5 MISTAKES

CHURCHES MAKE ONBOARDING NEW STAFF

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UNseminary

Hiring is the single most expensive decision that most church leaders will make over the course of their ministry.

In many churches, staffing accounts for anywhere between 30 percent and 50 percent of the annual budget.

You want to make sure that, as you hire new team members, you invest what you can at the front end of the process to ensure that the team is set up for success.

Every time we hire someone, it shifts the culture and future of your church. Don't believe me? **Why are you hiring someone if you're not hoping that it will change the future of your church?** If you're thinking things will just stay the same when you hire this person, you probably shouldn't hire them!

It's been said that everything rises and falls on leadership but it's more specific than that: **everything rises on well-onboarded leadership placed within a thriving leadership structure.**

It's important that we take time to ensure that the team we have is ready to serve well. The first 90 days of any new team member's employment is critically important. Rather than just having the team members show up and assume that they know what to do, **it's our responsibility to define a process by which they go from being external to our culture to being crucial to the mission of our church.** That can only happen through a well thought out and structured onboarding process.

When I was younger, I was a part of the Royal Canadian Air Cadets. (Yeah, it sounds pretty fancy, but it was really an opportunity to volunteer and take some free gliding lessons.) A glider is an aircraft that is pulled up a few thousand feet in the air and then released. It then glides its way back down to the ground.

One of the things I learned over the years of my glider training was that takeoff and landing are critically important. As new air cadets, we were given the opportunity to control the gliders while in air, but takeoff and landing were always handled by someone with much more experience than we newbies. The same is true with our team members! Takeoff and landings are critically important. **Just like takeoff, planning the first steps of a new team member needs to be done with thought and care.** You've made a huge investment and you're hoping this team member will make a difference in your church. Setting them up for success with a well thought out onboarding process can be a part of how you ensure that will happen.

Below are five mistakes that I've seen churches make time and again when they're hiring new team members that you should avoid when onboarding new staff at your church.

THE DEFINITION OF WINNING IS FOGGY

Everyone that works at your church needs a clear understanding of whether they're winning or losing.

A clear picture of what the win looks like is critically important for the well-being of your team members. Studies show that people feel that they are losing because they don't know where they stand with their goals.

Having a clear set of goals for new team members in their first 90 days is an important part of the onboarding process. This can be as simple as a list of people that they need to meet with or a series of activities that need to take place. **Being crystal clear on exactly what you need people to do as they begin can launch them in the right direction as they start a new role with your church.**

Don't allow the definition of winning to be foggy and unclear to them, but go out of your way to define it with as much granularity as possible.

NEXT STEPS:
- Write out a one or two-page description of what first wins the new team members should focus on.
- Meet with the new team member and talk over what they should focus on as they begin.
- Follow up every four weeks during the first three months on the goals that you've outlined. Celebrate the wins! Provide extra support for those areas that need support.

RELATIONAL DYNAMICS ARE IGNORED

If you're not a naturally relational leader, it may be difficult for you to understand that one of the greatest success factors for team happiness and performance is actually having a close friend or two on the team at your church.

People need friends at their places of employment. They need someone who they can blow off steam and not be concerned that it will make its way back to someone in the command and control structure who would be offended.

Giving people clear relational cues in their early days that it's important for them to develop relationships is a good thing. A good practice can be to allocate your new team member a mentor for the first 90 days, someone that can meet with them regularly to help them onboard. These people should be picked in a way that you think may end up actually building friendships in the long-term.

NEXT STEPS:

- Book a lunch meeting for the new team member and someone on your team.
- Hand out name tags at the first team meeting that the new team member attends.
- Check-in at the end of the new team member's first week and ask them how they are doing.

TECHNOLOGY TRAINING IS SKIPPED

Technology is increasingly the air that we breathe in our churches.

All of our churches have their constellation of church management systems, email management systems, content systems, and service planning systems, all designed to help us be more effective in our ministry. There can be a bewildering amount of detail to think through when you're starting a new role.

Care should be given to training new team members on the technology that is considered core to their role. **Don't just assume that people know Google Docs or Office 365. Providing them time to watch some training videos or to take a class or two in their first 90 days can help accelerate their effectiveness with your team long-term.** The longer your church has had a certain technology, the harder it can be for you to remember what it was like when you didn't know how to use it.

Go out of your way to ensure that the onboarding process includes technology training early in new team members' experience with you.

NEXT STEPS:

- Pull together a few team members and brainstorm a list of all the pieces of technology that new hires will need to use. (Chances are you'll be surprised how much there is!)
- Before the new team member starts, explore with them which areas of additional tech training they would like to undertake to bring them up to speed.
- There are many online training systems like Udemy or Lynda that have thousands of helpful online courses ready to go!

YOUR TEAM CULTURE IS ASSUMED

Have you stepped back and gone through the critical task of making your implicit team culture explicit, rather than just assuming that everyone knows what it's like to work at your organization?

Taking time to actually work through important aspects of your culture can help onboard your team member and ensure that they don't stub their toe as they engage with other team members.

We've done this in the past with weekly onboarding conversations that simply go through ten different culture-defining aspects of who we are to help new team members understand what it's like to work with us.

An easy way to bring them up to speed quickly could be something as simple as giving your team core messages from Sunday morning to listen to and respond to and discuss why they're such critically important messages for the church.

Helping your team understand what it means to work at your church rather than be a part of, or be a member of, your church is a critical piece of the puzzle. Taking time to work through, particularly for folks who are coming in from either their first job or from another employer can be critical to their long-term success at your church.

NEXT STEPS:
- What are three Sunday messages that are core content for your church? Send them to new team members before they even start and ask them to come to a meeting to talk about them.
- Who are your existing team members who "get it"? Pull them together and brainstorm what lets team members thrive in your culture.
- Build questions about your team culture into the hiring process so you can start to signal early on with prospective team members how important these things are.

YOUR CHURCH'S DEFINITION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS UNCLEAR

This is particularly important as we talk about brand new team members where this may be their first real job. **Every church has a slightly different nuance on how they work through how people are to balance their work and life.** Much of our ministry becomes a lifestyle rather than a 9 to 5 job and being really clear on how that works itself out in your team in the first 90 days will help ensure that there aren't missed expectations with new team members. Also, being clear upfront on this helps people not build negative work-life balance patterns early in their time with you.

Taking time to be explicit in your expectations around when people need to be at the office or how they engage with team members during non-work hours will help your entire team understand what it's like to be a part of the team.

This is also very important for new employees who have never worked anywhere before besides maybe a part-time job during college. There are many nuanced aspects to joining the adult working world and going out of your way to define some of those, rather than just have them float as assumptions, can help your team and new team members get along well.

NEXT STEPS:

- What are your team's expectations around punctuality in responding to emails? What about phone calls? How about text messages?
- How would you define what a workweek is for your team?
- Imagine the conflicts you've had in this area. How can you pre-empt them as new team members arrive?

DO YOU NEED HELP ONBOARDING A NEW TWENTY-SOMETHING STAFF MEMBER?

Onboarding new staff members is an essential piece of the puzzle for ensuring that your new team members succeed in their roles. This is even more important with team members who are just starting their vocational ministry career in their 20s.

Our friends over at Leadership Pathway have launched a new 12-month coaching process that could be added on to your existing onboarding process. First Steps Coaching is designed to help particularly those team members that are new to the working world wrestle through some of the soft skills that ultimately end up defining the success of your church team members.

Click here to learn more.