5 Tips for Ensuring Confidentiality in Church Offices

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People who work (free or paid) for a church are often exposed to confidential information. These employees and volunteers are responsible for maintaining a strong code of ethics because of access to this sensitive information.

According to dictionary.com, confidentiality is defined as "**having another's trust or confidence; entrusted with secrets or private affairs**."

Members and volunteers provide the church with demographic, financial and personal information. This is an implied trust that those who have access to this sensitive information will maintain a high level confidentiality.

Church leaders are responsible for maintaining confidentiality with this often personal and sensitive information.

The church also maintains employee information which also needs to be safeguarded. This includes social security numbers and personal and medical information.

Focus on maintaining confidentiality to ensure that sensitive information is not inadvertently shared.

5 Tips for Maintaining Confidentiality

1. Create a Confidentiality Policy

The first step is to write a policy for confidentiality.

This policy should include expectations for anyone who is exposed to sensitive information and guidelines for dealing with inappropriate inquiries.

For example, it is common for people to call the church office and ask for the phone number or address of church members. This policy should include how to handle such inquiries.
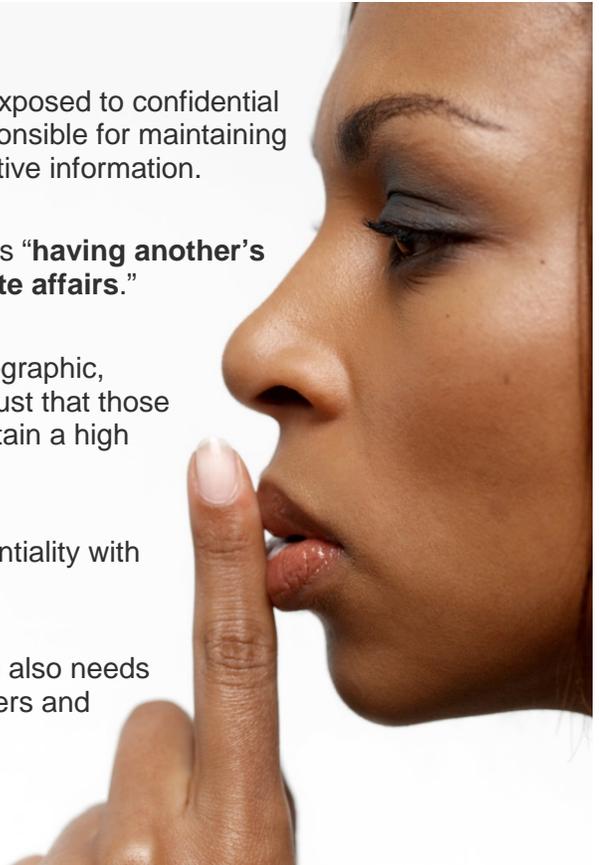
2. Confidentiality Agreement

Employees and volunteers who have access to sensitive information should be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement indicating that they understand the importance of safeguarding sensitive information.

The goal of the agreement is to merely assert the organization's commitment to maintaining and respecting personal and private information and should be kept in the employee or volunteer file.

3. Confidentiality Training

Once you have a policy in place, take the time to train employees, as well as volunteers, about the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

This type of training can be incorporated into the employee and volunteer orientation process.

Simply making people mindful of the expectations helps to heighten their awareness and compliance.

4. Need-to-Know Approach

Sometimes there are issues with members or volunteers that are of a pastoral matter and need to kept at that level.

Sharing this information with other employees and volunteers is inappropriate with the exception of a need-to-know situation.

For example, if the volunteer office receives a background check and discovers that a volunteer has been convicted of sexual misconduct, a pastor will need to be informed so they can help manage the communication to that volunteer.

5. Control Access

Control access to confidential and sensitive information. Electronic files need to have limited user access and paper files need to be locked at all times. The policy should clearly state who has access to what data and specifically who is exposed to donor and background check information.

The are many responsibilities that come with managing a church office but one of the most significant is creating an environment that protects and safeguards employee, member and volunteer sensitive information.