

How to Be a Specialist in Supporting Your Support Team

Without support roles in the church, little or no ministry would take place. Pastors may have a heart for preaching, but they still have to feed their families. That requires that payroll be processed.

Unless you are a house church, you probably owe rent or utilities to a vendor, and checks have to be prepared. If you have more than a couple of employees, your church likely has information technology and human resources needs.

These support roles may be filled by volunteers or paid staff. Regardless, your church should take care not to minimize the importance of these responsibilities. You can help ensure they are given their due by following a few key guidelines.

Tone at the Top is Critical

If the senior pastor or the board doesn't see the support roles as important, neither will anyone else. If those in authority don't comply with policies and procedures, it will be increasingly difficult to get others to comply as well. Leadership should be the biggest champion for the support functions within the church.

Build Relationships

One business administrator I know made it a policy to take new pastors for lunch during their first week on the job. He wanted to develop a good working relationship from the start, and he used the opportunity to communicate the procedures and expectations for the church's operations, such as expense reimbursements and the budgeting process. He also made it clear, however, that he was there to help the pastor and that if they worked together,

it would make both of their jobs easier and likely help accomplish more ministry.

He found that he got fewer surprising phone calls — like one at 8 p.m. Friday informing him the youth group was going to Mexico in a 15-passenger van the next day — and he was able to be proactive in preparing for upcoming events. This enabled him to provide the best level of “customer service” possible.

Simplify

We need to make it as easy as possible for ministry staff to help the support roles. Here are some examples:

- If IT requires passwords be changed every six weeks, instead of requiring a 15-character password with four specific criteria, it could be simplified so the user can remember their password without writing it down. (Hint: Scripture references make great passwords because they contain upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, and a symbol).
- The chart of accounts could be simplified so department managers can easily code their own expenses to the few accounts they use on a routine basis.
- Human Resources could walk new hires through the mountain of required paperwork, rather than expecting the employee to figure it out or requiring a supervisor to make sure it gets completed.

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Encourage Cross-Pollination

One revolutionary idea that has proven to be successful is getting people in support roles to work in direct ministry functions periodically. You may consider implementing this quarterly or semi-annually, but it is important that it occur during regular work hours. Don't expect support staff to "volunteer" in the evening or on the weekend and get the same benefit. Pay them to take a day out of their regular department and be hands-on in preparing for a youth retreat or serving meals to the homeless or elderly.

As support team members and ministry leaders work side-by-side, they begin to appreciate each other's roles, and relationships begin to develop. Often, the person in the support role will gain an appreciation for the demands placed on the ministry person and realize that it may not be as easy as it seems to comply with the administrative requests being made. Conversely, the ministry person often realizes that the support person isn't as difficult and rigid as he or she may have previously believed.

There is another benefit to the idea of support people serving directly in ministry.

Our employees join our team because they want to be part of what God is doing. Over time, that calling can seem to fade as they do their job day after day. They begin to realize that paying accounts payable or processing payroll at the church really isn't any different, at least from a task standpoint, than it is at a local car dealership or large corporation. Getting support staff involved in ministry helps each person remember why they are there and the effects your church is having on individual lives. It shows them that their work really matters.

The bottom line is that we all fill a role. Some of us are hands and some are feet. Some are eyes and some are ears. Each is important in filling the mission the Lord has given our ministries. Carefully consider how the support roles are viewed in your church and if the individuals on those teams feel valued and supported. If not, what can you do to start improving that process today? It doesn't take a huge effort. Just showing you are aware and care will go a long way.

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