

The Ultimate Church Leadership Guide



Introduction

The purpose of church leadership is to serve other members, volunteers, and the community for Christ through their influence, moral support and empathy.

We've found that most people prefer to visit churches, which have friendly and engaging leaders.

Leadership in the church is not just about a title; it's about getting involved in the life of the church and making a difference.

It's the right leaders in the church that help to empower the church's community to continue achieving their mission no matter the changes and how challenging times get.

An example of a challenging time was taking churches online due to COVID-19. This transition was not well-received by older members of church families. In fact, many wanted to keep the church the same as it was in the past. As times change, people change, and they ask new questions. For instance, some ask why they should stay at a physical building every time that they can stay home.

The role of leadership in the church plays a significant part in making these changes a success. The leaders will explain the plans, answer any questions and help ease the transition for everyone involved.

Learning how to effectively lead a church is something that takes a lifetime of practice and dedication. But once you've learned the basics, leading your church will be easier than you think. Keep reading our Ultimate Leadership Guide to understand what bad leadership looks like and the steps it takes to create good leadership in the church.



What Does Bad Leadership Look Like in Church

Before we dive into the steps it takes to create healthy and productive church leadership, you'll need to know what bad leadership looks like. Keep an eye out for these signs that your church isn't where it should be. If you see one or several of the problematic signs, it might be time to make a change.

Church is a place where you give and receive love and care, grow in your faith and know God! But when abuse or neglect happens, it can be devastating.

Here are some signs of what [bad church leadership](#) looks like:

1. There are too many expectations placed on members, making them feel like judging contests rather than performing.
2. There are never enough expectations placed on members and they are often taken advantage of as a result.
3. The decisions in your church are determined by the politics in your church, which is made up of conflicting individuals.
4. Gossip is one of the biggest signs of bad church leadership. It's a sign of distrust and underhanded leadership.
5. A church pastor calls all the shots, and this will ultimately destroy the congregation.
6. Conflict has become normal in your church culture.
7. Everyone's constantly blaming each other when problems arise.

The church is a place of safety and refuge. Being the stop for sinners seeking heaven can give people a sense of pride and purpose. But providing refuge to others constantly can be too much for some people. It's incredibly important to spot toxic traits in your leadership before it's too late.





Steps to Being a Good Church Leader

As a church leader, you have many [roles and responsibilities](#). Apart from a person who guides other people, how do you know what church leadership competencies to seek? The following church leadership competencies will help you be better equipped with the knowledge necessary to lead well.

If you are a church leader, remember you cannot do everything yourself. Still, if you wish to be effective in ministry, it will require some attention to developing a few skills, having a few objectives that are right for you and the right means of getting there. If you commit yourself to this task, you will find yourself moving toward leading more effectively.

Your church needs strong leadership. Without one, it would be a ship without a rudder, drifting wherever the currents take it.

Here are the must-have [leadership competencies](#) that you'll need:

1. Servant Leader
2. Models the Faith
3. Self-Development
4. Able to Teach
5. Equipping Others
6. Embodies the Spirit of Love

Although the focus above was on good traits of church leadership, authentic leaders are also accountable to their followers. Authentic faith-based leaders are also accountable to their communities. In order to serve and lead the church, a person must exude love. As lead pastor of a church, you are responsible to recognize and fill leadership voids with the appropriate power and ability that can only be expressed through genuine acts of love embodied in the manner of 1 Corinthians 13.

In the sections below, we'll cover a few steps you'll need to take to be a strong leader for your church.



1. Setting SMART Goals

The first leadership step is to [develop SMART goals](#). Without a goal, how are you supposed to know where you're going? SMART goals help you reach the initiatives you seek by making sure your vision is clear. The acronym, SMART, provides the guidance you need.

The SMART acronym that stands for:

1. Specific
2. Measurable or motivating
3. Actionable or achievable
4. Realistic or relevant
5. Time-Related

Churches and ministries are always looking for more ways to grow and attract more people towards a relationship with God. Any goals associated with the church or ministry should move the organization forward as a whole.

How to Create SMART Goals for a Church

Whether they're set by you as an individual or created collaboratively with a team, there are specific steps you can take to turn any goal into a SMART goal that's more likely to succeed in the long run. When setting up your church SMART goals make sure that they are:

1. Specific

When setting your goals be sure to answer all the who, what, when and where questions.

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Why is this goal important?
- Who is involved?
- Where is it located?
- Which resources or limits are involved?

2. Measurable

A measurable goal should address questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

3. Achievable

An achievable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How can I accomplish this goal?
- How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors?



4. Relevant

The goal needs to be relevant to our primary objectives.

- Does your goal help you reach your greater vision?

5. Timing

A time-bound goal will usually answer these questions:

- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

Once your church has defined its goals, you're ready for the next step of choosing a church leadership structure.

2. Choose A Church Leadership Model Structure

Fostering spiritual growth begins by producing a well-designed church organizational structure. A leader must be committed and passionate to build a vibrant church community. You can't forget forming an effective church administration structure that runs like clockwork, which makes the system run more smoothly and creatively by achieving the mission of the church.

If you're looking for [church leadership structure models](#), here are a few examples that can help you build a strong group of leaders for your church.

The Pastor and Bishop Model (Episcopal)

In this model, the pastor of the church is responsible for conducting worship and overseeing the spiritual side of parish life. The bishop oversees congregations over which he has direct ministry responsibility and acts as a liaison with other dioceses to maintain consistency in Catholic teaching, doctrine, and practices.

The Pastor, Elder and Deacons Model (Pentecostal)

At the top, there is the pastor. They are the head of the church and are responsible for teaching the Word. Next, there are the elders. The congregation elects these men to oversee the spiritual needs of a particular local body member. Following this position are the deacons. The members of a congregation also elect them. They help with the day-to-day operations of the church like those mentioned above.

The Pastor, Deacons and Treasurer Model (Baptist)

Baptist churches have a fairly simple model of church leadership. At the top is the pastor, who has ultimate authority and makes final decisions on all matters.

There is no wrong way to run an organization, especially one as personal and unique as a church.



Every structure has its benefits and challenges, but often, the best church administration structure is the one that allows your organization to function at its maximum potential. After you've reviewed the different structures and found one that resonates with you, it's time to put it into practice.

3. Delegating

Ability and resources are multiplied when church leadership and teachers wisely delegate responsibilities by drawing upon others' abilities and resources. When they do that, the result is a better relationship between leaders and teachers, who can do more for the church. This is where church volunteers help.

There are many ways to go about finding volunteers to help delegate tasks. From [church volunteer recruitment](#) campaigns to celebrations and [church surveys](#).

You might have some trouble finding volunteers. All church leaders have faced this struggle at some point, but if you follow a few helpful tricks, you can get the volunteer support you need.

1) Build Relationships

Churches are meant to be a transformative force within the community. In many cases, the actual service is the least important part of going to church. The most important being building relationships and mentorship.

2) Demonstrate Passion

A great way for a leader to earn respect is to demonstrate passion. If you are delegating tasks and are in need of volunteers, get dirty with them! Get your hands dirty, as the saying goes! That's a way to get more church volunteers... people seeing the church leader out and about.

3) Know What You Need

Plan ahead and make sure you know exactly what is needed for each task or project. Only then will potential volunteers know if they can actually come in to help. That's why it's crucial to identify your specific needs. These needs should come with:

- How many people do you need
- What roles you have open
- The skills and experience needed to fill these roles
- What you need now and what you may need in the future
- The amount of time required
- The dates volunteer work will occur on
- How often do you need recurring volunteers
- Location



4) Don't Forecast Negativity

In church leadership positions, trust is necessary. Don't write anyone off. People know their own schedules, limits and priorities. Give your congregation the opportunity to pick and choose what they'd like to be involved in. If things aren't going exactly as planned, be sure to stay positive because this will discourage members from volunteering in the future.

5) Leverage Word of Mouth

Invite your church members, friends, and family to be involved. Ask your volunteers to spread the word to their connections. Start a church volunteer recruitment campaign. You may even want to get a group of volunteers together in advance and ask them for their help promoting your church services and events.

6) Make It Easy

Be sure to have the volunteer work nailed down before recruiting help. Imagine there's a man showing up at your door, wanting to help your church. Wouldn't you be thrilled? Would you want to pass him off to someone else or make time in your schedule to chat with him? When you're eager to work with someone, you don't wait forever for an answer, this will discourage people from helping.

7) Promote Opportunities

If your church doesn't have social media channels, it's time! Get on social media. This is especially important if you are looking for younger volunteers who aren't quite sure where to look for information on faith.

8) Thank Them

Finally, always thank your volunteers or whomever you're delegating tasks to. There are a few ways to approach volunteer retention. The most important thing is to never make them feel underappreciated. We calculate each volunteer's impact and show the results to our volunteers. This is an effective way of showing them how valuable their efforts are.

4. Know How to Handle Challenging Situations

When it comes to serving others, good church leadership is unflappable. They can handle any situation with a strategic brainstorming session. Conflicts between your church members if not handled, will spread and eventually create toxicity and eventually lead to a hostile environment.

There are ways to work through complicated issues that everyone can be happy with, which brings us to our next step: creating good leadership in church by knowing how to handle challenging situations.



How to Respond When People Leave

People will leave your church in the years to come. Their reasons for leaving will vary, but it is important that you handle the situation with understanding and grace. Here are a few ways to do that.

1) Have a conversation

By having a casual, relaxed conversation with a former church member, you can gain insight into their reasons for not returning. This is the perfect time to ask questions to help you become a better leader.

2) Show compassion

When people leave the church, especially for negative reasons, showing compassion isn't the first thing that comes to mind. However, in the Bible, whenever Jesus dealt with adversity, he showed compassion.

3) Think before you speak

When addressing people who have left the church, carefully choose your words. You want to speak thoughtfully and with confidence in what you're saying.

4) Offer a solution

The best way church leadership can meet the needs of their congregation without forcing them to choose if they want to continue attending is to offer them different ways of accessing church services. For example, if you're concerned that people are feeling isolated and lonely, one thing you can do is increase the number of church services you offer.

Handling Conflict in Church

Church leaders must hone their conflict resolution skills fast as conflicts will invariably arise. The key is to identify where and when you should step in to mediate conflicts. Oftentimes church members or staff can resolve conflicts on their own.

If that's that case, you should step back and give them the space to do so. However, there are a number of situations where you need to involve yourself. When you mediate conflicts, here are a few best practices you should follow.

1) Ask to Remove the Members with Conflict

As a part of church leadership, it's your responsibility to buy time to get through the most difficult and annoying stage of an argument. The best way to do that is to draw them away from people, give others a chance to escape and you the time you need to deal with the situation.

2) Ask the Members to Sit Down

If you're able to sit the two counterparts down to face each other eye to eye after they settle down, you'll be able to put the fire out a bit sooner.

3) Be the mediator

If a situation becomes heated, remain calm. Speak softly. Refuse to be baited into an emotional reaction. The larger the gap between your tone and theirs, the more you encourage them to soften their approach.

4) Be a Good Listener

Good church leadership will know how to listen at a hot time. Do not interrupt. Don't correct. Don't argue. Just listen from a comfortable position. Let the conversation flow smoothly, but do not get burned.





Our team created an in-depth resource on church conflict management [here](#) if you're looking for more tips. If you're looking for tips on managing difficult church members such as disgruntled persons or bullies, we also have built guides for managing these challenging folks.

- [Church Bully Guide](#)
- [Toxic Church Members Guide](#)
- [Controlling Church Members Guide](#)
- [Managing Disgruntled Church Members Guide](#)

5. How to Handle Change in Church

In order to grow and better your church, change is often necessary. However, change may feel uncomfortable to members, especially ones that have attended the longest. Good church leadership will have a plan to ease members before new projects begin.

1) Prepare Yourself

Before making any changes, pray regularly and consider the cost and value of those changes.

2) Seek Counsel

Talking to other people about a new idea or change before you implement it is an important aspect of managing change in a church. Speak with advisors who can help guide you and offer insight into how to begin the change process.

3) Prepare the People

Once you've decided on the change, prepare your congregation. Introduce the new concepts piece by piece, to start with general ideas about change. This will serve as a reminder in scripture regarding flexibility.

If you're looking for more tips on leading a congregation through change, we've built this short [church change management guide](#) to help.



6. Being a Good Financial Steward

Being a good financial steward is the most important role for church leadership. Pastor, you play a critical role in setting good examples for the congregation to follow.... the vision that could have otherwise led them on the road to riches.

The way most churches talk about stewardship today is some combination of these definitions. A very basic understanding could be the responsibility of doing what you feel God wants you to do with the resources you have been given.

Talking about stewardship can be hard for leaders in the church. Everyone feels some level of discomfort when asking for money. To help you and other leaders in the church with this important concern, we identified some pragmatic ways you can reshape the meaning of stewardship and increase your church's funds.

1) Make Stewardship About Doing

Members are a part of the mission of the church, not merely funders of it. All giving should be about how they are contributing to God's work.

2) Put Heart into Stewardship

This also can be a chance to look at what the Bible says about debt and how God wants us to live fruitful and productive lives. It can be an opportunity to talk to your congregation about financial peace. And it can be a good segue into brainstorming about how to promote stewardship within the congregation.

3) Make Stewardship About the Cause

The causes you wish to support may not be grand or lofty. They can continue to do what you are already doing. But, whatever these goals, they should be the central theme of any church stewardship campaign or conversation.

4) Make Stewardship Ongoing

Consider shifting from seasonal fundraising campaigns to a continual conversation about stewardship. This also moves away from the feeling of "it's time to talk about money again." It becomes more commonplace and is not separate from the goals and ongoing work of the church.

For help talking about stewardship, download a free [guide to church stewardship](#).

5) Understand Why and How People Give

It is always a great idea to frame conversations about stewardship in terms of "the gifts" the church has been given, as opposed to what it is lacking or what it "needs." People are more receptive to the idea of contributing to something positive, rather than filling in a deficit. It is your role to inspire and motivate people, even if it is for activities your church has been doing for a long time.

6. Be creative

When it comes to asking for gifts, it helps to craft unique appeals to break up your regular giving requests. These creative calls to stewardship help members reevaluate their giving habits.

If you're looking for suggestions, try these [15 creative ideas to boost stewardship](#) within the church.



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