



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT CHURCH CONSULTANTS

Leading churches and religious organizations has never been more challenging. The use of consultants by churches and denominations is on the rise as the challenges of cultural shifts, structural and organizational change, strategic direction and alignment to mission have combined to increase the complexity of leadership. NetFax recently posed a series of questions on the use of consultants by churches and denominations to three widely experienced national church consultants: Bill Easum (easum@easum.com), Dan Reiland (dandr@injoy.com) and George Bullard (bullard.journal@compuserve.com).

Are there some general reasons for using consultants? Most consulting will fall into one of four categories: (1) to facilitate a particular process such as strategic planning or capital campaign; (2) to address an issue such as relocation or staffing; (3) to address a specific problem such as conflict resolution; and (4) increasingly, to serve a coach to the senior pastor or leadership team.

When does a church need a consultant? Consulting is most helpful at “hinge points” or critical passages in a church’s history. Some hinge points include the initial six months of a pastor’s tenure, when the church has experienced a substantial period of growth, prior to a building project, times of major crisis and the concluding months of a long-tenured pastorate. “The best consulting is done when a church is doing well, not when it is in trouble, although we usually get a call when it is the opposite,” said one consultant. Another factor is when a church “wants to be stretched beyond an incremental or discontinuous range into the realm of true transformation.”

What qualities should a church look for in selecting a consultant? Important qualities include experience with a variety of churches and denominations; a proven track record of leadership. A good consultant has authentic skills, is a practitioner, not a theorist. Churches need a person with whom they can establish a high trust level and who is comfortable working with their type and size of church. The consultant should have the ability to focus on solutions not quick fixes. The ability to integrate thought, process, relationships and interpret circumstances, not only in terms of what is needed but what the congregation is actually able to do is also very important. Finally, the consultant should be someone who can empower the church and its leadership through the process, rather the remake it in the image of the consultant.

What does a consultant look for in a church before agreeing to work with them? All three consultants agreed there were three common factors critical to a positive consulting relationship. First, the “readiness” of the church...it’s openness and willingness to implement what is needed and change. Second, the responsiveness of the church to do the necessary preparation work in advance of the consultation. Finally, the ability of the senior pastor and other leaders to clearly articulate their need for and expectations of the consultation. Without this, “the process is dead from the start,” said one consultant.

What else should a church know about a consultant that would make the consulting relationship more effective? “Every consultant has biases and it helps in determining a match between the church and consultant if the biases are known.” “The best consultants will draw out of the people a consensus of God’s movement through a process that focuses on the congregation as an organism and therefore, most of the data gathering is soft data. The consultant will focus on assessment and then learning and coaching.” “We genuinely want to make a difference in the life of the congregation.”

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