

TOXIC LEADERSHIP:

5 PEOPLE CHURCHES SHOULD NEVER HIRE



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ABOUT THIS EBOOK

Nothing will muck up a growing church faster than a few bad hires (or, frankly, even one bad hire). Every hire you make changes the dynamics of your church staff. In this ebook, you'll learn about five people you don't want on your church staff. They're often great people. They do good work, and may someday have Kingdom influence somewhere. But you don't want them on your church staff. To help you catch these five staff candidates before you hire them, this ebook will teach you three easy interview "tells" that'll give you clues to whom you're speaking.

About echurch

Pushpay and echurch were created in response to well-documented declines in both tithing and church attendance. By simply making giving available on your congregation's smartphones (connected in real time to a church's website and database), we help pastors address the disconnect between the church and younger, tech-savvy generations.

Engagement is the key to community. In our fast-paced culture, mobile technology is essential to staying connected with people in your church. When you are accessible from their pocket, you open up communication with your members and allow them to give you a gift or connect with you anytime. Mobile adoption is the secret to engagement, and we have the tools to ensure your success.

If you're interested in learning more about how you can keep your church engaged and giving, visit echurchgiving.com.

About Tobin Perry

Tobin Perry has served as a writer and editor for Saddleback Church, the North American Mission Board, and the International Mission Board, where he has frequently focused on church leadership issues. He has also served as the lead pastor of a church in Southern Indiana. He has written for numerous publications, including Christianity Today, HomeLife, ParentLife, Baptist Press, and On Mission magazine, and has ghostwritten for a number of Christian ministry leaders. He was also a contributing writer for Zondervan's The Jesus Bible. A graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism and Gateway Seminary (formerly Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary), Tobin lives with his wife and three children in Evansville, IN. For more information about Tobin, visit www.tobinperry.com.

All of the first person pronouns in this book are his.

NEVER TRADE FOR DWIGHT HOWARD

(OR WHY YOUR CHURCH STAFF
CULTURE MATTERS)

Heading into the 2012-2013 season, the Los Angeles Lakers had a great team (at least on paper). With Kobe Bryant and Pau Gasol on the squad, the Lakers had a core intact that had already won two titles just a few years earlier. Then the team brought in two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash to run the offense as its point guard.

But the crowning achievement of the off-season had been the trade for the enigmatic center Dwight Howard. Three-time league defensive player of the year, he had been the best center in the league for the past five seasons.

Despite the fact that defending champion Miami Heat had the NBA's undisputed best player and a highly touted team, many (like Bleacher Report) thought the Lakers could eclipse them in 2012-2013 and bring home the franchise's 17th world championship. Arash Markaszi of ESPN wrote that the Lakers "were not only expected to win the title but to do so in record-breaking fashion."

But it wasn't to be. Despite four potential Hall of Famers, the team lost four of their first five games, fired their coach, only won 45 games that year, and were swept out of the first round of the playoffs. Nash got hurt, but the real problem came between the team's two best players. Dwight Howard and NBA legend Kobe Bryant never saw eye to eye. Anyone who had paid attention to basketball for the last few seasons saw it coming. Bryant had been famously intense his whole career. His laser focus on winning couldn't be diverted.

Howard, on the other hand, had been just the opposite. Known as a "big kid" on the court, Howard didn't take anything too seriously. And when the team's play began to go south in 2012-13, the big man sulked.

Team chemistry killed their championship aspirations.

It'll kill your church, too.

Your church isn't aiming for an NBA title. You have a bigger and much more important goal: make much of Jesus in your community and around the world. Eternities hang in the balance of what you do. Communities depend upon you.

You can't afford to put Dwight Howard on your team. Some in the secular world have claimed that bad hiring decisions can cost employers two-and-half times a candidate's annual salary. Writing about church staffs in particular, Holly Tate suggests that churches need a "Bad Hire Fund" to mitigate against some of the costs associated with the transition of a staff member who was a poor fit (such as the inevitable decrease in giving when it happens). She specifically cites the bad hire of a senior pastor but adds that poor hires of other staff members—like a small group pastor or volunteer director—can bring a decrease in giving as well. In fact, Vanderbloemen Search Group has a "Bad Hire Calculator" on its website to help you figure out what those costs might be.

But money isn't the biggest problem. It's what a bad hire does to the working relationships among your staff.

Sarah Robins writes, "Working in ministry is not easy. Often, churches are already understaffed or their leadership is working overtime and are stretched-thin. By adding the strain of a bad hire, it can become a huge drain on the church staff's morale or create a toxic staff culture. Whether the bad hire was a poor fit, divisive, lazy, or simply ill-equipped to do their job, their presence (and their leaving) creates a ripple through the staff that lasts even after they've left."

Bad hires simply aren't worth it. No church can ever completely insulate themselves from the potential of bad hires. But in this ebook, you'll be introduced to five profiles you don't want to hire.

Just to be clear from the outset, these five potential hires aren't bad people. They may make great contributions some day to a Kingdom-advancing church.

You just don't want them on your staff right now. Your church's reputation with your community, your ministry effectiveness, and your gospel witness are on the line.

Not even Dwight Howard is worth that risk.

THE 5 PEOPLE NOT TO HIRE

If you were to sit at a table with the five people highlighted in this ebook, you'd likely be impressed. They may have top-notch credentials on their resumes, engaging personalities, and even godly character.

But don't take the bait.

The moment you make that job offer to one of these five people, you can't take it back.

So stop. Think hard. Pray harder. Ask yourself if you're hiring one of these five people you're about to read about.

In the following pages, you'll not only get the who and the why of bad hires, but you'll get three "tells" that'll clue you in on the kind of person you're interviewing. If you think you might have a few of these people on your team already, this ebook will tell you how to improve the situation moving forward.

BLAMING BONNIE

You'll find a victim or two on just about every team. You can't miss them. They can point to a cause for every problem—in their own ministry and in the broader church ministry. But it's never about them.

When a ministry event fails, someone else missed an assignment. When a ministry contact doesn't get made, it's because someone else put it on her calendar. When she leaves a church, Blaming Bonnie isn't the problem. The church was too traditional, too liberal, too careless, or too out-of-touch. Her old boss was too controlling, too lazy, too forgetful, or too incompetent.

There's one thing you won't hear one thing from Blaming Bonnie: "It was my fault." Almost never. Victims blame other people for any deficiency in their ministries. Blaming Bonnie can destroy teams. When she makes a mistake, she won't care who she blames. She'll lob grenades everywhere, hurting anyone who happens to be in her path. No one wants to serve with her.

Workplace trainer Curt Newport writes, "The amount of damage a single blamer can inflict on your entire organization far outweighs whatever benefit they might bring to the table. It doesn't matter WHO they are."

Staying away from putting Blaming Bonnie on your staff isn't just good for a smoother ministry environment; it may save you from future litigation. Employment lawyer Alan Rupe suggests that employees who exhibit a tendency for blaming may be much more likely to sue you when the job turns sour.

"Workers who blame co-workers, their supervisor, their job assignment or their lack of training for their own poor performance often take the next step of blaming a supervisor and claiming discrimination or retaliation instead of admitting poor performance," Rupe writes.

3 SIGNS YOU'RE INTERVIEWING BLAMING BONNIE

When asked about why she left previous ministry assignments, she points to the perceived failures of others. Of course, sometimes someone else does need to own the failure, but you can always own part of it. When failures come up, Blaming Bonnie points the finger elsewhere.

She refuses to take responsibility for negative outcomes in her ministry. Whenever these negative outcomes come up in the interview, you'll hear the word "I" mysteriously absent from the discussion.

She has shown little growth in personal ministry development. When you don't admit failure, you don't grow. It's nearly impossible to grow as an employee (and absolutely impossible to grow as a disciples of Jesus) if you can't learn from mistakes. If you don't see professional or ministry growth in the person, you may be interviewing a blamer.

Ask Blaming Bonnie This Question

Tell me about an effort you led in ministry (or work) where you failed. What did you learn from that failure?

What to Do if You've Already Hired Blaming Bonnie

Whenever something goes wrong related to Blaming Bonnie's work, make sure she owns something about it. This may prove to be difficult, particularly if she has narcissistic tendencies. But keep pressing toward the goal.

OLD-SCHOOL OLLIE

No one would deny that the fundamentals of ministry haven't changed much in the past 2,000 years of church history.

Paul's description of ministry giftedness in Ephesians 4:12-13 as building up "the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That still rings true today.

And it always will.

But how we do ministry constantly changes.

The website theemergingfuture.com says that in five years technology will be 32 times more advanced than it is right now. In a decade, it'll be 1,000 times more advanced.

And in 20 years, it'll be a million times more advanced.

Our ministry processes will have to adapt to the advancing ways our world communicates.

Old-School Ollie just doesn't get this. Worse yet, he doesn't want to get it.

Old-School Ollie doesn't just prefer past methods. He denigrates new ones. He makes fun of people who prefer technology. At times, he may even use scripture to downplay the need for using newer technologies.

But is Old-School Ollie really toxic to your staff culture?

He can be. If you're a church committed to reaching millennials, count on it. If everytime you push forward with new methods (particularly new communications tools) he pushes back, you'll have a problem.

3 SIGNS YOU'RE INTERVIEWING OLD-SCHOOL OLLIE

He loves to talk about the “good old days.” He'll go on and on about when ministry was “done right.” This good old days might be the 1950s, 1970s, or some other decade. It won't take you long to find it.

He criticizes new ministry or professional methods. He will have nothing good to say about new methods. He'll let you know how these new methods distort the Christian message, get in the way of real ministry, and lead to a crumbling society. Sometimes, the critiques are valid. But Old-School Ollie can't take the good and leave the bad. It's all or nothing.

He makes up fictional names of modern communications tools. If you've ever watched New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick discuss social media, you're familiar with the approach. You may hear words like “Facegram,” “MyFace,” and “LinkedUp.” It's a typical approach for Old-School Ollie as he tries to lash out at technological change.

Ask Old-School Ollie This Question

What's one thing you learned this past year that changed how you did ministry for the better?

What to Do if You've Already Hired Old-School Ollie

You need to determine where Ollie is in his career. If he is nearing retirement, be gentle. Put him in positions that minimize the damage he can have on the rest of the staff. While all church staff should see the value in adapting to new ministry models, it's certainly more critical in some positions than others. If Ollie is relatively young (which isn't unheard of), re-iterate the value your church places on forward-thinking. Try to determine whether Ollie's views stem from theological conviction or personal preference.

DO-EVERYTHING DAN

Every church wants to hire a hard worker—a person who understands that he is faithfully serving the Lord as he serves the church. You want to hire a person with a vision for all God wants to do through his ministry

Just make sure he knows his job.

Do-Everything Dan doesn't. You can't hire enough Do-Everything Dans.

No, literally, you can't hire enough. You can't afford to hire enough!

You see, Do-Everything Dan does everything. If he is on your ministry staff, he makes every visit, teaches every lesson, and calls every widow. If he is on your custodial staff, he scrubs every floor, cleans every toilet, and locks every door.

Volunteers don't stand a chance. And since Do-Everything Dan will eventually get worn out, you won't have volunteers to lean on when that happens. You'll have to hire additional staff to do what Do-Everything Dan won't lend to volunteers.

The call to ministry—whether in pastoral leadership or support staff—is a call to equip new leaders. The fastest-growing churches in America realize this.

Eric Geiger writes, “As a church grows, staff and pastors must move from doing all of the ministry to equipping others to do the ministry. Equipping is necessary because it is biblical, not only because it is practical. But in a growing church, if a staff does not learn to build teams of people who serve, the growth is hampered. A non-equipping staff member is quickly exposed on the staff of a growing church.”

If Dan does everything, volunteers are immobilized. Gifts and talents stay on the bench. Your staff gets overworked. The extra work won't just fall on Dan either. You'll slowly change the church culture from “all of us serve together” to “the staff serves the congregation.”

It's more dangerous than you might imagine.

3 SIGNS YOU'RE INTERVIEWING DO-EVERYTHING DAN

He minimizes the potential of volunteers to serve in his field. Do-Everything Dan doesn't think volunteers are needed. He can do the job better. Mobilizing volunteers is simply a waste of time and money.

He shows few characteristics of a good "equipper." Good equippers know how to get the best out of other people—like a great point guard in basketball. A person without a track record of making other people better may be a Do-Everything Dan.

He shows signs of low self-esteem. At first observation, it might seem like someone who won't delegate suffers from elevated ego. Typically, that's not true. Do-Everything Dan usually fears if he delegates his work to someone else it will minimize his value to the congregation. He doesn't want to risk that.

Ask Do-Everything Dan This Question

How will you involve volunteers in your work at the church?

What to Do if You've Already Hired Do-Everything Dan

Take the time to make the biblical case for lay involvement in ministry to Do-Everything Dan. Also, help Dan see the ministry value of mobilizing lay leaders. The more volunteers you mobilize, the more your church can impact the surrounding community.

PRAYERLESS PATTY

Prayerless Patty would do an amazing job at the corporation down the street, the school around the corner, or the restaurant across town. She's talented. She's a good teammate.

But she doesn't have one indispensable quality of a church staff member: a growing call to make much of Jesus through the local church.

You need God-gifted individuals on your church staff. You want people who can bring excellence to your church's ministry.

Yet no matter what the role—whether it's ministry staff, janitorial, or tech support—you need a growing disciple of Jesus in every spot on your church staff.

Pastor Paul Chappell describes it this way: “The role of a church staff member is larger than sitting at a desk and getting work done. Those you hire become a representation of you.”

Invite Prayerless Patty to be a part of your staff and you risk massive confusion about the mission of your church—both inside your staff and outside of it. You hire out of your values or they cease to be your values. As a New Testament church, part of those values include a commitment to growing discipleship. A staff member who isn't a growing disciple of Jesus will not reflect that value to your community.

3 SIGNS YOU'RE INTERVIEWING PRAYERLESS PATTY

She can't describe her personal devotional practices. She may mumble out something about her prayer life and Bible study practices, but dig a bit deeper and it's clearly a cover for her lack of intimacy with God.

She leaves her relationship with God out of any discussion of her personal story and professional goals. God simply isn't a part of any meaningful aspect of her life.

She gets defensive when you dig deeper into her spiritual life. Prayerless Patty knows that by initiating an employment process at a church, her lack of spiritual depth may get rooted out. Her focus will be getting the job. If she believes your spiritual questions may get in the way of that, she'll defend herself in any way she can.

Ask Prayerless Patty This Question

How does your relationship with God impact how you see your work?

What to Do if You've Already Hired Prayerless Patty

Involve Prayerless Patty in ongoing discipleship in your church. Connect her with a same-gender discipleship partner who can help her grow in her relationship with Christ. Insist to the entire staff, on a regular basis, that all staff members should see their roles as ministry opportunities.

IVORY TOWER IVAN

Ministry can't be done in isolation. Anyone you hire on your church staff must understand this. Not everyone has to be an extrovert, but good people skills are critical, particularly in a local church.

You'll find a couple of different types of Ivory Tower Ivans applying for work at your church. For example:

The theologian: He digs into the Bible like no one else. Unfortunately, that's all he wants to do. Building relationships with people in the community or people in the congregation doesn't interest him. He prepares amazing Bible lessons or sermons, but he doesn't connect well with other people (which often means he doesn't deliver the material he has put together as well as he could). He has lots to contribute to kingdom-ministry efforts, but he may be best suited for a seminary career or at a parachurch ministry.

The artisan: Excellent at his craft (whether that's working on computers, designing websites, cleaning the church, etc.), the artisan would prefer to do his work and be left alone.

Despite Ivory Tower Ivan's great passion for his work and his potential for kingdom involvement, he won't make a strong local church staff member. All ministry roles (which is every role in the local church) rest on the calling to lead flesh-and-blood people.

Again, this doesn't mean you can't be an introvert and serve on a church staff. Some of the most significant Christian leaders in history have been introverts. It means you need to hire people who care about people. Sure, people may drain an introvert's energy, but they're still passionate about seeing Christ formed in people.

He tells you he isn't a people-person. Not everyone can be a "people-person," but you should think really hard about hiring someone without people skills for a local church ministry role.

3 SIGNS YOU'RE INTERVIEWING IVORY TOWER IVAN

When asked about why he left past jobs, it's clear inter-personal conflict played a key part. This is by no means a certainty. Some Ivory Tower Ivans have no issue with interpersonal conflict. But if you're interviewing a younger (and theoretically less mature) candidate, you'll certainly see this pop up.

When sharing his story, people play a minor role. Hiring managers love to ask candidates to share their story. You'll notice Ivan will mention few people when he does this. Why would he? They've played a minimal part in his life so far.

Ask Ivory Tower Ivan This Question

Can you tell me about a person outside of your family whom you've invested your life in during the past six months?

[Bonus Question] Describe a conflict you had at work. How did you resolve it?

What to Do if You've Already Hired Ivory Tower Ivan

Encourage Ivory Tower Ivan to step out of his comfort zone. Be patient. It's likely not an easy shift for him. Your goal isn't to turn him into an extrovert. Your goal is to improve his people skills and encourage him to make an effort at connecting with other people. You'll find a variety of great classes out there that can help employees improve people skills.

THE 6 CHARACTERISTICS YOU NEED IN TEAM MEMBERS

It's never enough to talk about what kind of teammates you don't want on your staff. For every Dwight Howard you could bring onto your team, there's bound to be a Shane Battier—the smart, gritty forward who helped the Miami Heat win back-to-back titles a few years back.

Howard had the fancy hardware (multiple All-NBA first teams, Defensive Player of the Year awards, etc.).

Battier had all the characteristics coaches look for in good players. He was smart, a hard worker, and a conscientious teammate. And he had championship rings to show for it.

You'll have a similar decision when hiring for your church staff. Go for the flashy superstar who is a poor fit or the gritty hire with all the important intangibles.

What are the intangibles that lead to a winning combination and will impact your community for years to come? Start with these.

Multiplier. Jesus gives every one of His followers a job description: “make disciples” [Mat. 28:19]. No one gets a pass on this. Staff members don't typically see themselves as practitioners, but you can use all the practitioners you can get. All church staff must be able to train a new generation of leaders in whatever ministry they are in.

Team-Player. No ministry is a solo effort. The New Testament describes ministry as something that's done in the context of a local church. Make sure whoever you hire has a track record of working well with others. A good teammate makes everyone else better.

Grows in Intimacy with Jesus. You're putting together a team that will turn your community upside down for Jesus. Don't settle for staff members who can do their jobs with excellence but don't truly get why they're doing it. Make the effort to find people who are growing in their relationship with Christ.

Forward Thinker. You need staff who know how to minister in the context of the 21st century, not the 20th. This isn't about age either. Look for staff who are willing to adapt to current ministry models—and to technology.

Exemplifies Your Values. Your values can't simply be words on a page in some dusty employee handbook. For them to guide the ministry practices of your church, they must guide the work of your staff. If you claim to have a passion to reach new people with the gospel, then hire people with a pattern for personal evangelism in their lives. If you value authenticity, hire people with a track record of demonstrating it. Go through your set of church values as you pray through any potential new hire.

Handles Conflict. Nothing will detonate a church staff quicker than unresolved conflict. You're not looking for people who avoid conflict or charge forward uncritically. You want to bring people on your team who know how to handle conflict in a healthy, biblical manner.

You'll never find a perfect candidate for any open position you have. But if you pursue the characteristics above (and avoid the five described throughout the rest of this ebook), you'll take a great step forward.

Shane Battier is out there.

Don't settle for Dwight Howard.

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