

EFFECTIVE STAFFING FOR VITAL CHURCHES

The
E S S E N T I A L G U I D E
to Finding and Keeping the Right People

Bill Easum AND Bill Tenny-Brittian



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Foreword

When people look at struggling churches and the decline of self-identified Christians in America, a multitude of theories as to why this is happening and how the trends can be reversed are created. As a researcher, I can testify to the reality of these trends and the concern they cause among pastors and leaders whose hearts beat to see a genuine movement of God in North America. Long-term downward trends are very difficult to arrest, let alone turn around, yet I remain hopeful.

Much of the discussion surrounding how to reach unbelievers has focused around the “missional vs. attractional” debate, which is a needed conversation. In this book, however, Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian remind us of an often overlooked point: wise churches will pay close attention to staffing as it relates to their effectiveness. If the question “Does church staffing look different now than before?” is self-evident, then the question “How do we do staffing now?” surely is not. And the wrong answer will prove disastrous.

A long-accepted paradigm for staffing is that churches hire for each major ministry. The result is oftentimes a church that is top-heavy on payroll, with staff members working to justify their own existence. Such a situation makes it almost impossible for a church to maintain

an outward focus since so much time, energy, and money are needed to maintain the infrastructure.

Understanding the process of hiring church staff is just as important now as it has ever been. Financial constraints, the changing North American mission field, and personnel shortages conspire to make the task of hiring effective staff a real challenge. When Jim Collins observed in *Good to Great* the necessity of businesses having the wrong people off the bus, the right people on the bus, and the right people in the right seats, he could have been speaking directly to churches in the twenty-first century. In a similarly colorful analogy, Easum and Tenny-Brittian write: “Our favorite way of describing the effects one ineffective staff person can have on the entire staff is to think of a stagecoach being pulled by eight horses in full gallop—and one of the horses decides to sit down” (p. 27).

The new realities of our post-9/11, post-Great Recession, and post-postmodern world of ministry is that we have less margin for staffing mistakes. Strategic hiring is crucial for the mission of the church. Decisions about which positions to create and when to create them are just as important as who will ultimately fill them. When should a church move from volunteers to paid staff in a particular area of ministry? In what order should staff positions be created and filled? Thankfully, the authors do not limit their writing to theoretical or ethereal discussions about what should be versus what is. They include plenty of practical implementation for the “How” questions that will inevitably arise.

Ahead in this book, you will read the authors’ assertion that all effective churches are actually missional churches, and their argument that the church at Antioch is the best model for emulation. Even though the church in Jerusalem usually gets the lion’s share of pastoral and seminary attention, they stress that studying the Antioch church will help us to better understand leadership today. These are bold statements, to be sure, but ones that need to be considered if we are to break out of the evangelistic malaise currently enveloping the church in North America.

The current struggles we face in no way stifle God’s plan for his church, but it would still be foolish to ignore our drastically changing culture and not review our ministry strategies. The sons of Issachar, it

is worth remembering, understood their times *and* knew what Israel should do (see 1 Chron. 12:32). We pay them no heed at all if we assume to know what the church should do *without* understanding the times. This book will help us do both.

Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research
and coauthor of *Comeback Churches*

Introduction

Why Read This Book

With so many church books to choose from, it's reasonable to ask, "Why should I purchase this book?" Money is scarce, the cost of books is escalating, and there are more new books being published than ever before. We know this makes folks especially particular about which books they purchase. As pastors and consultants for several decades, we clearly see four reasons to pick up this one.

One: Money's Tight and Having the Right Staff Is Critical

In most churches the largest share of the annual budget goes to staff salaries. In recent history churches have largely depended on their staff to get congregational ministries up and running. Virtually every church we work with confesses to having a laity leadership vacuum and asks us how to get the most from the staff they have. A misstep in hiring and supervising staff isn't just expensive—it can be a congregational disaster.

Effective churches make the right staff choices. They have a supervision process that encourages growth and maturity. They know the difference between a player and a competent leader. Helping churches make efficient and effective staff choices is our underlying theme from the first page to the last.

Two: The Mission Field Has Changed

In the eyes of global Christianity, the United States is one of the largest mission fields in the world. Indeed, with the increase of immigration and diaspora of ethnicities from urban centers across the country, most communities can attest that the “world” has come to them. Add to that the rapid growth of the unchurched population and we’re faced with a game-changer for everything the church does, including how a church is staffed.

However, staffing for today’s church is only half the story. What about tomorrow’s church? Although we don’t profess to know your congregation’s future, throughout this book we’ll help you lay a foundation that will get you ready to face whatever comes.

Three: There’s a Shortage of Leaders

Contrary to what some have predicted, we believe the local church will continue to need paid, skilled, and gifted leaders to lead the church. But we agree that the role of unpaid and volunteer church leaders is becoming increasingly important. However, by now everyone should be aware that the available pool of church leaders is shrinking each year. There are fewer men and women entering seminary, graduating, and remaining in the congregational ministry than any time in recent memory. And it’s common knowledge that the number of people attending local churches has been in decline for decades.

As the pool of leaders dwindles, the chance of having or being a competent pastor or staff member declines proportionately. The key question that runs throughout this book is: Can today’s average pastor, staff, and volunteer become tomorrow’s exceptional leaders? We believe the answer is “Yes!”

Four: The Right Staffing Facilitates Church Growth

If you’ve been around the church block once or twice, you already know what the wrong staffing decisions can do to a church. Never mind the waste of resources; a bad hire can rip a congregation asunder and

even lead to the church's demise. But what many church leaders don't realize is that the right hires can facilitate a sustainable growth culture.

Whether you're a leader in a church of 25 or 2,500, your next staffing decision has the potential to make you . . . or literally to break you. We've provided the technicalities of who, how, and why to make your next staffing choice for any size church—and the church you'll become.

One last thing. We've each shared personal stories and experiences throughout the book to help illustrate both what works and what doesn't work. Comments that apply to Bill Easum are marked with (BE) and those that apply to Bill Tenny-Brittian with (BTB).

1

Every Church Is Missional, or It Isn't a Church

Originally the title of this book was *Staffing the Missional Church*. However, we decided against that title for three reasons:

1. We believe every church is missional, or it isn't a church! But we use the word a bit differently than most books written on the missional church. We believe every true church is focused more on transforming the world than on building up its own membership. We subscribe more to the type of ministry seen in the Antioch church than to the ministry of the Jerusalem church. The Antioch church was focused outward on the world, whereas the Jerusalem church was more focused on itself and how to care for its people.
2. We also believe churches that sit around waiting for people to come to them have stopped being a church, and that such a purely attractional¹ church has no validity on a mission field.
3. Finally, we believe a church can be a church with or without a building. The church isn't about buildings—it's about people. So we reject the longstanding exercise taught to children,



We refuse to adopt the typical usage of the word missional since we feel the word applies to every faithful and effective church.



adequately show the difference between the ineffective and effective church today.

So join us now on a journey of growth—yours, the kingdom’s, your church’s, and your people’s.

“Here’s the church; here’s the steeple; look inside and see all the people.”

Throughout the book you will overhear bits and pieces of the missional/attractational conversations going on today. But we refuse to adopt the typical usage of the word *missional* since we feel the word applies to every faithful and effective church. So we will occasionally use the words *attractional* and *missional* because they so

2

The Context for Everything

The emerging new world is changing everything, including how a church staff functions. Consider the following game-changers affecting every congregation and its staff.

People don't come to church on their own anymore. Now they must be brought by a friend, relative, neighbor, or co-worker. This is one of the most profound changes for Christianity in our lifetime.

When people do show up at church they are blank slates we must write on. In the past the majority of children in the United States either grew up in church, knew someone who did, or had at least some secondhand knowledge of what happens “at church.” No more. Once upon a time the faith was both taught and modeled for children at home, at church, and even in school. We all know that doesn't happen today. Now it takes longer and requires more staff to disciple a person than it did two decades ago.

When people think of Christians and church they are skeptical about our motives. In the past pastors were revered even by people who didn't attend worship. No more. Now before we can disciple someone we have to gain their trust.

People are defecting from the church in record numbers. In the past adults remained in church after their children went off to college. No

more. Today, parents are more apt to leave the church when their kids leave home than they are to remain in the church. That's why most effective churches focus much of their attention on the adults.

Global migration is changing demographics and culture. Between 1960 and 2000 the number of immigrants rose to 3 percent of the total population of developing countries. Yet the United States alone accounts for 20 percent of the world's immigrants, totaling more than 38 million people or almost 13 percent of the US population. Many of these immigrants are coming from some of the least reached groups of people.¹ In the near future if a church isn't multicultural it probably won't be growing—a profound effect on how a church is staffed.

The Result

Fewer people are attending worship today than ever before in the history of Western civilization, and when they do attend they are mostly clueless about what it means to be Christian.² Each decade the percentage of people attending worship drops.³ Although Gallup still reports that about 79 percent of the US population consider themselves “Christian,” these same polls also report that only 30 percent of the US population attend church regularly. In reality, even that 30 percent statistic is inflated. The fact is last weekend less than 17 percent of the US population graced the doors of a local congregation.⁴ In the eyes of the world, the United States is seen as one of the largest mission fields in the world. Thus Christians who share their faith will be more like backyard missionaries than they would like to think.

The Game Has Changed


*They don't come
to us anymore. We
must go to them.*

These changes have enormous implications for the way a church staffs and functions. Because people no longer come to church on their own, the church must spend most of its time, energy, and money filtering people out into the community. The measurement of effectiveness shifts from “How many in worship?” to “How much difference is

the church making in its efforts to transform the city?” The question “What is God doing in our community that we can be part of?” is replacing “How can we get more people to come to church?”

Today’s church must think *outward* rather than *inward*. Instead of doing programs in the church building designed to keep the members active, staff must make preparing disciples to go out into the world as backyard missionaries their primary role. If the church is going to adapt to the sea of changes underway, it has to be and think and become *mission*.

In the effective church staff members function more as scouts and coaches than as doers of ministry. The smaller a church, the more time its pastor must spend in the community rather than in the office or with church members. The larger the church becomes, the more likely it is to have a staff person whose primary responsibility is to discover and implement ministries in the community instead of in the church building. But in any size church both the pastor and the staff’s primary role is to provide a culture where people naturally connect with the unchurched.

Because people come to church as skeptical blank slates, discipleship and leadership development become more important than programs and courses designed to keep people involved and active in the church. Unless a skeptical blank slate is written on by a transformative experience with Jesus Christ, all the programs in the world will not keep that person connected to the body of Christ.

As a result of these changes, on-the-job ministry and coaching replaces in-church programs and courses. As we’ve said many times, “We are the curriculum.” They must see Jesus in us and in our actions. Although courses and programs that help disciple the unchurched can be used, they are no longer the primary thrust of evangelism.

Living on a Mission Field Changes the Kind of Staff Needed

If it’s true, and we believe it is, that we now live in one of the world’s biggest mission fields, then that must have a bearing on the kind of people we choose to lead our churches. Not just any staff



*Blank slates must
be written on.*





We have to listen to their story before we can tell them our story on the way to the story.



can step outside the walls of the institution and walk with Jesus on the road to mission. Not just any staff has a heart for people who haven't yet been transformed by Jesus. Not just any staff understands that it's not about them, but rather about submission to Christ. Not just any staff can internalize that it's all about the kingdom of God rather than growing a church. Finding the caliber of person to staff an effective church takes more than just looking through a few résumés or denominationally formatted "papers."

Living on a Mission Field Changes How a Staff Functions

Staffing an effective church is different than staffing the typical church of the past. It used to be most churches staffed primarily for the care and feeding of their members, and if any time was left over staff could attempt to reach out to the community. But even then church leaders looked for effective and innovative ways to proclaim, "Here we are; y'all come." Not so today.

Today the primary focus of an effective staff is the mobilization and empowerment of the entire congregation for the purpose of transforming the surrounding community and the world, which does result in the growth of the church as a by-product. This is a more "we have to go to them and meet them on their own terms" attitude. We have to listen to *their* story before we can tell them *our* story on the way to *the* story. Living on a mission field requires four huge shifts in how staff functions:

1. The shift from professional paid staff who direct volunteers in carrying out programs to paid servants who equip and coach unpaid servants to carry out most of the pastoral responsibilities. When this shift happens a church learns it can accomplish its goals with fewer paid staff.
2. The shift from using all paid staff to a combination of paid and unpaid servants to fill a role, or the use of unpaid servants as a

replacement for paid staff. When this shift occurs staff management becomes a key role for some key staff person.

3. The shift from seeing the needs of the congregation as the focus to seeing the penetration of the surrounding community as the focus. When this shift takes place the measurement of success changes.
4. The shift from a clear division between clergy and laity to more of an “it doesn’t matter if you’re ordained or not” attitude. When this shift takes place it frees up the church to develop the priesthood of believers.

So Why Have Staff at All?

Most people have a false understanding of why staff is needed. So let’s be clear from the beginning: staff should *never* be hired to do ministry! That’s right. The less ministry the staff does, the more people who are reached for Christ. And the more the kingdom grows and your church grows.

So what’s the purpose of staff? Simply put, the role of staff is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12 ESV). Staff creates an environment in which leaders at every level are equipped and encouraged to replicate the DNA of the church by living out their spiritual gifts. God built the church on the premise that every Christian has a gift and a calling to share with the world. It’s called the “priesthood of believers.” The role of staff is to ensure this happens.

A Few Conversations Can Help

A couple of years ago we had the opportunity to pull together a group of thirty-four pastors from a variety of backgrounds to talk about why their churches weren’t growing. Let’s listen in on some of their conversations.

“I just don’t understand why my church isn’t growing,” Sam said. “We were growing until we got to a little over a hundred in worship, and then we leveled off. We haven’t grown any in the last year and I’m working harder than ever. Our volunteers are excellent, our fellowship

is solid, and I'm preaching better than ever, but we can't seem to get over one hundred. What gives?"

"I don't understand either," Andy chimed in. "I hired the best worship leader we could afford and we rocketed to over three hundred in worship and then leveled off. Our worship is outstanding, but we can't seem to get over this barrier. I just don't understand."

"Well, I can go you one better," said Chuck. "The first five years we went from twenty to two thousand people in worship. Then we hit the wall and now we're on a plateau. Our staff is working harder than ever. We've added four new staff people. We can't figure out why we aren't growing."

Jim jumped in with his sad story. "I'm baffled too. We're stuck at two hundred in worship even after raising extra money to hire a full-time youth director. But that hasn't helped us grow one bit. I need help."

"I've got a different problem," said Toby. "We rapidly grew to four hundred and then began to decline. We're now around three hundred and I don't understand why, because we have the same worship, same programs, and same staff we had when we were at four hundred in worship. Everyone is working hard, but we've started declining and I don't have a clue."

Sarah finally unloaded. "We outgrew our space when we reached five hundred, so we built a new worship center and our attendance went to seven hundred overnight—but three years later we're down to about four hundred. I don't get it."

We began to ask some questions. We asked Sam what his plans were for hiring staff. His response was telling. "I haven't given that much thought. We're not a big church and don't have any money to staff. We've got to learn how to grow without paid staff."

Next we asked Andy, who was doing his children's ministry, to share his plans for hiring staff. "Volunteers," was his reply.

Then we asked Jim why he hired a youth director. He replied, "I've always heard that the youth are the future of the church."

We then turned to the megachurch pastor and asked him what plans he had for adding staff. Chuck's response was deadly. "I've already added four new staff the past three years. Surely you aren't saying I need to add more!"

At this point, we asked Sarah whether or not she built in additional staff to take care of the influx of people because of the new building. Her reply? “No. We could barely afford the building!”

Finally we asked Toby to describe his staff for us. His reply was all over the map. “We have two part-time program staff and one secretary. All of them are doing an excellent job. The only problem I have with the staff is I wish they had more relationships throughout the church.”

So what’s going on here?

After some conversation it was clear that these pastors had all committed a fatal mistake: they didn’t understand the importance or the dynamics of staffing a church, much less staffing it for growth.

The thought of paid staff hadn’t entered Sam’s mind when he should have been looking for a worship leader. Andy was trying to take his church through the five hundred barrier with only two staff people. Chuck had allowed rapid growth to outgrow the staff’s ability to form enough relationships to be able to identify and grow future leaders, so his church stopped growing. Jim hired a youth director when he should have hired a worship leader. Sarah allowed the church to build so it could expand, but she didn’t think through the reality that more people always means more staff. Toby didn’t understand that one staff person can only relate to a hundred people, and as a result he hadn’t added any staff as they grew, and they receded back to the amount of people the staff could relate to.

So, here is our starting point: more than anything else, how a church staffs determines how many people a church can reach for Christ. A congregation’s most valuable assets are the gifts, skills, and passion quotient of the paid staff. How a church staffs, and what it expects staff to accomplish, are two of the most important decisions church leaders ever make. A mistake here throws everything the congregation attempts out of balance.

The average church in the West doesn’t grow beyond 125 in worship. Many reasons have been given for this inability to grow larger. Some blame it on the concept of the family



*A congregation’s
most valuable assets
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and passion quotient
of the paid staff.*



church, where the congregation prefers to know everyone rather than everyone in town knowing God. Others blame it on the dysfunctional nature inherent in small churches. Still others blame it on a lack of leadership from the lead pastor. While all of these obviously *could* play a part in the inability of small churches to grow, we don't think they are the primary reasons most churches stay below 125 in worship.

Our consulting experience and research have taught us the primary reason for the inability of churches to grow beyond 125 in worship is that no one in the church understands the importance and dynamics of staffing a church for growth. Most churches reach one hundred in worship without ever thinking about how they are going to staff the church. Instead of preparing the church for the addition of staff, the pastor just works harder and takes responsibility for more and more ministry, which eventually burns out the pastor and keeps the church from growing.

When a church is small one pastor can grow it without much help. We've seen pastors grow a church to four hundred in worship with almost no staff. We've also watched pastors like that crash and burn because they did not adequately staff the church. On the other hand, we've never seen a church grow beyond five hundred without the addition of paid staff.

As a church grows in size, the role of staff becomes more important.

In churches under 150 in worship nothing is more important than how the lead pastor recruits and equips unpaid servants. The key skill the pastor needs is learning how to hold these unpaid servants as accountable as paid staff would be. The biggest mistake made at this point is hiring (or recruiting) just anyone, whether or not they're qualified, and then failing to give them clear expectations.

In churches over 150 in worship nothing is more important than the lead pastor learning how to staff with paid people. The challenges the pastor faces here are that the people don't understand the need for paid staff, the pastor has difficulty relinquishing control of all ministry, the pastor hires someone to "do" ministry, or the pastor doesn't know how to manage people.

When a church reaches five hundred in worship, the primary challenge facing the lead pastor is the staffing issue. More time must be focused on staff as compared to the whole church. New skills are

demanded of the pastor along with a willingness to allow others to receive the credit or the blame for their ministry. At this size it takes only one unaligned staff person to derail the entire progress of the church.

Our favorite way of describing the effects one ineffective staff person can have on the entire staff is to think of a stagecoach being pulled by eight horses in full gallop—and one of the horses decides to sit down. Can you imagine what would happen? That’s the same thing that happens when all staff except one are hitting on all cylinders.

As churches grow beyond the one thousand mark staffing issues tend to be spread throughout the core staff, both paid and unpaid. It’s not unusual for several paid staff to do the hiring and firing of those who work within their area of responsibility. Often this will be an office manager or business manager taking on the supervision of the office and maintenance people and/or an executive pastor supervising the pastoral/program staff. Or, in the case of multiple site congregations, the campus pastor taking responsibility for their campus’s staff.

No matter what size it is, the number one reason a church plateaus or declines is because of staffing issues.

The Keystone of Staffing

A keystone is the central building block at the top of an arch that keeps the entire structure from collapsing. It is the anchor or central cohesive source that holds everything together. In the case of staffing an effective church, the keystone has four characteristics that apply to every staff member, no matter what position they have in the church.

1. Every staff person assists in equipping and sending people out into the mission field to be backyard missionaries. Everyone works for a single goal—the transformation of the individual, the community, and the world. Instead of seeing ministry taking place “at the church,” they understand that ministry takes place “in the world.”
2. The primary role of staff is to create a culture of transformation that produces disciples and leaders. Instead of seeing the

primary role of staff as taking care of people, they understand their primary role has become transforming people.

3. Staff functions as scouts and coaches rather than doers of ministry. Instead of being hired to *do* programs, staff members are hired to *be* scouts and coaches. They are always on the lookout for future leaders and are always coaching their current leaders to the next level. Like baseball scouts sent to the minor leagues, staff sees the church and surrounding community as a recruiting field, not to get people to sit on committees and do the bidding of the church, but to invite people into a growth process through which they find their place within the body of Christ. Everywhere staff members go, including Sunday morning and weekend services, they are scouting for future leaders. And when they find recruits, they understand their role is to coach them into a ministry that brings fulfillment to them and the body of Christ.
4. Each staff person does their share of generating both personal and numerical congregational growth. Once a church moves past three or four hundred in worship, explosive growth cannot rest solely on the shoulders of the lead pastor. Staff must assume more responsibility for growth. Each department in the church must have clearly defined growth goals that can be evaluated and for which they are held accountable throughout the year. Staff must feel the same pressure to grow their departments as the lead pastor feels for growing the church. Instead of a management mentality, all staff, including support staff, must have a growth mentality. Effective staff members identify and find ways around the growth barriers in their department.

These four paradigm shifts are fundamentally changing the game when it comes to staffing a church and being the Church.

Now we must turn our attention to how the congregation members function as backyard missionaries. Only when members begin functioning as backyard missionaries does viral evangelism become possible.