

# Something to Talk About

## A conversation guide for church leaders

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### What I Learned from Brian

*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](http://www.efcawest.org). Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.*

By the time you read this article, my friend and EFCA West teammate, Brian Farone, will be off to serve in a new ministry. When I joined the EFCA West team three and one-half years ago, Brian was already serving as our director of Biblical theology and credentialing. He has accepted the call to serve as the superintendent of EFCA's North Central District (think Minnesota). I hate saying goodbye, so when I learned that Brian had been selected for this ministry I had the dual responses of "Yippee!!!" for Brian and "Aaargh!" for me.

You see, Brian speaks into my life. He doesn't necessarily always know it, but he does. That's one reason I think he is so well suited for his new ministry in Minnesota, and it's the main reason why I wish he wasn't leaving our team. As leaders, we can get so involved in making decisions and doing leadership things that we don't get the meaningful inputs from others that we need to be able to see ourselves in proper perspective and to make necessary course corrections in our lives and ministries. For church leaders, the importance of having people speak into our lives is something to talk about.

I learned from Brian that theology does not have to be stuffy and that leaders can hold deep, strong convictions about issues from God's Word without behaving boorishly or demeaning others when they share them. His periodic winsome challenges to some of my thinking about spiritual things made me *want* to rethink and carefully consider his inputs while other people's more confrontational, dogmatic and sharply-pointed challenges usually had me digging in my heels.

These conversations usually occurred naturally – just part of being together. They might occur in a staff meeting, over lunch, or while hanging out or preparing to facilitate a workshop in some place away from home. They just happened – they were not forced or sought. Such

conversations were the naturally occurring fruit of two guys who love Christ and His church being together.

Here's one example. A couple years ago, Brian and I were sitting and talking in a hotel lobby the night before we were to facilitate a workshop for elders. Our conversation turned to "passing the baton," that metaphor for current leaders allowing the next generation of leaders to have the opportunity to lead. He mentioned that the concept of "passing the baton" felt completely differently to those who were currently carrying the baton compared to those who were waiting for an opportunity to carry the baton. Sheesh! That's obvious, but was so missing in my consideration of this important topic. I had mentioned that I was likely to serve as the elder chairman at my church for another year before my maximum six-years of service would be completed and I would have one year off. He asked who would replace me as chairman, and I told him our vice chairman was ready to take on that task. Then, Brian asked *the* question: "Why not let him serve as chairman while you are still serving as an elder?" Pass the baton.

Brian's simple question, so nicely framed, hit me hard. Why not indeed! His question gently led me to face the fact that I was actually quite reluctant to pass that baton – I was going to hold onto it for as long as I could, which was one more year. It also got me to thinking about some potential benefits of relinquishing the responsibility of the chair while serving my last year before the mandated one-year sabbatical: The new chairman would gain experience while an experienced former chairman was around to mentor or help if needed; the congregation would have the opportunity to see the new guy as a leader in his own right, not as Bob's substitute; the new chairman was already ready to serve and there was no reason to prevent him from doing so. I stood aside and enjoyed serving last year as an elder, but not the elder chairman. And the new chairman did fine.

I could go on and on, but here's the main point: Church leader, do you have people who are speaking into your life? The question isn't whether or not there is someone who could speak into your life, but whether someone is speaking into your life. For many of the church leaders I work with, the answer is, "No." Here are some ways to jump-start a conversation about this important topic with the other members of your leadership team.

- Proverbs 27:17 is well-known: "Iron sharpens iron; so one man sharpens another." Have team members talk about a time when someone played the role of iron in sharpening them. What was the setting? What was the topic? What was the result?
- Do you have a Brian in your life? Someone who naturally speaks into your life and with whom you have regular contact? Who are they?
- Into whose life do you regularly speak? With whom do you regularly talk about one another's real-life issues?
- Are we leaders speaking into one another's lives? Are we learning from one another? Are we better for having been together? Or, are we too busy doing business and voting on stuff to learn from one another?

Some who read this article have no one who regularly speaks into their lives. It is not infrequent that we find people in church leadership who have shut themselves off from others or refuse to live with appropriate transparency and openness to meaningful inputs from others. Some think they are too busy to spend such time with others; and, they are right – they are too busy! Some choose to live a secret life, perhaps to hide guilt and shame or out of insecurity in their leadership abilities. How sad. Hiding such things doesn't make them go away, and carrying that baggage consumes lots of our emotional energy. Going it alone and secrecy are not conducive to good emotional or spiritual health – humble transparency is.

We all need at least one Brian in our life. Maybe more.

Who speaks into your life? Into whose life do you speak? That's something to talk about.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.  
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