

# STRENGTHENING YOUR PASTOR-BOARD RELATIONSHIP: *A TOOLKIT*



# THE PASTOR-BOARD RELATIONSHIP

One of the most important and precious relationships to navigate in the life of a church is the board/pastor relationship. There are so many nuanced dynamics and aspects of this relationship that need to be clarified and named. When things are going well, we sometimes neglect this relationship. When things are not going so well, we are reminded of the importance of this relationship. Here are three tools that designed to help your church strengthen this relationship by assisting you in naming some of the dynamics in your church.

## PURPOSE, PEOPLE, PROBLEM or PROCESS?

If you are currently experiencing tension in your pastor-board relationship you can clarify if your issues are around purpose, people, problem or process. Answer the questions to help clarify which of the dynamics is your biggest issue.

## WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

A proactive way of examining the pastor-board relationship may be to clarify the roles and responsibilities between board members and pastors. It might be helpful for you to name all the responsibilities and duties that the church does and then to clarify who is responsible to complete the task.

PURPOSE	PEOPLE	PROBLEM	PROCESS
Is your crisis arising from a lack of purpose or mission?	Is your crisis coming out of conflict with people working together?	Is your crisis from a problem that feels impossible?	Is your crisis the result of inadequate processes to deal with change and conflict?
Mission drift Lack of clarity around purpose Culture of apathy	Emotions Interests Needs Perceptions Personal styles Expectations	Concerns Differences in needs Values Perceived incompatibilities	History of conflict Leadership Communication Decision making patterns
What are the competing purposes of the church? Is there a lack of vision or a lack of follow-through?	Who is directly involved? How does each person perceive the problem?	What is the primary concern? What needs to be addressed in order for the problem to be resolved?	What started the problem? What escalated the problem?

**Is our current, primary challenge an issue of purpose, people, problem or process?  
Or is it a combination?**

## PURPOSE, PEOPLE, PROBLEM or PROCESS?

If you are needing to navigate **PURPOSE** issues with your pastor...

- Have you clearly identified the pastor's job description?
- Does your pastor have a hard copy of the job description?

If you are needing to navigate **PEOPLE** issues with your pastor...

- Have you set up a "Pastoral Relations" committee or does your board have regular time to talk about issues and concerns in a non-confrontational format where people can be honest, vulnerable and supportive?

If you are needing to navigate **PROBLEM** concerns with your pastor...

- Are you able in good faith, to come together, to name the issue and then agree to develop a discernment process to work through the problem?

If you are needing to navigate **PROCESS** issues with your pastor...

- Can you agree that you need to come together to develop some process with your pastor on how you will discuss concerns and to move forward?
- Do you currently have a system for evaluation?
- Is there clarity between the pastor's responsibilities and the board's responsibilities?

---

## WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

1. Take five minutes to have both a pastor and each board member write out as many tasks and responsibilities as you can think of that fall into each of these categories (you may need to use different categories for your church).
2. Once you have each listed as many as you can think of, review your lists together. You are just listing what you wrote. Don't take time to analyze, defend your position or provide examples at this point.
3. Identify which items you agree on. If you agree on everything, that is tremendous. Celebrate that you are all on the same page! If there is some confusion, move forward to the next step.
4. Identify which items you are in agreement about. Again, you aren't trying to "figure out" your differences. You are simply looking to see if there are differences.
5. Take a few minutes to list the differences and agree to develop a process or come back together at a later time to work through how you might need to bring greater clarity to these issues.

Pastor      Board    Ministries / Committees /  
Teams      Congregation

PASTOR

BOARD

MINISTRIES/COM-  
MITTEES/TEAMS

CONGREGATION

## 8 STEPS TOWARDS BETTER MEETINGS

### 1. Prayer

Make prayer more than an add-on. Some boards open with three prayers—a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of indifference (not my will but your will be done) and prayer for wisdom. Some boards give permission for any member to request someone to pray at any point in the meeting. Some boards begin each major agenda item with a prayer.

### 2. List your mission, values, or vision statements.

You can place your mission statement at the top or bottom of your document and return to it at every meeting. List your operational/aspirational values on the back of your agenda and with every discussion ask these kinds of questions: How do our values impact our decision? Does this decision move us away from our stated values?

### 3. Create a pre-meeting package

Make a pre-meeting package that includes your minutes, agendas and supporting documents at least three days before the meeting. Some boards have built a culture of reading these materials by requiring board members to read the materials for a particular agenda item before the meeting. If they have not read the materials they are asked to keep quiet on that particular item.

### 4. Make your meeting about decisions

Many meetings are wasted with updates. If you need to provide updates put them at the end of the agen-

da. The beginning of your meeting is when people are most attentive. Be very concise with the issue at hand and then provide excellent questions. Build each meeting around two or three specific outcomes and not just, “old business, new business and reports.” You may need to clarify, “these are the three decisions that need to be made by the time we walk out of here.”

### 5. Ask for action

Start asking for action. Churches can change the culture of their board meetings within a year but it will require work.

### 6. Set time limits and priorities

Set a time allotment for each agenda item and assign priorities for the items at the beginning of the meeting. Do a quick evaluation at the end of the meeting.

### 7. Living moments

Set aside time to tell a story of people living out the mission of the church. Some boards spend the first 20 minutes of their meetings telling of where they saw God at work through the people and ministry of the church.

### 8. Interview the pastor

Ask the pastor, “What keeps you up at night?”, “What is the one issue that we need to tackle together?”

