

December 2009

Difficult Conversations – The Pathway to Change

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Val Hastings

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Empowering Today's Spiritual Leaders



Difficult Conversations – The Pathway to Change

Whether your goal is for your church to grow, stop shrinking or to just plain stay open, some things are going to have to change. Churches are closing all over the world and if you do nothing different, yours will be among them.

Change is never easy, and being a leader in a time of change is going to mean having difficult conversations with your members and staff. Recognize that you are both pastor and prophet here. As the pastor, you keep the peace and care for the people who are struggling with the change. But as the prophet, you speak the truth. You show people the current reality, including – in fact, highlighting – where the problems are.

Here are some of the reasons these conversations can be so difficult:

- Your church is like a family. We tend to tolerate behaviors we would never accept in a work environment, all in an effort to keep the peace.
- The church is a microcosm of the world. People seek solace and sanctuary in the one place they think will never change. At the same time, the unresolved issues and stressors of the real world will infiltrate church life as well.
- Your church is in palliative care mode. If you see your church inching towards closure, what does it matter if Mary takes an extra-long lunch break or if Nate doesn't finish his fundraising calls?

So why make the effort to have a difficult conversation in the name of change? First of all, because whatever issue you don't

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speaking about will only compound, and dysfunction will continue. The problem will be a lot harder to deal with later, and more emotionally charged.

Second of all, because people want feedback – they want to know they're doing a good job so they can feel a sense of achievement and fulfillment.

How to have difficult conversations

Before any conversations take place, make sure you are taking care of you. Practice extreme self-care so you have the emotional, physical and spiritual reserves to draw on when you need them. That includes a healthy sense of individuation – a separation of you as a person from you as a pastor.

Next, schedule regular meetings with members and staff where you give them feedback. Tell them what's going well and ask how you can support them to stay on this track. Also, use these regular meeting opportunities to talk about your vision for the church, so that everyone understands where you're going and understand their own unique role in that.

If you notice any little problems along the way, if your intuition is telling you something isn't right, schedule a meeting as soon as possible. Do not wait for the problem to get bigger.

When it's time for the difficult conversation, try delivering a feedback sandwich – surround your constructive criticism with two examples of things they're doing well. Keep your language as positive as possible and focus on the bigger picture of your vision.

Having difficult conversations is one of the best ways you can pull your church out of hospice mode and set it up to thrive. Hard times don't have to mean that your church is dying for good. Navigating these difficult conversations could be your path to resurrection, to a new healthy level of functioning and growth.

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS! Strength-Based Coaching



"You cannot be anything you want to be - but you can be a lot more of who you already are."
Tom Rath, StrengthsFinder 2.0

Would like to know and develop your Top 5 strengths? Would you like to analyze and optimize the strengths of your team members? Have you already taken the StrengthsFinder assessment? Do you need help in applying your Top 5 strengths?

If so, here is a solution for you:

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS through Strength-Based Coaching. Once we've identified your Top 5 strengths, we will focus your coaching on playing to your strengths. In addition, we will create an action plan that will help you play to your strengths. We can also focus your coaching on developing a high impact team by working through your team's strength type-table.

For more information contact Margot Wurst at margot@coaching4clergy.com or 970.249.5553 (Mountain Time Zone)