

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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Staff and lead volunteers

Joys and sorrows from the same source

Most senior pastors will tell you that some of their greatest joys come from working together with staff as friends, and also with lead volunteers. And they will probably say the same about the saddest experiences of their careers. Same source.

How can that be?

A number of reasons go into this: We are all rather human... We've gone with our hopes instead of our gut feelings when we hired or recruited staff or volunteers... People don't change much, and we might've hoped some new teammate might really work on strong changes.... Sometimes we don't check references enough or believe them when they do caution.... Life is hard.... And we are all very human! (Did we already say that?)

But maybe we can all do better. And maybe if the three of us talk about our experiences and the lessons we have learned, we can save you some accidents or head-on crashes!

No question that lead volunteers and paid staff are crucial from a human standpoint to our success in following Christ as churches. May we learn from others and from our past experiences and from our Friend and Savior!

With great joy and some sorrows also,

Knute, with Jeff and Jim

Can you be friends with them if you are the leader?

Jeff Bogue

- Absolutely! Just be sure you keep leading and that you are objective and strong in your decision-making.
- Our friendships are going to be at different levels with different people. In my experiences, that level is usually defined by the other person, not by me. The question becomes: *Can they handle the access, and can they handle knowing me and seeing my frailties or not?*

Jim Brown

- Yes, but selectively choose them.
- Jesus had his inner circle of three close friends.
- It's always challenging to find someone that you can confide in, but once you do you hold the friendship lightly because people move on to other churches with job changes and life changes.
- I often test the waters to see if I can confide in a person after getting to know them.
- My closest friends are the ones that I trust and allow me to be me and don't use our friendship as an advantage to them.

Knute Larson

- Certainly, if you mean strong love, joy to get together, social life together if you please, strong discussions, laughter and fun, trust to say anything to each other respectfully, and more.
- Friends in the sense of loving each other and wanting and doing what is best for each other and for the church—yes, all of them, we hope.
- No, if you mean there is no room for senior authority and responsibility at times. All must do what is best for the church, and that means there is organization and teamwork. And all teams have a leader.
- However, you interpret this question, I should think every staff meeting and even volunteer meeting should be fun and friendly as well as mission-oriented. Staffs and teams that are all business will get old. I think this means eating together regularly as a part of staff meeting, having some fun events, leadership warmth and joy and encouragement. At the least, staff members who bring wet blankets constantly must be counseled to change or asked to leave.
- Any staff member or volunteer who is a good personal friend will not even say hello to you on Sundays. Meaning he does not have to show he is close to you, and he values the other times you get together. (And he does not tell anyone. Or quote you.)
- I do think—to add to the question—it is also good to have close friends who also pastor, but elsewhere, to exchange stories and headaches and prayers, and for tough accountability questions and challenges.

Are the three C's still pertinent — character, competence, chemistry?

Jeff Bogue

- Yes, 100% they are still pertinent.
- My strong belief is that character and chemistry are a bit set in someone. It's hard to create that later on; but competence can certainly be taught, and I have found that these are great indicators of how a person interacts on a team.

Jim Brown

- Yes, they are all important, and failure in any of them can be toxic for teamwork.
- Competence is often easy to see when interviewing, as is character from references. Yet chemistry is often the deal-breaker and is often hard to see at those entry levels.
- We try to ask probing questions about chemistry and seek to find out what are the interests, hobbies, passions, and goals for the future teammate.
- Through the years the chemistry element has caused more challenges to the team than anything.
- Look at any championship team in sports and the strength comes not always in the talent but in the chemistry of the roles played out well. I have often said, "Give me someone who is in it for Jesus and we will win!"

Knute Larson

- Yes, indeed, and in any order you choose. Without character, there will be some sort of failure. Without confidence, it is unfair to be using the money of the Lord in the church to pay them. Without chemistry, it is drudgery, no fun at all. Life is too short for that.
- Most of us who have supported the hiring (in the case of staff) or inclusion (in the case of volunteers) of someone lacking in one of those three areas have regretted the mistake. Even if someone on the decision team feels "this is Gods will," which means different things to different people, there probably will be regrets and hurts.
- I know this sounds non-Christian, but people don't change much. When you hire overlooking somebody's fault because you are sure you can change them, you probably will be disappointed.
- J.C. Penney, whose stores once did very well, used to say he would not hire someone until he had eaten a meal with them. He wanted to see how they would treat the servers and interact while they eat. My policy was that I would not hire someone until I played basketball with them, if they liked that sport. Someone who does not hustle in a sport they like will not hustle at work. Would you want to be on the same sports team with them? Or at the same family reunion? Or on the same platoon in the army? Or on the same construction team building a house?
- The chemistry goal can be misleading, methinks. We certainly do not want people who think like we do, or have the same views we do on debatable subjects, or dress the same and like the same music— unless we want the church people to wear uniforms or all like the same Bible version!
- Reference calls or email should always ask former employers about these three areas, and the last question should be, "*Would you hire him or her again?*"

Where do you find them? Develop them?

Jeff Bogue

- I believe character and chemistry are mostly found or raised. It's very hard to teach those two ideas. Sometimes you can find them within the culture of your own church, or you can raise it from the young people in your church.
- Competence can be taught.
- One of the filters I use is what I call *the eight-hour car ride*. If I was stuck in a car with the person for eight hours, would I enjoy that trip or dread it? If I dread that trip, then I would look and say we probably don't have the chemistry to work together.
- You can also look within your church to find someone who can be developed and trained and knows the DNA of the church. But a word of caution; remember that if they have great influence and things go south with them a large portion of the church will be impacted by that.
- The development happens with the systems you have in place already in your church. The hope of every church is to develop leaders to serve and be sent out!

Jim Brown

- That is a million-dollar question!
- When we have a staff need, I first ask my closest friends and ministry partners.
- Your church-related school is another great place to check on potential candidates. We have a large part of our team from Grace.

Knute Larson

- Good staff can often be found in your own church, among strong volunteers; among the retired people excelling in a needed skill or ministry; through internship programs, your own and those of other kindred churches; from your favorite seminaries and churches and colleges; from your network of friends.
- Pertinent here is the idea of part-time staff. That often is not only a good savings for a church but produces a more targeted staff member. We once replaced a full-time pastor with three part-time people that took his areas of concentration, saving a lot of money and producing in this case more success.
- Good volunteers can be found in your own discipleship group, and those of other staff; from those serving in less active roles who could do more; from recommendations of other active volunteers; very little from just posting or announcing a need. Part of such a search can be to ask other staff members who would be good for this job — who is now in their discipleship- accountability group!
- And there are very good search ministries who have many contacts.

Pastorpedia is a resource provided to you by CE National, a church effectiveness ministry. Please contact us at cenational@cenational.org or 574.267.6622 if we may be of any help to you or your ministry!

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