

How To Deal With Staff/Church Betrayal

How does a pastor deal with a staff member who is not loyal? What about a church member whom you thought was a close friend suddenly betrayed your trust and loyalty? Loyalty is a fundamental ingredient that all pastors must have. It is more than being faithful and defending the vision and policies that you implement as the pastor, but it also includes **supporting**. I know these words are closely related but support has more of a commitment and personal involvement in their position and relationship to you as a pastor.

Anyone can come to meetings and perform their duties. Anyone can defend your cause without agreeing with you. A pastor must have the commitment from all their staff, whether paid or voluntary. Commitment seems to be a dying quality within the church today. Perhaps people are more self-centered with their own needs to not look at the bigger picture of the church.

In order to gain the support and commitment from staff members pastors should make this a priority in selecting their staff. A pastor should address support and commitment during this process and whenever a pastor may feel that loyalty is slipping. Many pastors avoid this step and trust that people will line up in “unity” for the sake of the church. This can be a big mistake. Other pastors do not want to cause problems and are afraid if confronted, a staff member might quit. If this is a case, pastors are losing the vision and mission they have for the church and allowing dissent to possibly thrive.

Successful pastors address disloyalty from the very beginning but even then, feelings of betrayal could still hurt. Pastors desire for everyone to be a part of the “team” and to openly come to them if differences arise, but in reality, there are many hidden agendas that take place behind the scenes.

In reality, you are the leader, and you are God’s instrument for this time, in this place, and the staff must work for you. It is about management and roles, pure and simple, and should not be driven by emotions or feelings.

Employee acceptance is needed except in situations of any wrong-doing from any other leader or pastor. It is wrong to expect loyalty in these situations. There is no such thing as blind loyalty. Staff members are not disloyal when they do not support the pastor who acts in a wrongful manner. Every staff member, along with the pastor, must maintain Biblical standards of conduct and standing up for those standards is not a sign of disloyalty.

Another misnomer about loyalty occurs whenever a pastor announces his/her resignation and is going elsewhere. Some pastors seem to feel as if others should be as close as they were when

working towards the same goals. Loyalties seem to slow down or take a different direction due to the resignation announcement of the pastor and seem to focus more on the future. Staff members are often hired or placed by the current pastor and now their position is uncertain. A pastor should become more focused on the transition than on loyalties or friendship of others. People also react negatively when positions are threatened. Now that the pastor is leaving, their position may be terminated. It is important for pastors to understand this and to minister to them individually.

Disloyalty can also take on a form through rumors. You might hear something through the grapevine and have to determine whether it is the actual truth, whether there is any merit, and whether conflict exists. Comments and opinions are cheap. While they may disturb us, they don't necessarily have much merit. It is important for the pastor to address these rumors before they get out of hand and to sort out a plan to deal with these.

It is unfortunate but disloyal people usually do not show their disloyalty face to face. They do not send precise memos outlining the differences in leadership, objectives, or direction of the church. They usually confide in a close friend. There is an old saying, "birds of a feather flock together". How true! People seem to gravitate to those that also complain. It is unfortunate but by the time you actually hear about this, the accuracy of any statements may have been compromised and likely altered.

We have addressed what disloyalty looks like and perhaps is not. We must remember that with any leadership, there will be those who will disagree with our leadership and direction styles. It is imperative that you surround yourself with trusted people that will stick by you and remaining faithful at all times. These are your staff. It might be a good thing to occasionally do a loyalty check to see how strong your staff is willing to stick by you in your vision and operations of leadership.

If you suspect a staff member being disloyal, there are certain steps to consider and take:

STEPS TO TAKE

Don't overreact. While there may be disbelief or hurt over what you are experiencing or have heard, determine what your next step will be. Understand that no one is perhaps as loyal as you are or what you wished them to be. This could be a time of teaching or you may find out that the reports are unfounded. By overreacting on a falsehood may jeopardize the trust and confidence your staff member desires from you.

Do not internalize/Keep feelings in check. While disloyalty in a staff member is never tolerated, there may be reasons why a staff member acted in the way he/she did. As leaders, our testimony of how we act in adversity can benefit others. The differences a staff member has may not be directed to you as a person but the method in the way or direction you are leading may be different or difficult for that staff member.

Analyze. Try to determine whether this was a lack of good communication on your part or whether there could be something more severe. Many issues, problems, disagreements often stem from a lack of effective communication.

Gather all your facts. Make sure you have an outline of all alleged infractions of disloyalty, whether they are verbal, written, or in action terms. It is embarrassing for a pastor to confront a leader without these. It looks as if the pastor is personally against that staff member or leader.

Verify. Verify all infractions, listing names, dates, and what type of alleged disloyalty occurred. It is very important to list those that are factual and provide a guideline to follow during your arranged meeting with that staff member and when determining a course of action.

Pray. Pray for wisdom.

Arrange. Schedule to meet with the staff member and confronting him/her about the allegations. You must confront this issue as a leader, whether the issues are true or false. While these could only prove to be rumors, together you can determine a course of action to stop this from spreading or getting out of control.

Meet. Present the allegations to the staff member. Give them ample time to respond to your research. If the evidence is incorrect and the staff member denies any wrongdoing and insists on staying in your employment or position, they must show you, in a very convincing manner, that the evidence is wrong. They may have insight as to why this has happened or team together to prevent any misunderstandings or rumors from re-occurring.

If the allegations are true, this is the time to demand and remind the staff member of the expectations that are required of that position. The pastor must be firm, direct, communicate the differences and determine whether there is a solution available. Some pastors might place a person on probation for awhile, meet more regularly with staff members to clarify the directions and expectations they have for that position, or dismiss that person.

It is our recommendation that a pastor clearly explains the expectations and disappointments to the staff member. If it is a **minor violation**, tell that staff member that everything will be considered and the likelihood of another meeting will be scheduled. This allows the pastor to have further thought, counsel, and prayer about how to deal with this person.

Another factor to consider is how repentant is the staff member if allegations are actually true? Again, on a minor issue, a pastor does not have to brow-beat them to death nor become so passive as to let things slide. You must continually express, in love, how serious this situation is. Remind them that trust has been broken and there are consequences for any action.

If it is a **major violation**, a pastor has to consider termination as the best option.

Keep emotions in check. Don't allow emotions or personal attacks from derailing you from your objective. Some pastors might even ask the staff member, "If you were me, what would you do? How would react to this information? How would you interpret the findings?"

Come to a conclusion. This will be the closing part of the meeting with an alternative course of action(s). This may include probation or ways to correct this in a structured way. Our suggestion is to have things in writing at the next scheduled meeting to ensure no misunderstandings or confusion with either party.

HOW TO DEAL WITH CORRECTION

Express. Express deep sorrow for what has happened.

Change. There needs to be visible change and repentance if reconciliation is a possibility.

Communicate. A pastor must clearly communicate the wrongdoing, outline expectations, and deliver a course of action, which may include termination if conditions continue.

Course of Action. Indicate that you are willing to work out differences but the responsibility lies with the staff member to prove themselves again.

Discipline. If discipline is required, such as time off without pay, seeking counseling, or eliminate privileges or benefits for a time period, these should be spelled out clearly. It is imperative that the timetable is clearly spelled out and that the staff member agrees in writing to all forms of discipline.

Make sure the staff member understands. It is a good policy to allow the staff member to recall what has happened, explain the expectations, and understand it may take some time to restore a working trust back to what it should be.

Arrange. Tell the staff member that you will be working closer with him/her to ensure that everything is going well and that if there are disagreements or misunderstandings that these must be brought directly to the pastor.

A word of wisdom to the pastor: If disloyalty crops up, address it immediately! Do not allow any issue to get out of hand or cause further problems for your church. You should demand no less than 100% loyalty. Remember you are called to your church for such a time as this. Be patient with others who may have differences in leadership or how to reach the same goal. We can use the talent and abilities of others around us but there is only one leader and we must clearly communicate our expectations to bring our vision forward in a unified manner.

Pastoral Care, Inc. is here to help assist you with counsel or help provide other materials that may be able to help you in this area. We are praying for the success of your ministry and hope that this outline has helped you achieve that.

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