



The **Effective**
Church Group >>>>>>

Fatal Mistakes to Avoid

10 Fatal Mistakes Pastors Make

and

5 Fatal Staffing Mistakes

At The Effective Church Group, we look for trends rather than isolated events. So when we see fatal mistakes happening over and over again, we make note of it and try to evaluate it in light of one priority: Does it enhance or hinder the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matthew 28:19), and the Great Commandment, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34).

Over our more than thirty years of consulting with more than 40 denominations has allowed us to see some common tactical mistakes made by church leaders. Usually these mistakes are hallmarks of declining congregations. So if your church is declining, and you are doing any of the following, it will be in your best interest to change your tactics.

This e-booklet contains a list of these fatal trends we see being made by pastors and staffs. If you’ve made any of these, don’t panic there is time to correct them and begin growing your church again. And keep in mind – everyone makes mistakes. Making mistakes often leads to new innovations. However, if we can avoid common mistakes others have made, we’re ahead of the game. That’s why we created this workbook: In the hopes that you can avoid these common mistakes.

10 Fatal Mistakes Pastors Make

Mistake Number One: Failing to Understand That Growing a Church Is a Team Sport.

Too many pastors try to do too much. Instead they should learn to value getting as much ministry done through others as possible. The great leader understands the need to reproduce him or herself through handing off ministry to others and helping them succeed. Rather than hogging the limelight and the accolades, the great leader equips others to shine and grow. The weak leader needs to be needed so badly that he or she has to do most of the ministry. As one pastor told me years ago “If I did what you are recommending, I wouldn’t be in ministry. I became a pastor because it feels good to be needed.” It is that kind of attitude that kills the church.

So what are you doing that you could hand off to someone else?

The first things I handed off were visiting the shut-ins, going to the hospital, and counseling. That meant I had to equip some folks to do justice to those needed ministries and free me up to spend time among the unchurched.

If you are having trouble handing off ministry to others take a look at our workbook *Developing a Culture of Equipping* and our video *Handing Off and Follow Up* included in the Church Growth Toolkit. If you’re ready to join the community of members who have already taken advantage of our Church Growth Toolkit, you can join here: <http://bit.ly/GrowthTools>.

Mistake Number Two: Trying To Keep Disgruntled Members and Inactive Members Happy

For some reason unknown to us, it’s hard for church people to let go of disgruntled and disruptive members. Rather than showing them where the door is, it seems as if we would prefer to let them run off all of the healthy people. We have seen case after case of a controlling member, threatening to leave and being begged to stay. We have seen too many times when a controlling member actually storms out, resigns the office, and leaves the church. Then either the pastor or some members pursue this person, who returns with more power than before. What’s wrong with us? We know the person is disruptive and intimidating. We know the person has run off literally dozens or hundreds of people. Why do we do it?

In our effort to save one person we inadvertently run off hundreds of people over the years due to the antics of this person.

If you need help dealing with the bullies, terrorists, and controllers in your church, work through the *Conflict CPR DVD Training Set* included in the Church Growth Toolkit. If you’re ready to join the community of members who have already taken advantage of our Church Growth Toolkit, you can join here: <http://bit.ly/GrowthTools>.

Mistake Number Three: Making the first staff hire a Youth Director instead of a Worship Leader.

Hiring a full time worship leader is the most important hire a church will ever make. Most church leaders still have not gotten the message – the world we live in has one universal language – Music, and mostly Rock n Roll. Hiring a Youth Director before hiring a Worship Leader is usually fatal.

Youth are *not* the future of your church. At best they are the future of someone's church but not yours. This doesn't mean they aren't important. They are important for the Kingdom. But hiring a Worship Leader first will make it easier to hire a Youth Director, but the other way around almost never grows a church. It's all about leverage.

For more on this see our book, *Unfreezing Moves* in the Church Growth Toolkit. If you're ready to join the community of members who have already taken advantage of our Church Growth Toolkit, you can join here: <http://bit.ly/GrowthTools>.

Mistake Number Four: The Lead Pastor In Churches Under 500 In Worship Does Not Personally Contact First Time Guests Within 48 Hours; and In Churches Over 500 In Worship Not Having Someone Full Time To Work In the Area of Evangelism.

We know much of the prevailing wisdom is people are more likely to return to your church if the laity visits them. It's just not so. In churches fewer than 500 in worship, people are more likely to return if the lead pastor visits them and the first contact is within 24 hours. Pastor, if your church is under 500 in worship, visit your first time guests within 24 hours. Then write them a handwritten note including the title of next week's sermon.

Our guess is one of the reasons the lead pastor doesn't visit the guest is because the congregation has them tied up doing non-biblical ministry such as visiting the hospitals and shut-ins. But this would be the seventh most common mistake (for more on this see the story of Stephen in Acts 6).

For more on how to respond to guests and retain them see our work book *I Love My Church Day: Doubling First Time Guests and Retaining Them* and our video *Responding to First Time Visitors* that are included in the Church Growth Toolkit. If you're ready to join the community of members who have already taken advantage of our Church Growth Toolkit, you can join here: <http://bit.ly/GrowthTools>.

Mistake Number Five: Hiring Associate Pastors Who Are Generalist Rather than Specialists.

The day of generalists is coming to an end. A church doesn't need another generalist until it reaches 600 or 700 hundred in worship. If you have an Associate who is in training, you can't count them toward the 1:100 ratio it takes to grow most churches.

Mistake Number Six: Asking a Paid, Retired Associate Pastor to be Responsible for Visiting the Guests.

Our experience is that people under the age of 40 respond better to someone either their age or younger than they are. The only reason to have a retired pastor on the staff is to develop a ministry to the elderly or if the area in which the church is located is primarily a retirement area. Notice I didn't say this person should visit the elderly. This is another form of this mistake. This person should develop a lay team who visit the elderly and attend to hospital visitation.

Mistake Number Seven: Dying, Plateaued, and Aging Churches Put Too Much Time, Energy, and Money Into Programs that Have No Benefit to Their Future.

We are Kingdom people and don't think everything a church does has to benefit the local church. Nevertheless, we find it hard to believe that a dying or aging church would continue to put time energy and money into programs that do nothing to ensure their viability. Some of these ministries are wonderful and probably contribute to the overall health of the Kingdom but they don't do anything to ensure the health or the sustainability of congregation. Often these are ministries aimed at children and youth. When we asked, "How many adults actually wind up in church?" We're told "No one." Yet the church continues to pour time, energy, and money into the program while the church spirals down to its death. It's one thing for a healthy thriving church to do ministries to children whose parents they will never see; it's another thing for a declining church to do this. Pastor, if your church is declining or on a plateau, make sure that most of your churches time, energy, and money is going into ministries that will ensure your churches future.

A cousin to this is most dying churches have too many programs. We're finding that fewer targeted programs is best.

Mistake Number Eight: Pastors Move Too Often.

The average tenure for an ordained pastor is around four years. The average tenure of a pastor in most large, growing, dynamic churches, with great lay ministries, is over ten years, and the average pastoral tenure in the 21st century will be twenty to thirty years. Already, many of the large, dynamic churches with great lay ministries have pastors in the fifteenth year or more.

Early in their ministry, pastors should find a church where a match exists between their vision and that of the church and stay there for the rest of their ministry. All pastors should try to "bloom where they are planted; be there while they are there;" and not wait for God to finally give them a "good" church. There aren't any "good" churches lying around. Pastors and laity with vision develop "good" churches.

We've found that pastors who stay seven years become married to the congregation and the trust level is high. When a pastor stays eleven years the trust level is off the chart. Most really significant ministry happens after the eleventh year. So pastor buckle up and remain where you are and grow the church.

Mistake Number Nine: Underestimating the Power of Prayer In Making Disciples and Decisions.

All renewal in the church starts with prayer. However, the problem with most prayer today is that it is misdirected. Too many pastors are professional prayers who pray in the place of laity. Instead, they should teach laity to pray for themselves and others. The next time you ask for prayers in your church make note of what people pray for. You will have to go to several different groups of people before you hear a prayer raised on behalf of an unchurched or pre-Christian person. Prayers are usually for physical healing of friends and loved ones and seldom for the salvation of someone.

Teach your people to pray for themselves and others. Make prayer a vital part of decision making instead of voting or trying to develop consensus. Organize people with the gift of prayer into groups that pray daily for the church and its leaders. Develop your own prayer life.

Mistake Number Ten: Not Having a Consuming Vision and Passion For the Transformation of People.

Too many church leaders are going through the motions while yearning for retirement. Too many local church pastors are little more than personal chaplains in dysfunctional hospitals where people never get well and get on with life. Yet, many church members hunger for a spiritual leader who can help them and their church grow spiritually. Many pastors have received a heretical view of ministry. They take care of parishioners instead of equipping them for ministry. They do ministry rather than equipping laity to do ministry. Pastors should never do for someone what they can do for themselves.

Pastors with a consuming passion for transforming people find ways to overcome all of the above mistakes. They ensure their personal and spiritual integrity, constantly retool for ministry, and instead of getting sucked into becoming personal chaplains to a handful of dysfunctional people, they help the majority of the church grow into the spiritual giants God intended them to be.

If your ministry is not driven by this passion, take your Bible and go off and pray until God shows you the vision. If you have this passion, don't let anything distract you from living it out. If you can't find this passion, get out of the ministry. Hint: Too much or too little passion for a vision can cause a person to lose their integrity.

Five Fatal Staffing Mistakes

Mistake Number One: Hiring Someone When You Are In Doubt Just Because You Need to Fill the Job.

Pastors will often hire just to fill a badly needed position when they aren't sure about the effectiveness of the person. Even though you may need this person badly don't hire until you are sure. It is easy to hire; it is hard to fire. Save yourself some grief and wait till you are sure. Of course it is rare for a pastor to be totally sure, but if you have any nagging thoughts about the hire, don't do it.

Mistake Number Two: Assigning Your Best People to Fix Problems.

Dying churches try to fix problems. Often they do it by developing policies. To make matters worse they assign one of their best people to fix the problem. Stop doing that. Your best people need to be working on growing the church.

Mistake Number Three: Allowing Ineffective Staff to Stay On Too Long

Firing staff is rarely the pastor's favorite things to do. Often their mercy gift is in the way so they put off doing what they know needs to be done. Or they try to save the person by giving them just one more chance. This approach never works. Once a person knows you aren't happy with their work they will begin to deepen their friendship with their church networks so when the day comes that you do let them go, you will have a real problem on your hands. Instead of letting an ineffective person stay on too long, when you first become aware they can't or won't do the job, move quickly to remove the person from the staff. In the long run you are doing them a favor.

Of course this is predicated on you're having done all you can to give the person the training and resources needed to do their job. But if after six months they still don't get it or haven't shown progress, the odds are they never will and it's time to move toward their removal.

Mistake Number Four: Hiring people to Fill a Job Rather Than Hiring People to Fulfill the Mission of the Church Using Their Particular Gifts.

Never hire staff to do a job. Instead hire them to use their gifts to develop the people and the teams needed to accomplish their particular mission. The only time staff should do ministry is when they are demonstrating to an apprentice how to do the ministry.

Mistake Number Five: Not Realizing that Making the Staff Successful Is the Primary Concern of the Lead Pastor.

The most successful pastors are those who gather around themselves enough competent staff to make the vision happen. These pastors understand that helping others succeed is the mark of a good leader. The larger a church becomes the more important staff becomes because they know more people than the lead pastor.

Here Are Some Things Staff Must Never Do: And If They Do They Should Be Fired

- Going around the lead pastor to the personnel committee instead of dealing with the issue with the pastor. Triangulation always leads to confusion and “He said” “She said.” Adults should be able to confront one another and work out their problems. When they can’t they don’t belong on your staff.
- Disagreeing with the pastor or another staff person in public. It is okay to disagree in staff or private meeting but never disagree with or question in public a decision that has been made in a staff meeting. When a staff person leaves the staff table and talks negatively about what was decided is same as a saboteur.
- Staff who are always showing up late for staff meeting without permission to do so. Just think- as the church grows the number of staff grows so when one person is late the entire staff is tied up waiting. Compute the total number of hours lost from waiting on someone to show up and you see the problem. It’s okay to be late or not attend if the lead pastor knows that is going to happen so the staff meeting can start on time and so time isn’t wasted bringing the late person up to speed as to what has happened in the staff meeting.
- Staff should never overspend their budget without prior approval.
- Staff should never make a decision or allow an action that deviates from the written ministry plan without gaining permission.
- Staff should never do anything that fractures or reduces the trust level between you and the staff, the congregation, the governance board, and/or the Judicatory leadership.
- Staff should never handle or spend money in any way that is dishonest, questionable, unethical, or that violates financial policies or jeopardizes fiscal integrity.
- Staff should never do anything that is immoral, unethical, illegal, unbiblical, or violates the sacred trust placed upon you as a pastor.
- Staff should never consistently fail to meet a deadline or accomplish a task you agreed upon with either your coach or executive staff without prior agreement by both.

For more details on staffing, see our book *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches* at <http://amzn.to/EffectiveStaffing>.

Additional Resources

[Net Results Magazine](#)

Published since 1980, *Net Results* has been the go-to magazine for fresh, new ideas for growing churches.

[Effective Staffing for Vital Churches](#)

By Bill Easum & Bill Tenny-Brittian. Whether you're a solo-pastor or have a multi-staff church, this book provided guidance for how to staff a growing church. Includes insights on time management, hiring, firing, and volunteer oversight.

[High-Voltage Spirituality](#)

By Bill Tenny-Brittian. Help your church leaders find and maintain their spiritual center with this compendium of spiritual practices. Includes how-to tips for "fitting" the spiritual habits into a busy life.

[On Not Being Nice for the Sake of the Gospel](#)

This is the #1 requested blog post from The Effective Church Group, and introduces one of the most important practices of faithful, effective, sustainable, and growing churches.