave room for repentance. I will be honest, I have never had a person



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burst into tears and repent at one of these final meetings. What I have witnessed is plenty of pride, blame shifting, and hard hearts. I have always prayed before these meetings that I wouldn't "quench a smoking flax." If the person repents sincerely, I will accept it and work with him. I am yet to see it in all my years of ministry, but I would give a truly repentant person grace if I saw it.

IO-Be honest but not slanderous. The news of these meetings spreads faster than a Southern California wildfire. People may ask what happened at the meeting. After the meeting, people asked to leave will call everyone they know in the church and tell their side of the story. People will ask for our side of the story and try to sort it out in their minds. I used to say nothing. I think this is a mistake. I believe you should be honest, but you don't have to be specific. You could say, "We did have a meeting with _____, and he was asked to leave the church. This is not a decision that came about overnight. We met with him five times and tried to get him on the right track, yet we saw no repentance. Each time, he refused and continued in his sinful ways. There comes a point in time where you have to let someone go and let God work in his or her lives. I just couldn't allow him to stay and hurt other people in the church. I would not be a faithful pastor if I allowed one person to hurt dozens." This allows you to answer the question and be honest without divulging details no one else



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needs to know.

If you're going to be a leader, then at some point, you're going to have one of these conversations. These meetings go about as well as a root canal; it's not pleasant, but if done right, they remove a problem, and the church is healthier because of it. My hope is that you follow these steps and stay above reproach in these matters, so you can lead your church at a higher level.



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Hot Potato 3 -

Don't Be Afraid to Challenge People

I have a friend who was in the military. When I say he was in the military, he wasn't just an average soldier. He was an Army Ranger. He was also part of a Special Forces unit. One day, he and I were driving to lunch, and I asked him, "What possessed you to join the Army and be part of this special unit?" Without missing a beat, he said, "Because they offered me a chance to be the best. They challenged me to either be the best or go home." It was at that moment that I realized when you challenge people, you invite them to go to a higher level.

Too many times in the church, we shy away from challenging people because we don't want to offend. Truth be told, the only people who get offended when we lay out a challenge are people who don't want to grow. I have learned that people are looking to be challenged. They are looking for something to which to give their lives. They are seeking to become more than they currently are. The church can be that place. But for that to happen, pastors need to step up to the plate and become comfortable about challenging people.

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Challenge People to Care

The only way people are going to grow spiritually is if they care about growing spiritually. This means putting in the time, effort, energy, and discipline necessary to grow. Is spiritual growth easy? No, it isn't. There's a reason half-hearted people don't become spiritual giants. Jesus said that the call to discipleship is a call to lose your life. That's total commitment. If we challenge people to care and show them the benefits of obedience (i.e., pleasing God, making a difference for eternity, and being who they were created to be), people will respond.

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Challenge People to Push Themselves

We recently taught a series through the New Testament, and we challenged people to attend every week of the twelve-week series, attend a Small Group, read a daily devotional, and read the entire New Testament in two months. We made no apologies. We laid out the challenge, and we watched God work in people's lives as they took steps in God's direction. We challenged people in this series to give, serve, extend



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forgiveness, and love the unlovable. The response was overwhelming. We said at the outset, “If you take this challenge, you will grow more in the next two months than you have in the last two years.” We were right, because challenges always bring growth.

Challenge People to Live by Faith

I used to be scared to challenge people to give financially. I didn’t want to be misunderstood. Today, I challenge non-givers to begin tithing, and I challenge tithers to

Without start giving generously above the tithe. The underlying motive is a

faith it is challenge for people to live by faith. The Bible says, “Without faith

impossible to it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). Yet, at times, we try to

please God. present a belief system that lives apart from faith. If we don’t

—Hebrews II:6 challenge people to live by faith, then their ability to grow

disappears. You’ve probably heard the expression that faith is like a muscle. For faith to grow, it has to be put under pressure. I’ve learned that making Christianity easy for people isn’t Christianity. It’s like imitation crabmeat. It might look like it and smell like it, but at its core, it’s fake. Christianity is about constantly trusting Jesus more. It’s about walking where He is leading and releasing control to Him. Christian leadership is challenging people to take their next step towards Jesus.



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Push vs. Pull

There is a difference between challenging people and pushing people. We don't push people to do anything. Instead, I believe to challenge someone is to pull them to somewhere new. If you've ever encountered a door, then you know pushing and pulling aren't the same things. Pushing someone involves moving him or her to a place you haven't been yet. Pulling, on the other hand, begins with your standing where you hope the other person will stand as well. Pulling says, "I've experienced this myself, and it's made all the difference. Join me." We pull by issuing the challenges of Scripture and inviting people to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

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