Let’s talk a bit about teamwork…

All churches depend, in part, on leadership teams to keep the church alive. In my lifetime, I have served on hundreds - if not thousands - of leadership teams. Some of those teams have been healthy and successful. Unfortunately, many have been failures.

My experience in the church is that team building is rarely a part of the leadership experience. Organizations that place an emphasis on team building are usually productive and successful.

In recent studies, the number one reason identified for team failure is “poor leadership.” While visiting churches, I am able to quickly discern if there is strong leadership at the top. Strong leadership is noticeable in clarity around goals, staying on task, and quickly resolving conflict. The team leader carries the responsibility of ensuring that everyone works well together, stays on task and is willing and able to contribute to goal achievement. A strong leader in the church is also spiritually strong, leading the team in deeper growth in their relationship with God, as well as going deeper in their Christian witness in the world.

A second essential in a successful team is having agreement on purpose and goals. In the not-for-profit world, one hears the term S.M.A.R.T. goals referenced, which refer to goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. What are the two or three goals that your church is currently working to achieve? Usually, if there are more than a few focused goals, there is little chance of success in attaining any of them.

Is your church leadership team comprised of persons with different points of view? In building a leadership team in the church, I have often identified persons who ‘go against the grain’ or who voice contrary opinions in congregational meetings. I have rightly discerned that the people who speak up are often the ones who deeply care about the church. Creating a diverse team, with opposing points of view, helps a team wrestle with problems effectively. Many points of view of the same problem helps different paths emerge, which would not surface from a team of only like-minded individuals.

Finally, the quality that undergirds any successful leadership team and church is trust - or put another way - mutual respect. A crucial part of this quality is the trustworthiness of the church members themselves. This trait includes consistency in actions and following through on agreed-upon assignments. Teams must be able to trust their leader’s ability to lead, which includes listening to and appreciating each team member’s contributions.

What are some of the essential qualities of team leadership that you have found helpful in your church? Please, send us a note and add to the aforementioned list. Your thoughts are important to hear.

Blessings,

*Alan G. Newton*