

Developing A True Ministry Team

© 2006 by Nick B. Nicholaou, all rights reserved

President, Ministry Business Services, Inc.

Reprinted from *The Clergy Journal's Faithful Finances*

Well coordinated ministry teams are rare! Ministry staff members are most often best characterized as entrepreneurial competitors who try to be diplomatic and work with each other—sort of. Why is that? How can we help our staff work together in a well-coordinated fashion?

The Problem

Understanding how the problem develops is an important part of identifying how to fix it. Here's what happens:

As ministries grow, they can afford to add staff to focus on specific areas of ministry. The charge to these new hires usually goes something like this: *We're so glad you're on the team!*

We want you to do everything you can to grow this area of ministry. Take it and run with it!

At first blush that sounds okay. But notice what was missing. They were never told how that ministry area was to feed into the purpose and mission of the organization. The strategic impact of that ministry area was left completely up to the new hire.

The Fix

It's not easy to transform an existing ministry staff into a team. Leadership often means making difficult decisions that sometimes identify a necessary change because a mistake was made. We'd like each staff member to make it through the transition, but this is something we must be willing to give up if necessary. It's the equivalent of being willing to walk away when negotiating.

The fix begins with identifying your organization's unique purpose and mission. It then works through how each ministry area helps the organization fulfill its unique purpose and mission. It then re-aligns, as necessary, each ministry area.

Some ministry areas will be easy fits, and some won't.

The key throughout the process is communication. It is extremely important to communicate to the staff:

- *The Concern.* The organization has a dysfunction that, if addressed, will make it more effective for The Kingdom.
- *The Goal.* Identifying the organization's unique purpose and mission, and then ensuring that each ministry area feeds that purpose and mission, which will translate into maximum fulfillment of the organization's purpose and mission.
- *The Love.* The priority is to help each staff member work through the transition. Some may feel this is a corporate re-organization, and in the corporate world that always means cutbacks. Though some personnel changes may result, that is not the *preferred* result.

The Process

First, spend time with the staff and board identifying what God is doing that is unique through your ministry. As an example, God is working through many churches in the community, but each may have a specific focus as to demographics or worship style, etc. What is unique about what God is doing through your ministry?

Once you have a feel for how God is uniquely working through your ministry, formulate a simple purpose or mission statement that helps communicate it. This becomes the filter element which helps identify what fits and what doesn't.

One at a time, look at each ministry area. Ask how it is feeding the purpose and mission of the organization. Look for aspects that are right on target and for those that are not. Look for the adjustments that would align each ministry area. Look at methods and processes, and set a plan in motion. Review the plan monthly to identify what's working and what needs to be modified.

What If?

You may find a ministry area that is completely outside of what the organization's purpose and mission is. If that happens, the first step is to re-examine the purpose and mission statement to see if it is accurate. If it is, be willing to eliminate a ministry area that diffuses your ministry's energy and focus. Most often staff can be re-assigned, but on occasion they may feel God is leading them to launch a standalone ministry.

Ministries are often said to shed light on the human condition. Taking that analogy a step further (I know, this might be dangerous!), a 25-watt laser can cut metal, but a 25-watt incandescent bulb will barely light a room. What's the difference? A laser is a focused beam.

A true ministry team is akin to a laser. The sum of its members is much more powerful than the individual parts. Working on your ministry team will make it more effective at fulfilling what God has called it to accomplish.