

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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We Miss Things When We Don't Look Around

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

New York City's Empire State Building has been my favorite building since I first saw it as a child in 1965 during a family vacation. It is majestic and awesomely tall with sleek, elegant lines that are timeless. And its night lighting is beautiful.

My room was on the sixteenth floor. I walked in and looked past a small couch and out my window and found not much of a view. Some smaller office buildings were across the street along with a taller gray marble building a couple blocks away. I had a great view of the wooden water towers that are atop Manhattan's taller buildings. So much for a "city view" room. I never sat on the couch.

I stayed three nights in that room. On the morning of my departure, just before I walked out and in a moment of sarcastic reflection, I took a picture through the window so that I could post some snarky comment about the hype of a "city view" room in New York City and what that might mean. I had a bad reflection in the first photo, so I decided to sit on the couch and try again from a new angle.

Then, for the first time, I saw it. That gray building in the background? It was the Empire State Building. From my window, I had a magnificent view of my favorite building. It had been there all along; but, I had never taken the time to look around or up or from another perspective to notice what was not directly in front of my face. That got me to thinking. Are there good or important things that we as church leaders needlessly miss just because we don't look around? What's out there that we just are not noticing? I figured, that's something to talk about.

To help jumpstart the conversation and inspire some new behaviors, here are some suggestions for getting different views and things that church leadership teams may want to talk about.

- We all tend to fall into ruts, especially in our commuting patterns. Take some time to leisurely walk or drive a different route to and from the church. Notice what is there that you haven't been seeing. Share notes at your next meeting. Are there ministry opportunities around us that we are missing? When we hurry, we get tunnel vision.
- Attend another church nearby where you are not known and have no role. Just attend services. What does it feel like? Is there anything you can learn to help you lead the ministry in your own church?
- Attend services at your own church like everyone else. Don't come early. See what it's like to park when you arrive just before the service starts. Observe parents checking in their children for children's ministries. Look for signage that would tell you where things are. Can you find the assembly area? Fellowship area? Front door? Restrooms? Sit with the congregation. If a member of the leadership team, sit somewhere where you normally do not. Can you hear? See? What are the sight line obstructions? Do projected song lyrics synch with the music or are they frequently late?
- Have the leadership team accompany facilities staff to walk the campus – go into every building and every room. What do they look like? Any smells? I was recently in a church whose carpeted children's room had filthy, frayed carpet and was foul smelling. If I were a guest, I would not leave my children there nor come back. How long had that problem existed?
- Rotate seating at your staff and board meetings. Encourage the leadership team to change seats often to cause interactions with other members of the team. This also helps prevent the leader of the leaders from picking out a seat of power. "No one owns a particular seat at the table" is a good way to minimize the potential emergence of factions within your team.
- Elders and board members are often older adults who do not have young children in the children's and student ministries. Assuming elder/staff relations are healthy, have staff give leadership teams opportunities to view these ministries in action. Elders and board members need to be sure to make this a knowledge-building experience rather than acting as supervisors. Ask good questions, but don't give directions. If our elder/staff relationships are not healthy enough to support such a visit, we have something else to work on, too.

What's out there that we are not seeing merely because we aren't slowing down to look? It could be a great view, or it could be something critical that needs some work. Either way, looking around and fresh perspectives are something to talk about.

Note: Church leaders should seek and follow sound advice from financial and legal professionals in setting up retirement plans, determining tax issues, and all other facets of financial accountability. This article is not intended for use as such advice.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.*



The view from my hotel window. Sigh.