

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

November, 2008, #29



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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Developing Staff Meeting Guidelines, by Jerrie Barber

One of my first responsibilities at Hendersonville is to lead staff meetings. When I go to a new congregation, my initial step in the process is to negotiate guidelines for the meeting. It is my observation that this is very important.

Family (group) rules are usually unspoken, unconscious, but understood. Since they are unspoken, they are often contradictory. Different people have different desires and expectations but they often expect others to have the same approach and values they have. That is why I like to start with the rules.

In our first meeting, I started by discussing the guidelines we would use to formulate the staff meeting guidelines. I used the Discussion Guidelines posted on my website. We then asked questions about staff meetings. The answers to those questions would be our rules for staff meetings. Here are the questions we asked in the first meeting:



Staff Meeting Guidelines

1. Why do we want (need) to have staff meetings?
2. How important are staff meetings?
3. What kind of relationship do we want to have as a leadership team?
4. How can we continue to develop that?
5. How will we celebrate and grieve as a group?
6. What is the best day of the week to have the meeting?
7. What time is best to start?
8. How long do we want the meeting to be?
9. Will we start on time?
10. Will we conclude on time?
11. Will each person have time to bring up concerns?
12. Could we have time for prayer and Bible study?
13. Will we have time for personal and spiritual growth?
14. What will be included in the staff meetings?
15. Will we be discussing people who are not present?
16. Will we let others know our schedule? Will we let the group know if we are going to be absent or late?
17. Who will be in the staff meetings?
18. When would others be brought in?
19. Where do we want to have the meetings?
20. How will we deal with interruptions, distractions?
21. What kind of discussion guidelines will we have for staff meetings?
 - a. Who will coordinate the meeting?
 - b. Will we have a right to all our feelings and can we express those?
 - c. Will we settle group business in the group or will we get in small groups afterwards and talk about each other?
 - d. May we disagree as well as agree with each other?
 - e. Will we have the rule of confidentiality?
 - f. What does that mean?
 - g. Will we be able to bring up old business when we feel that we have not finished with any issue?
 - h. Can we reevaluate guidelines?
 - i. When would we like to reevaluate?

Next month, I will list the guidelines we agreed to be the rules for staff meetings until we evaluate December 16.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

Let me be your servant:
 Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty;
 For in my youth I never did apply
 Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
 Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
 The means of weakness and debility



Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly: let me go with you;
I'll do the service of a younger man
In all your business and necessities.
[An older man's case for being allowed service]
As You Like It 2.2

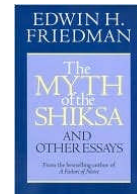
O good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweat for duty, not for meed!
As You Like It 2.2

Why, who cries out on pride,
That can therein tax any private party?
Doth it not flow as hugely as the sea,
Till that the weary very means do ebb?
[No person is alone guilty of pride: it flows everywhere]
As You Like It 2.7

Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you:
I thought that all things had been savage here.
[A confession by a young man who thought all in the forest was savage.]
As You Like It 2.7

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

The Myth of the Shiksha and Other Essays, by Edwin H. Friedman, © by
The Edwin Friedman Trust



From that point, it's relatively easy to get both parents and presidents to think that communication is a cerebral phenomenon depending on syntax, vocabulary, and rhetoric rather than an emotional process that depends on distance, direction, and anxiety. You know, people can't get near you unless they are moving towards you.

So that whenever you are pursuing or rescuing, your message will never catch up (pages 12, 13).

The important information categories of the soul (and they are the real bridges to community) are:

1. Knowing what you believe. I mean not only what you live for but what you'd die for.
2. Knowing where you begin and where other people who are important to you end.
3. Being able to preserve your own self, that is, having integrity, in a close relationship.
4. Having horizons that are not limited by what you can actually see.

5. Being able to stay on course when others sabotage you. By that I mean mustering up the self-regulation not to be reactive to the reactivity of others when you succeed at the above.
6. And, as I said earlier, making you own salvation dependent upon your own functioning rather than on using or saving others (pages 14, 15).

Several years ago a newspaperman doing a piece on the CIA reported his difficulties in coming up with the most elementary information about that super-secret organization. He was unable to obtain from them even the approximate number of employees who worked there, a fact which he felt was very important to his own story. Finally, in desperation, he called the Russian Embassy and promptly got the information (page 33).

I used to think that people did not tell others bad news in order to spare their feelings; now I believe it is so they won't have to deal with their own feelings (page 37).

It seems to me that whether one is viewing the macrocosm (society) or the microcosm (the family), most of the changes that take place in the social systems involve minor alterations rather than fundamental transformation. Further, few important changes follow from a deliberate act of will. I believe my survival as a therapist – by which I mean the fact that I am just as fascinated by the process of therapy today as when I conducted my first session – has to do with how I came to grips with the capacity of social systems of all sized to absorb those who try to change them (page 49).

Given my experience with nonchange in the face of society's tremendous efforts, and the power of multigenerational emotional processes to recreate old patterns, Bowen's offhanded remark concisely expressed a whole philosophy and even a methodology for promoting change in a nonwillful way. When the therapist's primary concern is understanding the human condition, a natural patience emerges that enables one to outwait the resistance demons that, like the swiftest horses, can beat humans only over a short course. Such an attitude also provides an automatic regulator of the therapist's own anxiety since if you genuinely want to learn, you must not be willful about life, but rather let it teach you. That means you try not to interfere too much with what you are observing, except in a manner that will bring it more into relief. Maintaining the stance of a learner also helps foster the right distance so necessary for permitting growth in others, obtaining objectivity about what is happening, and keeping clear the distinction between symptoms and underlying emotional processes. For all these reasons, I saw the "research approach" as the secret to remaining connected in a nonanxious way. When the task of the clinician becomes learning about life rather than imposing change, the challenge of therapy lies no longer in the contest of will with the client, but in satisfying one's own curiosity about what makes people tick (page 54).

I am after one thing, no matter what the symptom – promoting differentiation throughtout the system. This takes me totally out of the willful position of assuming I know what choices are best for my clients. For me, symptoms are not an enemy to be

eliminated but pathways that lead me in my quest to understand the system. And I assume once people begin to differentiate themselves, symptoms will atrophy (page 55).

Seriousness presents a paradox. If family members are not serious about their responsibilities, the family may become unstable and chaotic. But seriousness can also be destructive. This side of seriousness is more than an attitude; it is a total orientation, a way of thinking embedded in constant, chronic anxiety. It is characterized by lack of flexibility in response, a narrow repertoire of approaches, persistent efforts to try harder, an inability to change direction, and loss of perspective (pages 104, 105).

When our anxiety is low, our unencumbered thought processes enable us to differentiate from other forms of life, from previous generations, and from one another, but when our anxiety is high, what we think is thinking is merely mental activity (page 155).

Smile of the Month

My husband, Jeff, and I incurred several problems while assembling our new computer system, so we called the help desk. The man on the phone started to talk to Jeff in computer jargon, which confused us even more. "Sir," my husband politely said, "please explain what I should do as if I were a four-year-old."

"Okay," the computer technician replied. "Son, could you please put your mommy on the phone?" (*Reader's Digest*, June, 2001, page 64).



Barber Clippings

I am enjoying beginning the work with Hendersonville. We spent the month of October organizing staff meetings. I have taught Ladies Bible Class twice.

Elders and staff have been coming to our house for a meal and discussion. We have also introduced Cousin Zeke from Coon Creek to our guests.

I have been invited to several congregations to speak on special topics: leadership, conflict, appointing elders, foundations of our faith.

In January, I begin preaching in Hendersonville.

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John Parker

In my freshman classes at Lipscomb University, I am focusing on classic Christian hymns and material from my and Paul Seawright's book on great British hymns, to be published by New Leaf Press. My wife Jill is developing material on the life and teachings of Jesus for use in her teaching ladies classes beginning in the spring. It will include photographs which we took on our trip to Israel this summer.

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