

Building a Pastor-Deacons Ministry Team: How Pastors Can Work with Their Deacons

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We accomplish more together than we do individually, and so pastors can accomplish more when they are working in concert with their deacons. The following are some ways that pastors can help their deacons perform their ministries more effectively.

Share the Vision. The pastor/overseer should be the vision caster for the church. The pastor's role is not just to receive a vision from God, but to communicate it to the people. It's not sufficient just to have the right vision; it must be communicated with the right spirit and at the right time. It takes time for a pastor to pray and receive a vision for the church from God. The pastor has prayed and thought through the vision over a period of time. However, when he announces the vision, that is the first time the people of the congregation have heard it. They have not had time to get answers to their questions and think through new concepts. The wise pastor will take the time to communicate his vision with the deacons and other leaders of a church. Some pastors have gotten frustrated when they announced their vision for the church, only to face criticism and a lack of support from church leaders and others in the congregation. However, it is possible that the pastor's vision may have been received more positively had he taken time to get "buy in" from deacons and other key church leaders. The deacons will appreciate the trust that the pastor invests in them to share his vision with them. If the deacons are given time to come to share the pastor's vision, they can come to own the vision personally. Once the deacons are "on board," it will be of great help in leading the entire congregation to catch the pastor's vision for the church.

Teach by Example. The best kind of learning is not in the classroom, but learning by doing. No number of training sessions in how to witness or how to visit persons in the hospital is as effective as actually participating in these activities. Pastors who bring their deacons along with them on pastoral visits teach by example. At first, some deacons may only feel uncomfortable in some of these situations. They may prefer to participate by praying while their pastor presents the gospel, or by just being with him in the hospital room. But as time goes along, the deacons will feel more comfortable taking the lead in witnessing and ministering. They will catch "pointers" by watching their pastor deal with different situations. The pastors who invest time in providing in-service training in their deacons will see benefits for years to come as their deacons blossom in the ministry of the church.

Invest Time with Deacons. Not only should pastors engage with deacons during pastoral visits, but they should do so in social and recreational times as well. Deacons are often the best friends that pastors ever have. By spending quality time with deacons, pastors can model spiritual maturity for them. Some deeper things of the spiritual life are better "caught" than "taught." When pastors share themselves with their deacons, their theological training and

Christian devotion can “rub off” on the deacons. The pastor should take care to spend time with all deacons, not just the most active deacons. Although it is natural for pastors to spend more time with active, younger deacons, it is also important for pastors to give attention to elderly deacons who can no longer be as active. It is disrespectful of ministerial office for a pastor to ignore his elderly deacons who have served faithfully for many years. As I have met with older deacons, my life has often been blessed by their wisdom and insight.

Be a Team. Deacons can sense whether pastors respect them as a member of the leadership team or not. When deacons feel “out of the loop,” they do not feel a part of the team. Deacons who feel a meaningful part of the church leadership team will have real “buy in” for the direction of the church, and will do their best to support it. Deacons can perceive if their pastor is a “lone ranger” or “star” who doesn’t feel the need for any help, or if the pastor recognizes the deacons as a significant part of the church’s ministry team. In sports, it is often not the team with the most talented star that wins. It’s usually those who play together as a team who win. The same is usually true of local churches. When church leaders work together as a team, the church wins, and the Lord is glorified.

Honor the Deacons. Deacons are the only other scriptural officers of a local church besides the pastor. Just as honor is due to pastors who serve diligently, faithful deacons should be praised publicly and privately. We do not serve the Lord for the praise of others. We serve in dedication to the Lord, hoping to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt.25:21, 23). However, words of encouragement and praise spur us to attempt even greater things for the Lord. Most deacons are supportive of their pastors, and praise the pastor for his sermons and many other things that he does. If deacons praise their pastors in many ways, should pastors not return praise and affirmation to their deacons? Wise pastors will look for opportunities to praise deacons who have served effectively. Pastors who praise their deacons will often find that deacons return praise to their pastor, and together they can both praise the Lord.

It’s hard to win a tug of war when the people on one side are not pulling in the same direction. The pastor and deacons must be pulling together to maximize their service to the Lord. Working together, pastors and deacons can maximize their effectiveness in the work of the church, and magnify the work of the Lord.

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