

NEED HELP?

By Aubrey Malphurs

(December 22, 2004) Facing a major growth challenge in your church? Have you discovered serious leadership gaps in your preparation and training for ministry? Do you find it next to impossible to keep up with the wealth of information now available on good leadership? Are there moments when you know that your “in over your leadership head?” Ever felt that you could use some specialized help?

While in seminary, I worked for a Christian businessman who regularly brought in a business consultant to help him with his leadership and the operation of his company. As I look back on that, I realize the wisdom of such coaching and consulting. So did various leaders in the Scriptures. For example, in the Old Testament, Moses had Jethro (Exodus 18). And in the New Testament, Timothy and Titus had Paul. Who do you have? Doesn't it make sense that you should get some help as well? This is the first of several articles on church ministry consulting. Following are six value-added features that argue strongly for enlisting the aid of a ministry consultant.

1. Good church consultants have the experience, expertise, and time that your leadership staff simply doesn't have. The advent of ministry learning organizations, the explosion of knowledge, and the fast pace of communication make it nearly impossible for a single or senior pastor or an executive leadership team to remain knowledgeable of new methods and ministry paradigms that God is blessing. In addition, projects that require new skills and lots of time bombard leaders almost daily. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing world, churches have difficulty hiring enough knowledgeable people just to keep up with normal, ongoing ministries. Strategic minded churches and other ministry organizations are increasingly turning to ministry consultants to help them fill the knowledge and time gap for various growth challenges and the many special situations

that arise. These consultants bring to bare their expertise and years of ministry experience gained from other projects and other ministry organizations.

2. Good church consultants provide flexibility for their client churches. The typical church can bring them in for short-term knowledge acquisition, skills development, strategic planning, and other ministry projects. Much as Jethro in Exodus 18:27, they're there when you need them and gone when you don't. They come on the scene, serve your purpose, and then they disappear. Many also offer coaching on the telephone or over the Internet that is flexible to leaders' time.

3. Good church consultants provide a fresh, objective point of view. Most consultants have other projects under their belts and valuable experience in dealing with an array of ministry situations and leadership personalities. These provide them with fresh, unbiased approaches to ministry. This "cross-pollination" of ideas and experiences from other similar ministries allow you to tap into the brain power and strategies of those ministries. Often the pastor or leadership staff is too close to their situations to see the problems and potential solutions that a good, objective consultant recognizes almost immediately. In addition, the consultant doesn't have to tolerate but can address any internal politics or power plays that some use to short circuit healthy, biblical change.

4. Good church consultants provide maximum ministry efficiency. There are three reasons why they can do this. First, they bring experience with similar situations or problems so that they don't need to take valuable time to get "up to speed." Second, Senior Pastors, other leadership staff, or volunteer leaders have to accomplish their "normal" assignments in addition to any special projects. To become knowledgeable and give attention to a special project on top of many other responsibilities is the proverbial straw that breaks the staff person's back. Consultants, however, have the luxury of focusing all their expertise only on the special projects and assignments for which you've retained them. Third, they don't have to deal with the church's necessary, daily tasks such as attending staff meetings, returning phone calls or answering e-mails from congregants, "putting out fires," and dealing with other policies and procedures. Armed with ministry

tools such as the “storyboarding” process, they complete their assignments in one-half to one-fourth the time.

5. When it comes to the bottom line, a good church consultant is more cost effective for the ministry organization. The question is which is more cost efficient, using a consultant or hiring a new staff person? Hired staff require a regular paycheck along with other benefits such as a health package, retirement, and possibly a severance package. However, consultants serve you much as another staff person without the additional overhead. They work with you on an as-needed basis. The ministry has the benefit of an additional, specialized staff person without all the added financial overhead that comes with new staff. A second vital question is can you afford not to use a specialist where you need his special expertise, especially if you’re “stuck” and the future of the ministry is “hanging in the balance?” If the project fails due to the use of someone “in house,” most people will not give you a second chance. Also, organizations that try to take shortcuts usually end up spending more money in the long run but with less to show for it. Finally, not only is a specialist cost effective, but he saves you valuable time, thus freeing your up for other pursuits.

6. Finally, a good church consultant brings a solid grounding in the Bible and theology to the ministry situation. Ministry with and to churches is deeply theological. It’s critical that a consultant have a thorough grounding in theology that he or she brings to your situation. We have discovered that good biblical, theological preparation is vital to the consulting equation. That is why the Malphurs Group only uses consultants that have biblical and theological training.

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