

## Achieving a strong staff

By Brian McGown



It's been said that the three most important rules of real estate are “location, location, location!” Likewise, managing any size church staff has a similar critical rule: “communication, communication, communication.” Like most great leadership lessons, we learned this the hard way.

Early last year I sat in a meeting discussing the challenges of keeping a staff of high-octane people on the same page, avoiding train wrecks, easing frustration, and building trust between more than 50 teammates.

As our church reached adolescence (14 years old) we were experiencing some growing pains that accompany double-digit attendance growth each year for the last five years, including a year of 65 percent growth when we moved out of a school and into a permanent facility.

Our leadership staff knew we had to make some changes to maintain the healthy culture we had spent years cultivating. We narrowed the communication issues (which are still in process) to two general areas of focus to be immediately addressed: staff-wide communication and one-on-one communication.

### **Staff-wide communication**

During a providential trip to a great church in Indiana for some benchmarking, I was encouraged and challenged by the intentionality with which they joined their whole staff together each week for a time of fellowship, worship, teaching and prayer. Rather than the typical all-staff business meeting, this time served to join the large staff together and pour life and encouragement into them. I quickly felt the sense of urgency and confirmation that Faithbridge needed a similar moment in our busy week.

We decided to phase in the meeting, first quarterly, then monthly, and now we have “StaffLink,” our weekly Tuesday morning all-staff meeting, for one hour. We come together for fellowship, worship, teaching, prayer and announcements. This moment in our week has made a huge difference in the forging of relationships and trust between ministry areas and between the leadership and our staff.

We are continually revamping and retooling to make sure that the one hour is a “get-to” and not a “have-to,” discerning the overall temperature of the staff. This past December we opened our second on-site venue during the Advent season capped off by eight Christmas Eve services and we could tell that the staff was tired.

We needed a way to celebrate a great year, a completed building project, and a successful Advent season, so we converted “StaffLink” into a three-hour long “Staff Fun Day.” We asked the staff members for interesting facts about themselves, created a sheet for all to guess which fact went with which staff member, took all (now 60) team members to lunch at a local family-style Italian restaurant and just enjoyed each other’s company.

It truly was a special time and everyone came back to the church offices with big smiles and happy memories. Celebrating all God has done in our midst was definitely a landmark on the landscape of our staff culture.

### **One-on-one communication**

There is nothing worse than doing a good job and not knowing if your supervisor even notices all the hard work and effort you put forth. The flip-side is also true; it is completely unfair to an employee to let them continue down a path that is unhelpful, unhealthy, or just plain wrong. With that in mind, we have decided to no longer accept the minimum standards of an annual review that deals with 12-month-old information and delays praise or correction. Instead, an annual review is only part of our overall performance review process.

Currently, we have in place a three-tiered approach: monthly check-in, quarterly review, and annual review. The monthly check-in is an informal hour set aside specifically for celebrating achievements and dealing with correction. The timeliness of the celebration of an achievement is so important and helps keep momentum and energy building within the employee. Likewise, the timeliness of dealing with an employee or a situation that needs some correction is vital to maintaining health, holding short accounts, and clearly defining expectations.

### **The quarterly review**

The quarterly review is a set of five questions that focuses on key information for discussion and future planning. We essentially do three quarterly reviews (1st, 2nd, and 3rd quarter) while the fourth-quarter review is a combination of an annual review and all three previous quarters. The five questions we ask our staff to complete prior to each quarterly review are:

1. My greatest sense of ministry accomplishment or fulfillment the past quarter has been ...
2. The ministry goals I am prioritizing highest the next three months are ...
3. We will know when each of these goals has been achieved when we see the following outcomes ...
4. To help lead my area of ministry to achieve these goals, I am presently taking the following steps/prioritizing the following key activities ...
5. The way you (your supervisor) could best help me in my ministry right now is ...

The annual/fourth-quarter review is a 20-question self-review and adds questions regarding long-term goals and dreams. The annual review rarely has any surprises since we hopefully have

celebrated accomplishments and dealt with issues as they arise in the monthly check-in and quarterly review times. This three-tiered approach has served the leadership and staff well in communicating very deliberately and clearly the expectations for both supervisors and employees.

Frequent, specific and focused communication is the pulse of any healthy organization. We are striving to communicate well on a large scale and on a personal level, pursuing what we call “Ministry Excellence,” recognizing we are not perfect but giving our best to honor God and inspire others.

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