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TRAINING AT EVERY MEETING

Practice can't make perfect unless you're practicing the right way and heading in the same direction

By **Natalie Hart**

**“The primary tool of pastoral leadership outside preaching and teaching is meetings, and so many people lead bad meetings.”**

So said Rev. Tony Campbell to the pastors gathered at the Summer Clergy Learning Retreat. We've already shared articles about the five-finger vote (<https://gatheringsofhope.atavist.com/the-simplest-consensus-building-tool-ever>) and the five (six) P's of a successful meeting (<https://gatheringsofhope.atavist.com/five-ps-of-a-successful-meeting>) to help pastors and ministry leaders strengthen their ability to lead. This article will focus on another tool in the pastor's toolbox: training. The topic of the July session of the Refine Track was board meetings, but the lessons are applicable to other kinds of ministry meetings.

Rev. Dallas Lenear suggested that pastors should do some kind of training at every board meeting. He said, “When I was newly on the board of the United Way, the president trained me in the role of the board, in the organization, in the history of past meetings and decisions. This had a good, practical purpose, but it cemented our relationship, too.” In the same way, the pastor needs to teach the board what their role is and how they relate to the pastor and to the congregation.

He pointed out that,

**“Every trustee *gets* trained. You've just got to decide whether you'll be the one training them.”**

One of the attendees of the Learning Retreat spoke with great feeling: “When people don’t know what the roles of the board and the pastor are, they’ll go with their own ideas and everyone keeps going with their own ideas, and you don’t even wind up divided, but fragmented.”

Someone else noted that,

**“Practice does not necessarily make perfect, because you might not be practicing the right way.”**

So what is the right way?

Lenear recommends the book *Winning on Purpose: How To Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission* (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00AKJYLQ0/>), for its accessible presentation of church organization and governance.

John Kaiser, one of the authors, lays out the Cycle of Responsibility, which outlines what each major body in the church is responsible for:

- The board creates and revises a living set of guiding principles.
- The pastor interprets the guiding principles.
- The staff applies the pastor’s interpretation.
- The pastor holds the staff accountable for their application.
- The board holds the pastor responsible for the interpretation and the application.

Which leads right back to #1.

These guiding principles should include articles of incorporation, bylaws (<https://gatheringsofhope.atavist.com/getting-unsnared>), job descriptions (<https://gatheringsofhope.atavist.com/the-surprise-discipleship-tool>), and leadership expectations. It should be noted, however, that the board isn’t telling

the congregation what's what; it receives its authority to be the board from the congregation. The congregation empowers the board; the board does not exert power over the congregation.

Before a board member is put in place, each one must recognize that Christ is the owner of the congregation. Lenear said,

“The church doesn't have any business that isn't spiritual. Although we think of Trustee as a legal role, it has to be done in the context of Christ and *His* mission. **Every leader in the church needs to see him or herself as a spiritual leader.** Every leader needs to remember that the church belongs to God and we are all servants in His kingdom. The church does not belong to any of us.”

This is a major piece of training that Lenear says pastors should come back to over and over again: “Like anything we teach, you have to teach it, and then you have to teach it again. Keep teaching it using Scripture.”

He went on to recommend a few unexpected things:

- \* Put in writing that the church belongs to Christ. At a church Lenear served in, they put Jesus at the top of all their organizational charts, to remind everyone that, at every level, they were playing a role in *God's* kingdom.
- \* Put in a transition plan when you start at a church, even if you will likely be there for twenty or more years. Pray regularly for the pastor or ministry leader who will succeed you. He said, “This way, you don't think about building your kingdom. You're reminded that this isn't *your* church, that it'll be there when you're gone.”
- \* Term limits for board members should be written into the bylaws. When people serve indefinitely, it can be easier for them to fall into the trap of thinking the

church or the board is *theirs*.

\* Have the board members explicitly agree to follow the current leadership, even to put in writing, “I’d be willing to follow the leadership of X and Y.” This is to forestall people who are still following Pastor Z, although Pastor Z is no longer at the church. Lenear was blunt: “Current leaders *have* to be willing to follow current leaders.”

So what are some topics pastors can teach about during the training portion of the meeting?

- Biblical expectations of leadership
- Matthew 18:15-19 on dealing with conflict
- Exodus 18 on leadership structures and needing help
- Wise handling of church finances
- Legal responsibilities of Trustees
- Biblical and theological underpinnings for church ventures

Jethro told Moses, in no uncertain terms, that he needed help, otherwise he’d wear himself *and* the people out. Jesus chose not to do ministry by Himself. This is instructive to pastors and ministry leaders: we need a team. The Board of Trustees is not the opposition, they are the pastor’s team, on the same side – on Jesus’ side. **Regular training is a great tool for building the capacity of leaders, for keeping everyone aimed at the same goal, and for helping the church live out its mission in their community.**

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