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5 Characteristics

**OF CHURCH STAFF TEAMS THAT
BREAK THE 1,000 BARRIER**

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Only 2% of churches will ever see a weekend service attendance upward of 1,000 people. [ref] This particular growth barrier really is a gigantic challenge for church leaders, akin to low-oxygen at high-altitudes setting. **Of all the challenges that present themselves to leaders who are looking to see their church break this barrier and go beyond - the leadership of the staff team might be among the most profound and complex.** You could be asking yourself how you manage your team better, to witness your church break this barrier.

Through my own personal experience over 20 years of ministry in helping three churches across the 1,000 barrier, over [200+ podcast interviews](#) with churches who have broken this barrier and through my coaching practice of churches who are in the process of breaking this barrier, I have come across many diverse groups of staff teams. In my observations, I have attempted to condense the common traits of the teams who are able to break this barrier!

Subject Matter Experts vs. Jack-Of-All-Trades

Every staff member of churches that attempts to break the 1,000 barrier needs to instill a fundamental change of focus in their staff members. From being generalists to becoming much more specialized, is one of the toughest shifts of perspective that a staff

member will face. It is difficult for long-term team members to identify their greatest field of contribution to the church, especially when they are used to doing so much. The “mindset shifts” that could help your team through this transition include:

- **Only Do What Only You Can Do** // Helping each team member get a clear picture of their greatest contributions to the mission and then freeing them up to “double down” on that area to help the church grow. Then release them from all other responsibilities.
- **Got Us Here... Won't Necessarily Get Us There** // We all need to humbly hold onto our roles within the leadership of the church. We need to acknowledge that even though we led the church to this phase, we might not have what it takes to lead it through its next journey.
- **Leader vs. Doer** // Churches are often built on the back of great “doers”. However, in order to grow to the next level, your staff need to focus on leading people to the ministry rather than being the primary implementers.
- **Hire Smarter People Than You** // If you are the smartest person in the room... you're in the wrong room! The future of

the staff team lies in acquiring more qualified team members to shore up areas of the ministry where we anticipate growth.

- **Leaders are Learners** // Growing churches are led by growing leaders. A commitment to seeing the church grow means that as leaders, we are committed to constant growth in our personal, spiritual, emotional and leadership lives. Digging in your heels and refusing to grow disqualifies you from leading.

Establishing “Middle Management”

The average church in America has one full-time staff member for every eighty-seven attendees. [ref] That means a church of 1,000 people has about a dozen staff. There are studies about “span of control” that look at the optimal number of “direct reports” for any single staff member. However, all these studies conclude that between 5-15 is the maximum number of people that any leader can sufficiently lead. [ref] **When a church staff team gets close to a dozen full team staff members it is already pushing the outer limits of what is considered “optimal” management practice even in the most extreme examples.** This does not take into account that studies uniformly show that a smaller “span of control” are most desired in senior management roles because it speeds up decision making and collaboration.



These leadership dynamics mean that a church looking to break the 1,000 barrier is going to need to add a “middle management” layer beyond the lead pastor to manage the staff team. Often, this is a “leadership team” that reports to

the lead pastor and the rest of the staff report to a member of that team. The impact on the team of this sort of shift is beneficial but can also come with a series of challenges that the leadership needs to consider carefully. Here are some the challenges of this leadership structure change challenges that can crop up during this shift:

Lead Pastor Challenges:

- “What’s happening at the church?” // Sometimes the lead pastor can find themselves wishing for the old days when all roads lead to them but they must resist this temptation and allow the team to lead certain aspects of the ministry.
- Now, what do I do? // Crazy as it sounds, Lead Pastors might find it tough to deal with the newly available free time. A renewed focus on their contribution to the ministry can be gained in this period through prayer and meditation.

New Lead Team Member Challenges:

- Peer Leadership // Typically, these team members previously had “peer” relationships with people that they are now above them in the organizational hierarchy. These relationships must be handled with care, delicacy, and humility.
- Leader, not Doer // (Same as above!) These team members need to shift their mindset into how they lead the team primarily rather than “doing” the work of the ministry themselves.

Broader Staff Team Member Challenges:

- “I feel left out. I used to know everything.” // As specialization and reporting structures take over, team members can feel isolated from information flows and old relationships that used to be key to their ministry.
- “This is getting too corporate.” // Ministry used to be brokered around kitchen tables but now there are conference room tables ... We used to all do everything together but now we’re more siloed.

Church Community Challenges:

- **Titles, Authority & Care** // As the team stratifies, there can be a bifurcation among the staff that cares for the people and the team that is leading the church. Handling the delicate job of role assignment in this new structure is a job that needs to be done with great care and consideration.
- **Access to the Lead Pastor** // Although churches don't get to this size by holding onto the notion that the lead pastor handles all the care and support for the people. The shift to middle management can cause the distance between members who have needs to be met, with other care structures.

Administrative Staff to Increase Scale

Although lots of churches, which are considerably smaller than this have the prototypical “church secretaries” that provide a wide range of administrative support to the ministry, as the church grows a renewed belief in the importance of administrative support comes to the forefront. **There is an understanding that administrative functions at this level are more about scaling up the impact of staff team rather than just “offloading” functions that some team members don't want to do.** Finding ways to strategically deploy an administrative layer of staff so the leadership can widen and deepen their impact needs to be considered at this stage of development in your church. Here are a few areas that the churches looking to break the 1,000 barrier should consider adding administrative staff to:

- **Executive Assistants** // A high functioning support to the lead pastor and/or key staff to help them be more accessible to the church and the broader community. More than managing schedules these team members proactively help team members scale up their influence and impact in a wide variety of ways.
- **Office Manager** // Typically somewhere 50% of the church's budget is spent on staff and that number gets large enough that ensuring a smoothly functioning office environment provides productivity outcomes that are felt across the church.

- **Content Support** // Teaching Pastors might consider adding writers or researchers to message their prep routine at this phase. As the church grows beyond 1,000, preaching becomes a team sport and sometimes content staff is a part of that.
- **IT & Backoffice** // So much of what the church does is dependent on well-functioning information technology, databases, communication systems and computers. Keeping all those processes working smoothly pays productivity dividends when your staff team gets to this size.
- **Financial Support** // Finally, managing the accounts receivable and payable often becomes too large for a part time or even volunteer to do well so churches might consider adding staff to shore up this aspect of their ministry.



Performance Management Systems

Three factors work together to move church staff teams who are breaking the 1,000 barrier toward predefined performance management systems:

- **Team Size** // No single leader can get a sense of what everyone is up to so there needs to be a unified way to drive performance across every team member.

- Silos // Ensuring that there is a common commitment to progress across multiple “middle managers” means that a shared approach to goal definition and measurement arises.
- Vision // A renewed sense of vision often drives leaders to want to motivate and measure the entire staff team against how they are helping push the mission forward.

A performance management system doesn't need to be as complicated as it sounds. ;) It is simply a common way for a staff team to set goals and then to measure progress across those goals. A few common pieces of this sort of system might be:

- **Regular Check Ins** // Documented and timely interactions are a way for managers to keep tabs on what each team member is up to.
- **Annual S.M.A.R.T. Goals** // Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely goals that the team member and manager agreed on while heading into a new year and then talk about throughout the year.
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** // A series of metrics that the staff will look at regularly that indicator how they are performing against the goals set out at the beginning of a season.
- **Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)** // A popular leadership process for setting, communicating and monitoring quarterly goals and results in organizations.

Regardless of the approach adopted by churches at this size, it is difficult to break the 1,000 barrier without a shared approach to setting and measure goals together. Keeping the team focused on what God has next for the community is vitally important to help it reach new levels!

Intentional Organizational Culture Development

Finally, church staff teams that break the 1,000 barrier have a deep commitment to developing the team culture that binds itself together. Working “on” the team rather than just “in” the work becomes a vitally important function to move

forward. **Key leaders need to take the time & effort to make the implicit team culture explicit, in order to see the team develop and grow.** Decoding a church team culture is both a process of both describing what is and prescribing what it should be. Here are 6 questions to consider to help understand your team culture better:

- When is your church at its best? What does that look like?
- What causes conflict on your team, and how is the conflict resolved?
- How are decisions made when there is a disagreement and stakes are high?
- What are some of the ways the team celebrates a win?
- Who are the heroes in our church? Why are they heroes?
- What are the intangible non-negotiable expectations for our team?

As the leadership team comes to articulate the culture more clearly it then becomes a tool used to lead the staff into the future. Often “staff value” statements are generated and disseminated through a wide variety of environments to help move the team forward. **Culture development is 1,000 small decisions to 1,000 small questions and needs to permeate the team rather than being seen as a “one and done” event.** The cultural reinforcement moments are weaved throughout the life of the staff but here are just a handful of places they could show up:

- Interviews // As a driver of conversations with people who might be considering joining the team.
- First 90 Days // A part of the “on-boarding” of new team members.
- Regular Team Meetings // “Taught” on through all hands on deck meetings.
- Awards // Public recognition of team members who are going beyond to live out the culture.
- Performance Management // In conversations on how the staff is “doing” in their roles.

- Thank You // Personal interactions with the team on how well they are doing.
- Coaching // Informal conversations with the leaders about what is happening in the ministry.

Looking to Break the 1,000 Barrier? Let's Talk.

I provide coaching to senior leadership teams of churches that are looking to break the 1,000 barrier in weekend attendance. **This isn't a prepackaged solution but highly personalized coaching from me.** Your problems are unique to your church and I want to help you overcome them. [Let's talk... zip me an email today to start the conversation.](#)

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