

How To Deal With A Disgruntled Board Member

One of the greatest areas that a younger minister faces is how to get along with disgruntled board members. Many young pastors have left their first board meeting questioning why do people act this way? Even seasoned pastors who were blessed by having wonderful boards and

felt led to follow God's leading to another church, question and struggle with a controlling and disgruntled board. Some pastors have even questioned whether board members are Christians by the negative and obstinate way they act.

Most board members are great! However, many pastors come to a new church and "inherit" a group of people who like to govern every step and operation of the church. Traditions are hard to break and overcome. They are not formed overnight and cannot be quickly changed. In some cases, these members have served as board members for 20-40 years, having a mindset, "I was here before you came and I will be here after you leave!"

How do situations like this get so out of control? Most board members have been voted in by popular vote of the membership and some have remained on the board for extended periods of time and perhaps beyond their usefulness. Some churches are at a disadvantage due to not having enough members from which to adequately choose. Others assume that business "behind closed doors" are going well. It would be a great surprise to most church members concerning the conversations and decisions that are discussed and made in board meetings. I wished at times that members were privy to those meetings but, of course, they are not.

We understand the need for church boards and the scripture that validates their role but some boards are not fulfilling the scriptures. They are only maintaining control over the business side of things. Many are ill-equipped for spiritual matters.

DEALING WITH DISGRUNTED BOARD MEMBERS

Understand the History. It is really important for any pastor to know, if possible, the dynamics of the board. They need to know whether one board member is more controlling and those who are actually spirit-led. Just because "we have always done it this way" is not the best way to go.

Understand You Need Each Other. When there is adversity, we often think it is us against them. This concept and thought is totally wrong in the church world. The fact is, we need each other. Everyone plays a very important part of the church. It is up to us as a

pastor to lead, teach, and sometimes mold our "team" in making it the very best board possible.

Understand Change. People for the most part resist change. It is a part of the human nature. We get comfortable with doing things a certain way and with that comfort, habits and traditions are formed. Any quick changes by a new pastor will result in resistance. Please understand this very important point. If you wish to change things, move slowly, ask for their opinion, use open-ended questions that will allow discussions, and teach.

Understand Teaching Opportunities. When a pastor faces opposition, they can either view this as an opportunity or view this in various negative ways. Every pastor is to lead and teach by example. Many traditions and habits formed by negative board members have been formed over many years, perhaps affecting and controlling a number of different pastors before you.

Teaching takes time and so does change. Be patient. Pray every day for each board member as well as asking for wisdom and direction for your church.

Understanding Different Levels. Pastors come to a church with a vision that God has given to them. Don't be surprised that God has not given the same vision to your board members! The reason is very simple...you are on different levels.

A board member usually gets up in the morning, focuses his/her attention on the work they are trained to do, come home to deal with family issues, and come to church. They read their Bible and pray but they usually don't spend 2-3 hours each day to pray for God to reveal the direction for their church, nor do they spend countless hours dealing with other people in the church spiritually and physically. They are good Christians but their daily focus is usually on them and their family, but yet, they are **trying to make spiritual decisions based on carnal knowledge**. The two do not mix.

You, as a pastor, are called (they are not). You, as a pastor, are seeking God's direction for the whole church and spend hours each day with church-related work (they do not). It is very difficult to get others to see your **spiritual vision** and heart until you are able to share it and for them to also **take ownership** of it.

Listed below are a few steps to follow you in dealing with a disgruntled board member:

Pray. Pray for wisdom in business, relationally, and in leadership. When we pray, God usually releases His wisdom and give us a fresh direction to approach others. When we pray for others, we often find that our attitude and patience levels are not where they should be.

Attitude. Be in control of your attitude. Display a positive and loving spirit. Don't allow negative thoughts or talk affect your emotions. Just because someone disagrees with you, does that mean that all is lost or that we become as negative as they are?

Have your Board Members pray for you and a vision for the church. I have found that most of our boards do not ask God for direction but leans on their own understanding instead of leaning on God for his ultimate wisdom and direction. When board members actually pray for their pastor and the differences, usually God shows them where they may be guilty of not handling everything right also. This can be a teaching moment.

Lead. Conduct your meeting in a business and Christian like manner. Allow your meeting to flow without losing control of your meeting. Tell the members that we all can disagree and have different opinions on most any subject, but we want to maintain the right spirit in our meetings. We do not need a disagreeable or haughty spirit to exist. Do not dictate or demand. Be patient and display the right kind of Godly spirit for everyone to see.

Teach. The board should not be run as a democracy. Nothing in the Bible teaches this. In many elections, the majority may reign to provide a solution to a position in the church, but the decisions and direction for the church should always be measured by the Bible. We cannot compromise as a church in the things of God!!!

Monitor. Make sure that your meeting is achieving goals in a timely manner. If there is a disagreement or stalemate to any issue, table it to the next meeting and go on with business. Keep a good positive spirit to each meeting. Do not allow issues to become disagreements.

Share. Share the intentions of your meetings. These may include stating that you are either appointed or elected as pastor and that there is no intention of you dictating or controlling this board but would like to see a workable board that understands that we are all in this together. It is not a control issue! You may have to remind the board members that they were elected or appointed just like you and that you are more concerned about the spirit in which we operate, just like God is interested in all of our spiritual operation.

Instruct roles. You may have to instruct your board on roles they and you serve. Board members may be elected to their position but are not the representatives of church members to carry out their complaints and gripes. The board has a function and that is to work equally with the pastor and the pastor being the head. There should be a good working relationship moving together, not against one another.

Listen. Many pastors do not do a great job in listening because they are busy telling. It takes some patience, but a pastor can win the respect from their board members if they allow their members to share openly and know their concerns are valued. By listening, a pastor can tell the heart of a person. I believe that given time, you can tell the character and heart of a person. You can detect wisdom, a tender heart, and you can also detect certain "hidden issues" that need or might need to be addressed.

Friend. It is good for any pastor to have a friend on the board. This is probably not an actual friend but someone who loves and respects the role of the pastor. They can greatly assist you during difficult moments. They can also trustfully advise you when you might be wrong. They can be a safe sounding-board for you to share your thoughts or agenda before you actually meet in a board meeting.

Don't Internalize/Take things personal. Many who are disgruntled or hard to deal with seem to like to have the power or authority or control. They are not necessarily against you but perhaps being against removing their power. Explore other ways to allow them to have a position of authority but not have the haughty spirit. Remember, we don't wrestle with flesh and blood! (Ephesians 6:12) Focus on the spirit rather than perceiving them as personal attacks.

Confront. There may be times whenever you might have to talk to a board member in private to work things out. Look at Matthew 18. Have your facts together and do this in love. If things are not reconciled, take a fellow board member with you as a witness in efforts of trying to gain a **win-win** situation of that board member.

Pick your battles. There are some things not worth fighting or arguing about. I know of a board member who stated on his death bed, "The things I thought were so important in life and church work really aren't important at all!" What a wasted time arguing and trying to get his way to only find out later he would have done things much differently. There are battles in which you as a pastor may also have to forget and let go.

Find Agreement. Find agreement with any disagreement. Try to end each session with a positive note and summarize that the session may have been difficult but we are moving forward. End each session with prayer.

Willing. Be willing to admit when you might be wrong and know your limitations. Most pastors are called into sharing the gospel and are now having to learn the operations of the church. It is not an issue of control, it is about the issue of leading. Use the talents and availability of the people in the church.

Compliment. Continually thank your board members for their dedication and service to the church. Board members are human and can be tired in well doing. Encourage, lift them up, and let them know they are important to you and the church.

Create a Giving Spirit. Just as the board members and other volunteers in the church donate their services and time for the church, teach a generous spirit. A giving heart is much better than a sacrificial heart. There is something precious about a generous spirit.

Meet. Many pastors might meet with board members outside of their regular meetings to get to know them better and to allow that board member to better know the pastor and his family. Do this in the right spirit and not try to use this in a manipulative way to gain favor. Sincerity is best.

Creative. Be creative in trying to improve relationships within the church board. By improving relationships and maintaining positive relationships, the leadership is greatly enhanced, ushering in a spirit of unity throughout the church.

Extreme issues. If a board member has ethical or moral issues, other ways must be sought on how to address this situation or possibly remove that individual from office. It is best to try to bring a solution by suggesting that individual to voluntarily resign from their position for the sake of the church. Then it is important to restore the person spiritually. If all efforts fail, then more drastic measures have to take place, whether that means to have denominational leaders contacted or the membership addressing the issue.

Seek counsel. Seek the help of other ministers or mentors that you trust who may be able to help you in any situation. Please understand that advice and wisdom is welcome, but the final decision is yours. You are called to this church and God will use the talents and abilities you possess to make a difference. Others can be helpful and encouraging but your decisions and actions must be prayerfully decided by you.

These are only a few thoughts about how to handle a difficult or disgruntled board member. Even though you are considered to be the CEO of the church, many pastors rely upon the leadership of their board to help assist them.

If you have a situation that you are facing that seems overwhelming or you cannot seem to find a solution to bring healing to your board, try to remember to go back to prayer to seek God's guidance, develop a workable and perhaps an **ever-changing** plan of action to help re-direct a disgruntled board member's attitude into a positive one, and remember that small progress or victories is actually making improvement.

Please stay true to your calling and following God's direction. He will see you through. Remember, it took a while for the children of Israel to cross over to the promise land.

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