

Leadership Tips For A Building Program



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Leading a church through a building project can be either one of the most rewarding or one of the most difficult experiences in ministry. While certainly every congregation is different, there are a few basic leadership issues that should be considered before entering into a building program. For instance, anytime a church is making decisions that could result in the expenditure of thousands or even millions of dollars, the question arises, "How should the information be disseminated?" In other words, "Who should know what, when?" This is a very important question that could certainly determine the success or failure of a church building project. It is also a question that does not have a "one answer fits all" solution. While the polity and personality of each church differs, following is a short list of Leadership Tips that have proven helpful to churches entering into a building program.

- **Verify What the Church Constitution and/or Bylaws State?** Church leaders must always consider what their legal requirements are to the congregation. While it used to be extremely uncommon for a church member to file a lawsuit against his pastor or other church leaders, this is becoming more and more common. Always ascertain the legal requirements to the congregation and strictly adhere to them. Seek legal counsel if necessary. The last thing you want is to be perceived as trying to "hide" information about large sums of money.
- **Seek Godly Counsel.** One way to add credence to what you are doing is to find a trusted person in the congregation and build an alliance with that individual. This person should be a longtime member of the church who is highly respected by members of the congregation. Ask that person to pray with you about your vision for the church and use that person as a sounding board for your thoughts and plans for the building program. Not only will this person be able to give you solid insights into the thoughts of the congregation, he/she can also stand with you if any confusion arises about your intent.
- **Prepare the Congregation for the Message.** One sure way to wreak havoc in a church congregation is to blindside them with a building program. Long before you announce any plans to build, prepare the congregation with appropriate messages and Bible studies about evangelism and growth. I spoke with a pastor not long ago who totally unannounced had stepped into the pulpit on a Sunday morning and told his congregation of less than 100 worshippers that he had a vision and that they were going to sell their church and build a new church that would seat 2000 people. He couldn't understand why the congregation met his announcement with blank stares instead of shouts of joy. Prepare your congregation before making big announcements.

- **Make Sure the Vision is Realistic Before Announcing Your Plans.** One of the quickest ways for a pastor or other church leader to lose credibility with the congregation is to kick off a building program for a building that cannot be built. Some of the issues that church leaders should consider include; is the property suitable for the project; can the proper zoning be obtained for the property; can the congregation financially support such a project; will the congregation emotionally support the project; is the church's equity position such that they can obtain financing, etc. A false start to a building program can be very discouraging to a congregation. In fact, a church that dreams of a new building and engages in a building program but fails will typically wait 5 to 7 years before they will dare to dream again and attempt another building project. A wise leader will carry out the proper due diligence to ensure the probable success of the project before exciting the congregation. No pastor or church leader likes hearing, "We've tried that already; it didn't work."
- **Develop an Inner Circle for Counsel and Prayer Support.** This "inner circle" should never be a "clique" or a "stacking of the deck" to try to manipulate the outcome of the project. Likewise, this group should not be made up of close friends or "yes men." This group needs to be a small group of godly people who can maintain a strict level of confidentiality. Whether members of this inner circle are members of the congregation or not is not nearly as important as their level of Christian maturity. They should be willing to ask the tough questions of the Pastor or church leader heading up the building project as well as being dedicated to continually pray for the church leaders, congregation and building project in general. Every member of the inner circle should vow to each other not to breath a word about the proposed project outside of the inner circle.
- **When You Announce the Building Program, Make sure Everyone is Included.** While it is a given that some individuals will learn of the plans for a building project before it is released to the general congregation, foreknowledge of the proposed project should be kept to a minimum. When the formal announcement is made that the church is considering a potential building program, everyone in the congregation should receive the same information at the same time. This will help keep the misinformation to a minimum. If church leadership decides to make the formal announcement during a worship service, business meeting or special occasion, the oral announcement should be followed with a written letter explaining the proposed project. Everyone should receive the written announcement, including shut-ins and "snow birds."
- **Form Well Rounded and Well Balanced Committees.** Once again, no committee should be made up for the purpose of manipulating the outcome of the building project. While it is true that you wouldn't want to place someone on the committee who is negative and always against progress of any kind, you would just as certainly not want to place someone on the committee who unquestionably agrees with everything the pastor or other church leaders suggest. Seek out spiritually mature open-minded individuals who truly have a heart for the church and its mission. Remember, when it comes to who should be on the Building Committee, spiritual maturity wins out over architectural or construction experience.
- **Share Information and Update the Congregation Regularly.** For lack of a better term, church leadership must continually "sell" the congregation on the new building program. Consequently, regular updates about the progress of the building project are essential. In order to keep the congregation excited about the project and, therefore, maintain their financial support, they must continually be informed about what is happening with the

project. Often times, as the project is in the technical aspects of the architectural phase, churches make the mistake of not reporting progress to the congregation. The congregation often interprets this lack of reporting as a lack of progress and the excitement and support of the project suffer. Update the congregation often with announcements from the pulpit or in the bulletin. If drawings are being produced, don't be afraid to hang the updated drawings in the church for everyone to see.

- **Keep it Positive!** Regardless of how much due diligence is done, or how many people are praying, every building project will encounter a few problems along the way. After all, the Devil doesn't want to see a church build a new or expanded facility so it can grow and impact more people with the Gospel. When problems arise, a good leader will minimize the difficulties and keep the overall building program a positive experience. After all, the surest way to slow the financial support of a project is to convince the congregation that their money is being thrown away on a poorly executed building program.

With all of this said, the best advise for any pastor or church leader entering a building project is very simply, pray without ceasing. Make sure you stay focused on what God has called you to in your ministry and claim the promise that David made to his son Solomon as he started work on the Temple:

"Be strong and brave, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, because the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or leave you until all the work for the Temple of the Lord is finished."

I Chronicles 28:20