



Managing GOD'S Workers

By Al Ells, M.C.

*Let every man prove his own work ...
Galatians 6:4*

One of the most difficult challenges in ministry is firing someone who works for you. Wrestling with the decision of terminating a worker, volunteer or paid, is sheer agony. If the staff member is well known and has a following in the church, the decision becomes more worrisome. Once it's made, there remains the painful hurdle of actually terminating the person and informing those who need to know. As a well known Christian leader lamented, "It is much easier to lay hands *on* a person that to lay hands *off*."

Most pastors are at a disadvantage when it comes to these types of decisions. They are not trained in human resource policy and procedure. Additionally, the church is different than the secular world due to its complexity, customs and values.

In this article, I will share with you the most common church performance problems that could result in termination. My hope is that this will help make a difficult decision a little more clear.

Are you on the same bus headed for the same place?

Gary Kinnaman, senior pastor at Word of Grace Church in Mesa, Ariz. gives his annual "bus sermon" every January. In this sermon he declares the mission and vision of the church for that year. He does this so that "people know what bus they are getting on and where it is going," says Gary. That way, the church body can be focused and ready to do the will of the Lord for the coming year, rather than waste time debating about what the focus should be.

Too often, staff members are not in concert with the vision and mission of the church and senior minister. They have different ideas and want to declare their own conflicting vision and priorities of ministry. While this may seem to be a good thing for them, it is not good for the church. Purpose-driven churches must know what God has called them to do and must pursue with abandon the vision He has given the leadership. Dissent and differences of vision cannot be tolerated over the long run; they will only cause discord, which is not becoming to the body of Christ. A staff member with a different vision needs to seek a church that shares his or her vision, not try to change the existing one.

By translating his vision into written vision statements, a senior pastor can determine whether or not his staff members share the same objectives. This plan should include goals, strategies and measurable results. Staff members' adherence to the plan will clearly show whether or not they are on board (Habakkuk 2:2).

Has there been moral failure?

Moral failure signals a serious problem in a staff member's life and can damage the congregation as a whole. Where there have been serious moral failures such as theft, homosexual manifestations, adultery or child molestation, the church may want to consider immediate termination. This protects the church and frequently helps the offender better his or her life. Alcohol and drug abuse may also merit dismissal. It is not wrong to terminate someone for such failure. God often produces the greatest change in our lives through suffering the undesirable consequences of our sin.

However, in certain situations the church may want to consider undertaking a process of restoration and healing for the offending party. This usually requires that the person take a sabbatical from his or her position while counseling takes place.

One word of caution: It is important to list in the church's personnel policies and procedures the acts of moral failure that may result in immediate termination. Failure to do so creates a legal risk and does not properly forewarn church workers.

Is there a lack of integrity?

The concept of integrity is an important one to all who profess to be Christians. It has been described as the virtue of "saying what you mean and meaning what you say." It is the ability to adhere to the moral code you profess, even and especially when no one is looking. Going back on your word, lying, cheating, mismanaging money and other similar behaviors are examples of failed integrity. When a staff member exhibits these behaviors, it indicates a lack of godly character and a deficiency of inner moral strength. Such failures can be grounds for termination, especially when the staff member is in a public position of instructing others and modeling the character of Christ. Volunteer and paid staff, as well as church leaders all answer to a higher standard (James 3:1). Failure by a leader carries a higher consequence. Paid and volunteer staff must know this.

Does a staff member have a bad attitude?

Certainly, all of us can be accused of occasionally have a bad attitude, but a staff member with a constantly negative or hostile attitude is a liability. Individuals who regularly complain or are surly and rebellious are difficult to work with. Often they are *able* to do their work, but they are not *willing* to do it with enthusiasm, energy, loyalty and commitment. An employee with a bad attitude will destroy unity and poison a team. One worker can kill morale, destroy productivity and waste the senior pastor's time by being a distraction. The troublesome worker should receive counsel and hear how a negative attitude affects his or her supervisors, the church and others. He or she should have a chance to correct it. If the behavior does not change, it may be necessary to discharge the employee to preserve the unity of the spirit God desires and the staff needs.

Do they have the right stuff?

Because church staffs often act more like families than teams, unskilled workers may be tolerated when they shouldn't be. Growing churches commonly need new skills as they develop. The individuals God provides to start the ministry usually will not be the ones needed to continue it. Some workers may simply not have the skills needed for the job. Maybe their jobs have outgrown them. Maybe they never had the skills, and it's becoming more and more apparent. Or perhaps they lack good judgment even though they possess enthusiasm and commitment. What can be done with these workers?

Possibly the most important thing a senior minister can do is to set the expectation for all staff members that improving their skills is a necessary part of the job. The skills needed for the job must be identified and described. Unskilled workers must receive feedback on their lack of skills and offered structured opportunities for learning the skills. If no improvement is demonstrated after a reasonable period of time, termination or transfer to a position that meets their skill level should be considered. Occasionally a person's job may be reorganized to fit his or her skill level if doing so is not detrimental to the church.

For more information on leader restoration, coaching and counseling, or other performance management needs in ministry, contact Leaders That Last Ministries at 480-325-9350 or info@leadersthatlast.org