



Church Cultures

That



Grow

Giving.



Intro.



M

any churches and ministries contact us for help with developing major donors,

only to be disappointed when we insist that an entire ministry culture must be established to achieve maximum success.

Too often, they want a 'program' that they can 'add' to what they are doing. They want to be able to 'contract for' (that is, buy) major donors and major donations, or somehow short-cut the work needed to build those partnerships. Such an approach will produce unsatisfying and, at best, short-term results.

While there are no shortcuts to building authentic major donor relationships, your church's culture can fast-track or stifle it. In this article, we'll explore ways your church culture can best support your stewardship and donor relations programs. We'll take a look at organizational mistakes and toxic leadership styles to watch out for, and we'll unpack ideas for shifting the culture among church staff to enhance the donor experience.

Let's start with exploring if your church's culture is feeding or stifling your giving program.

In a healthy church culture that grows giving, your answer should be “everyone.” Everyone on staff does development, donor relations and marketing. It's not the work of just the staff in the communications or stewardship office.

A frontline ministry or program staff member, after all, comes in contact with hundreds of people over the course of a year who might become more deeply involved with the church - if that staff member were only tuned in to their potential. Especially in a large or multi-campus church, the entire organization needs to understand, embrace, and commit to a pastoral and relational development philosophy. It cannot simply be something staff in another department does.

In order to create a culture conducive to relational major donor work, we have to get “over the hump” of thinking about this as a new kind of formula for success. It's about loving the people who support the church, believing they're happier and healthier when they're giving, and inspiring them to step up to the fullness of their potential as supporters. Staff who “do programs” or other tasks in your church do not need to see a move toward relationships with members as donors as a departure from their purpose. It is an extension, a new facet, of their purpose.



Pastors,

this takes

work &

commitment

**from the
very top.**

Shifting the culture of an organization -
where it permeates the thinking of every staff
member - is challenging and takes time.

In the book **The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations**, Ori Brafman uses the starfish and the spider as examples of organizations. If you cut off a spider's head, it dies; if you cut off a starfish's leg, it grows a new one, and the severed leg can grow into an entirely new starfish.

Traditional top-down organizations are like spiders, but starfish organizations are changing the face of business and the world. You need shared development and organizational DNA to reshape a group of people so they become so dominated by a core idea that they function and grow even when being tested by the absence of leadership.

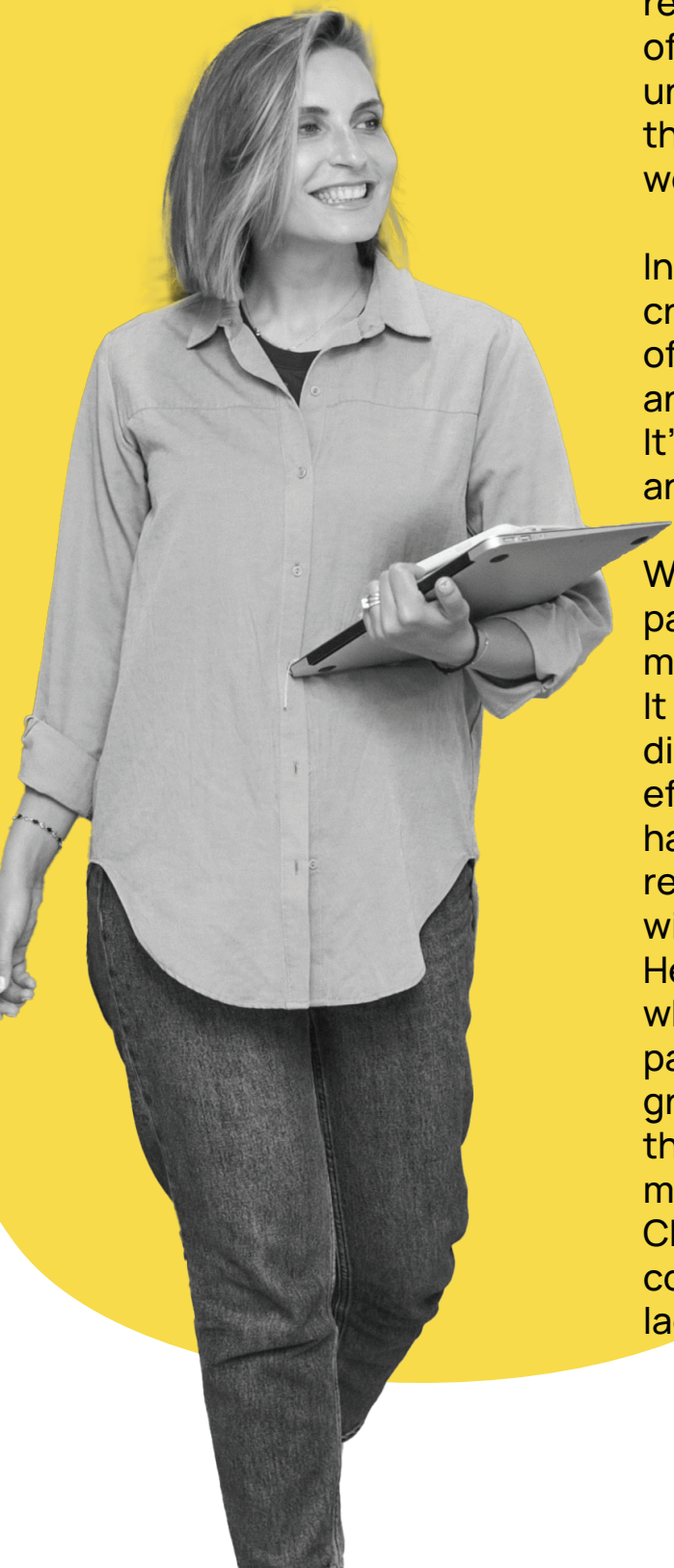
Some churches don't want to bother involving certain portions of their staff or adjusting certain systems. In many cases, the reasons are political. 'Barbara' has such a high sense of ownership of her area that nobody wants to challenge her. Or 'Robert' has been in his role so long that everybody assures everybody else that he can never change in order to avoid confrontation. But to allow philosophical inconsistencies within any organization, especially a large or multi-campus church congregation, is always deadly. Do the hard work of integrating your entire church staff into a new way of thinking — create

a true culture — and you'll take your ministries to a whole new level.

Pastors, there's a massive advantage to cross-training staff members so they can help build effective relationships with givers at all levels. In some cases, the best relational 'fit' even with a major donor may be a frontline ministry staffer.

Eric was a dynamic youth worker who had made a tremendous impact on the children of a wealthy family in the community. A ministry wanted to give this family an opportunity to consider financially supporting a project, but they had no entrée. Eric served on the ministry staff, but certainly not in fundraising — yet he had the ability to pick up the phone and make a date with the head of that family.

Because Eric had been trained in aspects of major donor ministry, and because he embraced the relational development culture and the idea that giving to the ministry was a good thing, he was able to make that contact. 'Hey, how's it going?' the conversation began. From there it led to 'Hey, can I come by and talk to you about a new project that our ministry is doing, and see if you'd like to be involved?' It was natural, it was casual — and it was hugely valuable to the ministry.



This was not a question of who was the most persuasive fundraiser in the ministry; it was a question of who is the best person for the relationship. But you can't convince an associate pastor or staff member to represent the financial needs of the church to a donor if he or she hasn't been trained and inspired to be part of a culture that is thoroughly committed to donor relationships. Eric saw the ministry dynamic of fundraising and rose to the challenge. He understood that it would be more than good for the organization if that family became donors; it would be good for that family as well.

In a large or multi-campus church, the intentional cross-training of staff also comes with the burden of coordination. Without a sense of connection and synergy across the church, we tend to silo. It's more a matter of good communication flow and process than about lines of authority.

We've all had that awkward situation where two parts of your ministry communicate conflicting messages to someone external. It's embarrassing. It sends a message to stakeholders that you're disorganized, that you're not communicating effectively inside the organization, that you have a problem in how one part of the ministry relates to another. A vendor reached out to me with a plan to build a key partnership with us. He was "the one to do the deal," he told me. But when word got out about our interest in this partnership, three other people from inside his group suddenly contacted me, all claiming that they, in essence, had the secret sauce and could make the partnership click. I quickly called their CEO with two observations: (1) you're creating confusion in our group, and (2) there's a serious lack of communication in your ecosystem!

Yes, involving all of your staff in building a giving culture will take commitment and communication. But the greater danger of not cross-training all of your staff to do development and donor engagement work is NOT doing it.

There are some red flags that we as pastors and ministry leaders have to watch out for (and avoid ourselves) if we're to successfully create a church culture where giving grows. Unfortunately, many organizations unintentionally develop toxic cultures that lead to staff turnover and disengagement.

Churches - and especially large and multi-campus church settings - can unintentionally create those types of cultures in part due to the size of the staff and the inevitable disconnections or crossed-wires that can occur among them. As pastors, a key part of our roles is to recognize when one of our ministry areas or departments is slipping into a red zone of toxicity.

Talk to people as they exit an organization and one of the most frequent themes will revolve around the culture they experienced in that organization. Exit interviews are a great value on this point. Organizational culture happens whether you're intentional about developing it or not. The greatest asset in any ministry is the people. How to develop a team, how to create an environment where people are heard, how to evaluate and assess performance, how to humanize the senior leaders yet not remove their stature as leaders—these are all key factors in creating a place where people want to contribute, where they feel they're making a difference.



We need to ask these questions:

Do we as leaders empower others to make decisions?

Is this an autocratic culture? Does the leader trust and believe in the organization's downline leaders and staff, giving them room to make decisions and take risks? An axiom I use often with my team members is, "Don't be afraid to take a risk."

Sometimes failing will lead us to a greater breakthrough." Top-down autocratic leaders are like dinosaurs devouring emerging leaders - and they will move on quickly.

What is the staff community like? Do they spend time together outside the workplace?

A staff that plays together stays together. I believe that the best staff communities are built away from the workplace. Sometimes when the days are long and the work is especially difficult, these social times can be the key to fostering a healthier community.

Listen closely to what boundaries your staff need and to what value they place on the staff community in your church. That culture is the foundation for everything else...and will help you flag "disturbances in the force," or when toxicity is entering the community.

Have staff stayed with this church or leader for a long time?

One of the real joys for me as a leader is to journey with a group of people over many years. Of course, while some have stayed with me as a leader for many years, others, we realized, were ready to get out from under my leadership and go lead their own efforts.

A real test of the culture of any organization is the presence of high turnover. This can be caused by many factors. However, it is a major challenge to creating a consistent synergy of leaders.

In my decades of work in the ministry and philanthropic world, I've learned that certain behaviors can be cultural poison. When we as leaders or staff in our churches are exhibiting these behaviors, something is wrong and if unaddressed, it can damage the culture.

When staff feel uncertainties, threatened or insecure, those behaviors can escalate. Building a healthy staff culture means watching for warning signs when something is out of whack. Celebrate the victories and reinforce the behaviors that will grow your giving culture.

A common mistake churches - especially large ones - make is constantly revising their structure and organizational chart to solve a cultural issue.

If you geek out on how organizations work (like I do), you've probably seen a little bit of everything when it comes to organizational structure. The hierarchical models— with boxes where one supreme leader stares down the chart at the others— may have seen its day in many organizations. You've seen the org chart with a lineup of more than fifty boxes, all people reporting up to one person. You've seen the chart of concentric circles and the inverted pyramid, with the senior leadership at the bottom. There are so many models to consider.

Clearly, there is not one “right” structure for any church or ministry organization. Structure needs to reflect the culture and priorities of the organization, its leadership, and its DNA. It deserves planning and attention, but too often, I've seen churches reshuffle the staffing and leadership deck without addressing systemic cultural issues. No amount of title-changing and reorganization can fix a culture that isn't embracing everyone's role in building givers.

If you see yourself in what I just described, it's time to focus on staff training and development, and lesson where reports where. In a healthy church culture that supports giving, staff members in any role see

themselves as having some accountability for fundraising and stewardship.

But to achieve such a radical infusion of development philosophy into all our staff means taking a hard look at every process and every system in the organization. What does this staffer do? How do we measure his or her success now? What would a relational philosophy of ministry require this worker to do differently? How should we be measuring this staff member's success? Will this staffer embrace the new idea? These can be painful questions, and the answers can be more painful still. But they are crucial to the achievement of a new 'culture.'

In a healthy church culture that supports giving, the donor is at the center. “We don't convince donors. We help them realize that they already care.” This bit of wisdom from Marc Koenig at nonprofithub.com helps us remember that we're inviting our givers into Kingdom work with us, to be part of something bigger than themselves. We're not convincing or arm-twisting them for their money for a project. And it's an entire culture that is needed — an alignment of everybody, every function, to the priority of establishing and maintaining authentic relationships with donors.

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

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Tools and support to strengthen churches.

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Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

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Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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