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THE SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY BOARD

Characteristics of Board Leadership

The importance of a spiritually healthy governing board can't be overstated. It's imperative not only that board members be spiritually healthy, but that they function in a healthy way. A healthy board displays at least four characteristics: They work together as a

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team; they display courage; they trust and respect one another; they know how to deal with disagreements.

Working as a Team

I'm not aware of any biblical passage that mandates team ministry. However, most leaders in the New Testament worked in teams. This includes the Savior (Mark 6:7) and Paul (Acts 11:22–30; 13:2–3; 15:40). The right people working in a team context often results in a leadership that is characterized by God's wisdom.

Though they work in teams, healthy governing boards have a clearly defined leader. This person is responsible to set the agenda—the direction of the meeting—and keeps the team moving in that direction. While the rest of the team is involved in much that the board does corporately, each board member should step up and contribute from his or her giftedness when dealing with issues that call for a particular expertise (this means that the team members know and understand their divine designs). Thus they know how to contribute individually as well as work together.

It's not unusual for good boards to have differences of opinion. This can be very healthy and assures that the board hears the different sides of an issue when making a decision. Sometimes they may even become emotionally upset with one another. It is important to know how to handle these situations. Strong boards are able to work through them in a spiritually healthy way (Matt. 5:23–24; 18:15–17).

There are basically four team player styles, each corresponding in some manner to the DiSC or Personal Profile System. Each style contributes in different ways to the success of the team. A team member may have one or a combination of styles. And each will have an upside as well as a downside. Following are the four basic team player styles. As you read about each style, identify your unique style. If you read this with your team, identify and discuss your styles.

Challenger. The first style is the Challenger, who has the team player style of the D temperament on the Personal Profile System. This person functions to challenge the team, which involves questioning their goals, methods, and even their ethics. This person is not afraid to disagree with others and to encourage the team to take some risks. He or she is also characterized by candor and openness. The downside of the Challenger is he or she can be insensitive, stubborn, impatient, and inflexible. Also the Challenger will struggle at times to get along with the Contributor.

Motivator. The Motivator has the team player style of the i temperament. This person functions to help the team be optimistic, cooperative, and share ideas. He or she sees the church's vision, is flexible and open to new ideas, and is very good at motivating the others on the team. The Motivator's downside is that he or she can be impulsive, manipulative, and at times obnoxious.

Collaborator. The Collaborator has the team player style of the S temperament. This person functions to help the team collaborate and work well together. He or she is an effective listener, resolves conflicts, and creates an informal, relaxed atmosphere. This person really cares about people. The Collaborator's downside is that he or she can be too conforming, nonconfrontational, and too easygoing.

Contributor. The team player style with the C temperament is the Contributor. This person functions to provide the team with good technical information, data, and quality control and pushes the team to set and observe high performance standards. He or she is attentive to details. The Contributor's downside is that he or she can be fussy, perfectionistic, and stuffy. The Contributor will struggle at times in getting along with the Challenger. They will need to work hard at their relationship so that they can be productive.

Courage

Serving on a church board in the twenty-first century is a leadership intensive enterprise. It's not for the timid or faint of heart (2 Tim. 1:7). It requires courage to take necessary risks, stand up for what you believe, address difficult issues, oppose the cynics, accept responsibility, and persevere in difficult times (Josh. 1:6–9; Acts 23:11; 1 Cor. 16:13).

Healthy boards aren't afraid to make the tough decisions. When making such a decision, it's their job to sift through the facts, examine the options, be aware of any biblical directives, and make the best decision

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possible. In a congregational church, the board does this before taking a decision to the congregation for approval. They also stand behind their decisions, unless it's obvious they made the wrong decision. Later waffling on a good decision, especially when under pressure, is a big mistake that kills board credibility.

Trust and Respect

On an unhealthy board there is a lack of trust, and members are suspicious of one another, leading to disrespect, the sign of an immature,

dysfunctional board. When board members respect and care about one another, trust will result, which produces a mature, healthy board.

If a board member wants to be “guardian of the gate” or if board members want to keep an eye on the pastor, little if any trust will be present. These boards are unhealthy and dysfunctional as long as the suspicious attitude prevails.

How can a board develop trust and respect? Here are five ways:

1. Each person must deal with his or her own feelings of mistrust. Determine who on the board you do and don't trust. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how would you rate each board person? Do this in a godly, biblical way. Deal with any issues that foment distrust (publicly and privately). These could be past disagreements or other issues. Scripture is very clear that you are to go to the other person and seek reconciliation and forgiveness if necessary—Matthew 5:22–24; 18:15–20.
2. If anyone refuses to deal with issues of mistrust, that person must resign from the board or be asked by the majority to resign.
3. Make a conscientious effort to spend some time together doing things other than board business. (If you don't like this idea, the reason may be that you don't trust or respect the others!) You could go out for coffee after the board meetings or attend various activities together, such as sporting events. It could be said: “The team who plays together stays together.”
4. When you enlist new board members, select people who trust others and are without agendas.
5. Work at being open to new, different ideas.

Dealing with Disagreements

As I said above, boards that function well will have disagreements when dealing with issues. This is good because it means that the board is seeing the issue from several sides. In a socially safe environment,

Healthy boards believe: “We can disagree and still be friends.”

people will feel free to disagree with one another and won't feel rebuffed or rejected personally because their idea is rejected. Healthy

board members learn to separate themselves from their ideas, issues, or viewpoints. Then they don't feel personally attacked when someone disagrees with them, realizing it's the merit of the idea or argument that is being questioned. Everyone on the board knows they can disagree with others and still be friends.

A good way to express disagreement with another's idea or viewpoint on an issue is to ask questions that help the others see why it may not be a good viewpoint or issue to pursue. The Savior used this technique often in his dealing with those with whom he disagreed. Questions make people think rather than react.

Boards would be wise to discuss these matters as a part of the board's training and development process as well as its orientation of new board members.

Characteristics of Healthy Board Leadership

Working together as a team
 Displaying courage
 Trusting and respecting one another
 Dealing well with disagreements

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you agree that spiritually healthy boards work together as a team? Why or why not? Is this biblical? Does your board work together as a team? Why or why not?
2. In this chapter did you discover your team player style? What did you discover about yourself? How will you help your team function well? Which of your behaviors or attitudes might keep the team from accomplishing its goals?
3. Why do spiritually healthy boards need to display courage? Is this true of your board? Why or why not?
4. How important is it that board members trust and respect one another? Does your board trust and respect one another? Why or why not? The author gives five ways to develop trust on the board. Which ways would help your board?
5. Does your board deal well with disagreements among themselves? Why or why not? If not, what will you do about it?