

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A conversation guide for church leaders

Leadership Must Be Intentional ARTICLE #100!!

You might be like my wife and me. We've been married one month shy of 46 years, so there have been a lot of anniversary celebrations. We quickly fell into the habit of doing something special on those anniversaries that end in the numbers five and zero. Somehow, those anniversaries *feel* just a bit more auspicious because of those two numbers. For 46 we will probably have a nice dinner somewhere, but I'm looking forward to 50. It should be a doozy!

This is my 100th Something to Talk About article, so I'm celebrating just a little bit. It ends with two zeros! I'm probably actually bragging, at least a little, but isn't that what celebrating is?

Article #1 was published in May 2014 and was titled "*Caring Enough for the Church to Care for Its Leaders*" and urged board members and pastors to care for one another in the very practical way of promoting and ensuring spiritual, emotional, and physical health. From the first article on, I have sought to create opportunities for church leaders to have conversations about things that are important but often overlooked and not addressed in the press of the everyday matters of church leadership.

In preparing this 100th article, I struggled more than usual with what to write about. If I could, with one article inspire leaders to pursue one thing that would help them and the church they lead be more effective in accomplishing the mission of the Church and their church, what would it be? The answer? Leadership must be intentional. If it is not intentional, it is not leadership. Intentionality in leadership is something to talk about.

Years ago, I became enamored by Stephen R. Covey's book "*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*." Its emphasis was upon intentionally considering what outcomes in life and work one wanted as the basis for planning one's life and then pursuing that plan. Doing was said to highly increase one's chances of actually accomplishing his or her purposes (note that the word used is "effective" and not "successful" – they are different concepts). That book helped me tremendously as a person and as a leader.

Fast forward a bunch of years, and I find myself entering my 10th year working with EFCA West and its churches and leaders in the church health arena. I have found the principle to be the same. Churches and church leaders that are intentional about setting and pursuing their priorities and goals tend to be most effective in accomplishing them (note that the goals need to be realistic, not just pipedreams).

It saddens me greatly to be called to serve a church that has serious issues that have emerged over many years and to discover that their leaders didn't lead – they just addressed issues that arose and did so over and over and over again. They may ask, "What happened? How did we get here?" The answer, sadly, is that they didn't intentionally lead their congregation anywhere. They drifted along without a compelling sense of purpose or strategy to accomplish it.

What does it mean to have leadership intentionality? It simply means that the things we do we do on purpose and for a specific reason. The concept is simple yet hard to do. Doing things "on purpose" means that we have seriously thought about what we do. We invest our time and energy in trying to determine what end results we are seeking and work to figure out what it will take to accomplish that in whatever area or ministry we are assessing. And, we must write it down so that it can be referred to, adjusted as needed, and passed on to new or succeeding leaders.

Let me end this narrative introduction and get to some questions that you can talk about with your church's leadership team. What are some areas in which church leaders need to be intentional? Here's a starting place for your conversation.

- Board and staff culture/leadership training: Church leaders want to be skilled and competent in their task of leading, yet those skills and practices are not attained through osmosis or miraculous intervention. We want our board culture to be such that people want to be board members and that serving in the ministry of leadership, though at times difficult, is a joy. An effective and pleasing board culture as well as leadership development and training are outcomes of intentional processes designed to provide those results. Left without intentional direction, leadership loses its edge and cultures degrade.
 - What are our desired board and staff cultures? Have we talked about them? Have we written them down so that they can be referenced and used to orient and train new staff and board members?
 - What is our leadership training and development plan for this year? Don't have one? Why not? What leadership training and development have you done in the past year and what were the results?
 - Do we want a united church leadership team? Unity does not accidentally develop itself. What are we intentionally doing to build and preserve unity among our staff and board members?
- Congregational singing – I hesitate to say "worship" because there are many forms of worship and singing is but one of them. Yet most churches spend significant time singing when they gather together each week. How does our singing together impact and support the other forms of worship as we gather? Do our song selections reflect the independent choices of the singers leading them, or do they reflect the intentions of the church leaders? Have we ever defined what we want our music to be like, why we want it that way, and what outcomes we want to see from our singing together? If not, how do we evaluate our congregational singing? Only by whether I "liked" the song?

- Mission, core values, key strategies – Did we just inherit our mission, core values and key strategies from those who preceded us, or have we intentionally examined and embraced them for this season of ministry? What do we intentionally do to encourage and support the congregation to live those values? Do they even know our church's values? The best way I know to determine whether we are intentional related to values, which is the key to accomplishing the mission and for key strategy identification, is to fill in the blanks in this phrase: "We value (state the value); therefore, we (state the action that supports the value)."
- The sermon and how to create doers of the word – Sadly, I have had connections with many churches that pride themselves on the deep teaching of scripture in their sermons but those sermons appear to be focused upon dispensing knowledge but not changing lives. James 1:22 speaks of a deception that can cause us to believe it is enough to be hearers of the word without becoming doers of the word. If the pastor teacher's purpose is to equip the saints to do the work of ministry, we have no way to determine whether we have succeeded unless the hearers are also doing the work. I assume that any good pastor's intention would be to faithfully and truthfully teach the word of God. Yet many lack intentionality in what they want the outcome of that teaching to be in the church they lead. What do we want the outcome of our Bible teaching/preaching to be and how should we go about doing that?
- How we will mobilize the congregation to do the Great Commission and Greatest Commandment – Are we intentional about leading a church that is engaged in the Great Commission and Greatest Commandment? You might be tempted to say, "That goes without saying." Yet the truth is that what goes without saying isn't said and usually isn't done either (See my article, *It Goes without Saying*, posted 4/1/2016). If we want to be intentional about both of these, we need to talk about it, and do so over and over and over again. How does this church engage in doing the Great Commission and Greatest Commandment?

This is just a starter list. You can see how important intentionality is for leaders to lead well. How are you doing? How is your team doing? Make my heart glad by spending some time talking with your team about your level of intentionality in these and other matters. It's my 100th article. Celebrate with me by making it something 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>.