

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A conversation guide for church leaders

What are the Indicators of a Healthy Leadership Team?

At a recent EFCA West staff meeting, I told my teammates that the EFCA West Team is the best leadership team I have ever worked with, and that this has been true for the over eight years I have been part of the team, and despite several staff changes, including a change in district superintendent. My teammates agreed, and we began to ask ourselves why this was true. At the end of the conversation, I was “assigned” to think about it and write something. So, I have been thinking about this a lot, and here is my initial writing on this topic.

In my prior career and in life in general, I have been a part of many teams and groups. Why are some so amazing and so productive while others have been so tedious, bothersome, annoying, unproductive and, in general, more negative than positive? As I pondered this, I came to the conclusion that healthy leadership teams not only have healthy attributes, but they also avoid unhealthy attributes. A significant unhealthy attribute can overpower a much larger number of healthy attributes and thereby cause a team to become dysfunctional.

Determining the attributes of healthy leadership teams and comparing our team’s attributes to that standard is something to talk about. For this month’s article, let me suggest that you take the following attributes as a starting point and ask yourselves these questions:

- Do we believe this attribute is important?
- Do we consistently display this attribute as a team?
- If not, how can we cause ourselves to start doing so?

Life is too short and the stakes are too high for church leadership teams to be lacking in health and do nothing about it. So, here’s my list in no particular order – at least the first edition of it.

1. Members of a healthy church leadership team understand their individual roles, drive in their own lanes, and offer help to their teammates.
2. Members of a healthy church leadership team care most deeply about the team accomplishing its mission and less about their own personal accomplishments.
3. Members of a healthy church leadership team can be trusted to listen to what their teammates think and feel without becoming defensive, argumentative or withdrawing.

When confronted with a disagreement, they want to learn more from the other side of the issue in hopes of coming together in unity rather than winning the argument.

4. Members of a healthy church leadership team choose to like their teammates, despite their differences and occasional annoying behaviors.
5. Members of a healthy church leadership team always treat their teammates with respect – especially when dealing with differences of opinion.
6. Members of a healthy church leadership team are more interested in having a great discussion about an issue than moving quickly to a decision. They understand that great discussions lead to great decisions.
7. Members of a healthy church leadership team do not keep secrets from one another.
8. Members of a healthy church leadership team display the character traits of elders and deacons (I Timothy 3; Titus 1; I Peter 5) as well as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5).
9. Members of a healthy church leadership team prize the health of their team and are intentional about remaining healthy and growing together. They know it is the nature of things to decay and are tireless about doing what it takes for the team to be healthy.
10. Members of healthy church leadership teams are assigned work and provide contributions to their team in keeping with their skills and gifts and humbly submit to other teammates who have gifts and skills they do not.
11. Members of healthy church leadership teams do all they reasonably can to attend as many meetings of the team as is reasonably possible.
12. Members of healthy church leadership teams hold one another accountable to display the preferred culture and behavioral norms of the group – misconduct or detrimental actions or words are *immediately* called out and corrected and not allowed to fester.
13. Members of healthy church leadership teams seek continuous growth, both spiritual and in their leadership knowledge and skills. They are curious and not content to stop growing and maturing.
14. Members of healthy church leadership teams let the boss be the boss. They know that at the end of the day the boss is responsible to make the final decision, will be held accountable for the decision he or she makes, and has the authority to make the decision, so they let him/her do so.
15. Members of healthy church leadership teams address concerns when they are small. They do not wait until it grows large and becomes unmanageable. Small things are addressed when they are small so they cannot grow.

16. Members of healthy church leadership teams strive together to discern the best decision possible under the circumstances and then unite around that decision. They do not pursue unanimity or unity knowing that unity is the result of a good decision-making process, not the goal.
17. Members of healthy church leadership teams share together the trials and struggles as well as the triumphs and blessings of their lives. They invest time in learning about and supporting one another.
18. Members of healthy church leadership teams are led by a boss that keeps the mission the main thing, lives out the core values behind the scenes as well as on stage, holds his/her convictions with humility, inspires confidence among the team members, and cares more for the church and the mission than himself/herself.

There you go; my first stab at listing indicators of a healthy leadership team. You know it's not complete because there are 18 points – not the nice, round number you might expect from a polished list. Are there more? Let me know what you think should be on the list. In the interim, it's something for you and your team to talk about.

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

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 <https://efca-west.districts.efca.org/something-to-talk-about-archives>.