

Church Ministry Employment Manual

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Chapter 13

Hiring Misconceptions

Introduction

One of the most difficult situations a church and pastor can face is the failed hire. When a failed hire occurs it is not because either the church, or the pastor, are proved to be deficient in their respective duties or obligations. It is simply because a proper match between a hiring church and candidating pastor were not found. One reason proper matches are not found is because churches are often laboring under a number of misconceptions concerning the selection of a new pastor. Some of these misconceptions are consciously held, and are even prided in by churches, while others are unconscious, but have the same negative impact upon the quality of the decision-making that goes into a new hire. Any one of these misconceptions can be operative in a given situation, or many can be at play at the same time. In an attempt to alert churches as to the possibility of hiring misconceptions being operative in their search for a new pastor, and how our theology of the Synergistic Church can inform us why churches should attempt to avoid them, a number of the more prevalent ones are listed below.

The Prima Dona Hire

This is where a “high powered” pastor is hired for the express purpose of leading the church to growth. But such a strategy, while it might prove beneficial in the short term (provided the pastor is successful), will cause the church much more harm in the longer term. As our theology of the Synergistic Church states, effective church ministry is dependent on the proper functioning of all Three Ministry Groups. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) In this case, the Pastorate is being called upon to assume an inordinate amount of attention and perhaps actual control of the church at the expense of Church Leadership. When this occurs the latter’s proper function is thereby compromised. As long as the pastor remains, the church might continue to grow, but when the pastor leaves the leadership vacuum created will result in a significant, and sometimes dramatic, reduction in the size and vitality of the church.

The Sentimental Hire

This is where the pastor is hired with the idea that he or she is a member of the church first, and an employee of the church a distant second. Although one can appreciate the good intent behind such a sentiment, a professional relationship built on this kind of thinking can lead to problems in employment relations. The danger is that the formal relationship can become minimized to the degree that the pastor’s legitimate employment rights and interests are put in jeopardy, or a healthy professional distance between pastor and church are disregarded. (See Chapter 14 – Preventing Pastor

Burnout) The fact of the matter is that the pastor is a professional that is hired to provide a specialized service to the church. Thus the pastor is to be considered an employee first, and a member second. This fact should not be forgotten by the church, or by the pastor.

The Reactionary Hire

This is where the new pastor is hired on the basis of the church's experience of the previous pastor. If the previous pastor performed well, or was well liked, the tendency is to find a replica of that pastor in his or her successor. If, however, the former pastor did not perform well, or was not well liked, the tendency is to look for his or her opposite in a new pastor. In either case the church is making a serious error. In accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, the hiring of a new pastor represents an opportunity for the church to reassess its current body health requirements. Once those requirements are determined the church must then find the right professional to satisfy those requirements, and thereby properly equip the church for growth. (See Chapter 11- Hiring the Right Pastor). Thus the church that commits a reactionary hire is not looking forward, but looking backward in its decision-making.

The Consensus Hire

This is where the pastor is hired by the vote of the entire congregation. The consensus hire is usually accomplished by a public show of hands, and occasionally by secret ballot. However, in accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, the hiring of the pastor is the proper and exclusive function of Church Leadership. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) If the General Congregation is to have any "say" in the hiring of a new pastor, it is not vote on the new choice, it is not even to ratify that choice, rather it is to submit to the authority charged with that responsibility and accept the choice that is made. A church that makes decisions on the basis of achieving full consensus of the congregation is often a church that has difficulty moving forward in new ministry directions. Thus a pastor that is ostensibly hired by such a church to provide "new and innovative ideas" often ends up becoming a caretaker of old ones.

The Political Hire

This is where the pastor is hired to appease or placate a powerful minority in the church, or, conversely, the pastor is hired over the protestations of a powerful minority. Once again, in accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, an inappropriate use of power has taken place. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) For as in the case with the consensus hire, the assumption is that those not in Church Leadership should have a say in who gets hired as pastor. But in this situation of the political hire the very presence of the new pastor becomes the focus for dissension in the church. Should the pastor do well, those who insisted on his or her hiring will feel vindicated in their manipulation. Should the pastor fail, the group that did not get their way will feel equally

vindicated to insist upon the pastor's removal. The pastor that is hired under these conditions will probably never have the full, unqualified support of the church.

The Wish-list Hire

This is where the pastor is hired to perform most, if not all, the practical ministry tasks in the church. On the basis of traditions formed in simpler times, or simply once again to placate vocal or powerful minorities, the church draws up a job description that leaves nothing out. But according to our theology of the Synergistic Church, the primary function of the Pastorate is to equip the church. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) Therefore when pastors are required to perform any secondary functioning it should only be when Church Leadership, or the General Congregation, are not able to perform those tasks themselves. A church that hires a pastor on the basis of him or her being all things to all people, in squandering the pastor's proper role as the primary equipper of the church, and denying the opportunity for other parts of the church body to function properly, will result in the church growing little, if at all.

The Entrepreneurial Hire

This is where the pastor is hired to initiate significant change in the church. The idea is that by hiring someone from outside the church who can bring in new ideas a church that perceives itself to be dying can become rejuvenated. But the more common outcome is for the church, or a large portion of it, to resist or reject any change brought about by the new pastor. In accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, the reason for this is that it is the job of Church Leadership, and not the Pastorate, to initiate significant change in the church. This is because only Church Leadership, by definition, has the trust, the local wisdom, and the mandate to undertake significant change. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) The church that desires to initiate significant change, without providing a reasonably detailed plan, and gaining the full and active support of the whole congregation, *prior* to hiring the new pastor, will subject the latter to a mandate he or she was never meant to accomplish.

The Gestalt Hire

This is where the pastor is hired on the basis of "feeling right" to the congregation, or (as we would prefer the group to be limited to) the church's trustee leadership. While there is nothing wrong with Church Leadership employing a kind of collective intuition concerning the possible "fit" of a candidate for their church, this mode of decision-making should not be depended upon exclusively, or even primarily. In accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, maintaining the healthy reciprocal functioning of the three main Ministry Groups must remain the number one priority of Church Leadership in the selection of a new pastor. (See Chapter 11 – Hiring the Right Pastor) Only when a candidate has first demonstrated he or she is in possession

of the right professional skill set to meet this essential criterion should matters of personality and social disposition be given any serious consideration. The church and pastor who enter into an employment relationship on the basis of superficial first impressions, might end up having second thoughts, once additional more complete, knowledge has been gained.

The Hasty Hire

This is where the pastor is hired as a direct result of time pressure. Hiring studies indicate that it will take most churches one to over two years to find the right pastor. Yet many churches think they can get the job done much quicker. As a result, and in order to save money, many choose not to hire an interim pastor. But in accordance with our theology of the Synergistic Church, the equipping function of the Pastorate must be performed at all times if the church body is to remain healthy. (See Chapter 1 – The Synergistic Church) Therefore when churches forego the hiring of an interim pastor, in addition to placing unnecessary pressure on Church Leadership to find someone, they also place their very spiritual vitality at risk as well. (See Chapter 12 – Hiring the Interim Pastor) The most obvious manifestation of the loss of vitality is when people start leaving the church. It is when this starts happening that Church Leadership is tempted to hire, not the right pastor, but the most available pastor, often, once the dust has settled, to the satisfaction of no one.

Recommendation

These then are some of the more prevalent examples of churches hiring pastors for the wrong reasons. As we have observed, these conscious and unconscious methodologies can take many forms. And yet, underlying all of these examples is one common feature. They focus on the perceived role and function of the pastor, to the exclusion of the healthy functioning of the church body as a whole. What we have hopefully illustrated in this chapter is that before a church can know what it needs in a pastor, it must first know what it needs as a total body. It is, therefore, recommended churches perform the Synergistic Church Assessment (SCA), found in this Manual. (See Chapter 2 – *Becoming a Synergistic Church*) Amongst other things the SCA asks a series of questions that will help clarify what kind of pastor will be most effective in 1) establishing and maintaining healthy church body functioning, 2) helping to move the church forward into the next phase of its Ministry Group development. Thus the performance of Synergistic Church Assessment will provide the information required to determine the right match between the hiring church and the candidating pastor.