

# Something to Talk About

## A conversation guide for church leaders

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### **Vacations: Relationships, Recreation, Rest or Renewal?**

*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.*

The fact that I wrote this article in the month of May has little to do with efficiency and everything to do with vacations. I am travelling during much of the months of June and July; some of it is work-related, and some of it fits the category of “vacation.” That got me to thinking – why do so many people leave unused vacation time on the table, and what are we trying to accomplish by taking vacations? In my prior employment, many people in higher levels of leadership were reluctant to take vacations because they feared that they would be found to be irrelevant if things went well during their absence, and they were afraid that if they really were essential to day-to-day operations, there would be a big mess to clean up upon their return. Seldom did anyone take more than one week off at any time. I have found this to be true of church leaders, too. I also found that most people who took vacations said they were taking them to attend to relationships, recreation, rest, or renewal. All four are necessary, but I’ve found it hard (actually, impossible) to accomplish all four during a single vacation period. And most seem to focus on relationships and recreation, leaving rest and renewal out of the picture.

I have two vacations planned for this summer. I am confident that our team’s ship will not run aground due to my absence because of our culture of shared leadership and multiple voices. We cover well for teammates’ absences. I will be addressing relationships by meeting with long-time friends in distant places and engaging in recreation by travelling to some places where I have never been just for the adventure of it. I’m sure I’ll have a great time, but I won’t be addressing my need for rest or renewal on these trips. In fact, I’ll come home tired.

Time away from work for the purposes of relationships, recreation, rest and renewal are experiences that vastly differ from each other. Yet, each is needed in the life of those who serve as leaders in churches. Because relationships, recreation, rest and renewal are necessary for

the church leader's emotional and physical health, "What are you doing for vacation this summer?" is something to talk about.

Here are some conversation starters.

- One way to build "team" relationships within your leadership team is to share life together. Take some time to talk about the various summer travel plans among your leadership team members. "What are you doing for vacation this summer?" If you procrastinate, you can ask, "What did you do for vacation this summer?"
- Are you or any of your team reluctant to take vacations because of fears of demonstrating irrelevance, missing out, or having to confront a mess upon your return? Where do these fears come from, and what can be done to mitigate them? Don't forget to ask your board members or bi-vocational leaders this question as it relates to their other workplace, too.
- It's helpful to know what we are trying to accomplish during a vacation, and we can learn a lot about and from one another by sharing what we hope to accomplish with that travel. Are we seeking to build relationships or engage in recreation, rest or renewal?
- What do we do to address our needs to maintain or build relationships and experience recreation, rest and renewal? What experiences have you had in the past that have proven beneficial in each category?
- Most people I know (including myself) center their summer vacations around relationships (seeing family and/or friends) or recreation (having fun and being active), but miss out on rest and renewal. In fact, many find that they are exhausted upon returning from vacation. Do you have any plans to address the need for rest and renewal? What are they?
- Does our church and leadership team value others taking time off from work or do we imply, subtly or directly, that time away is problematic or unproductive? Do we celebrate vacations or make vacationers feel guilty? Do we celebrate our non-vocational leaders taking time off for rest and renewal?
- For a season in my own church, I took it upon myself as an elder to ensure that our lead pastor used all four weeks of his paid vacation every year. I bugged him most of the year until it was all used. Who speaks into your life to ensure your work/rest boundaries are working for you?

I know that many readers of these articles do not share them with their teammates (Sigh). So, I close this article with a personal note to individual readers. Are you rested? Do you feel renewed in your spirit? Are you fearful of irrelevance or feel like you must continuously carry the leadership burden alone? If so, what will you do to address the need for rest and renewal in your life? Who among your friends, teammates, denominational staff or mentors will you share this with? Who can come alongside you to watch out for your rest and renewal? Relationships and recreation are fun, but rest and renewal are fundamental to long-term ministry energy and effectiveness.

If we value the long-term ministry health, energy and effectiveness of our church leadership teammates, how we maintain relationships, do recreation, get adequate rest, and renew our spirits is too important to ignore. That's something to talk about. Frequently.

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

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