

# Something to Talk About – A conversation guide for church leaders

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## Why don't we ask for help?

*Note: This is the fifth in an ongoing series of postings intended to facilitate and serve as a guide for church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams*

**“Where there is no guidance, the people fail;  
But in abundance of counselors there is victory.”  
Proverbs 11:14**

One of the classic stereotypes about men is that they would rather be lost than ask for directions. We laugh at ourselves when we see cartoonish caricatures of men driving aimlessly about while their wives plaintively ask them to stop and ask for directions. With the emergence of navigation systems in cars, cell phones, and other mobile devices, the idea of being lost and driving aimlessly about rather than asking for directions may soon go the way of the dinosaur. However, it may take a lot longer for this trait to become extinct in church boardrooms. And that's something to talk about.

Why don't we ask for help? When we encounter a sticky situation, major crisis, major decision or technical issue, why don't we ask others for help? Is it overconfidence? Laziness? Embarrassment? Or might we have just gotten out of the habit of asking?

There are many potential reasons why church leaders don't ask for help. Perhaps the following questions and potential new behaviors can spur some meaningful conversation during your next board meeting. Please note that all of these questions assume the leadership team already has the practice of looking to scripture, praying for wisdom, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit before making key decisions. Might that prayed-for wisdom and guidance be provided to us by God's working through others?

- *When confronted with a difficult issue, do we ask for help?* What has been our default or habit of behavior? Is it looking for answers only among ourselves? Or do we look outside, beyond ourselves, for understanding and ideas? When was the last time we contacted someone outside of our own team to gain their input?

New behavior: When facing a difficult or unfamiliar issue, ask ourselves, “Who might know more about this topic than we do?” “Who might know something about this that

we need to know? Then, ask for their input. The boardroom is not a restricted area – we can invite others to join us when we face difficult things.

- *When confronted with a difficult issue, if we seek help, do we do so before or after deciding upon a course of action?* This makes a lot of difference in the real world because of the related problems of organizational inertia and momentum. Inertia tends to keep a body moving on the same course once it's started, while momentum tends to make it difficult to slow or stop a course of action once it has started. Because of organizational inertia, the more people that have agreed to a course of action, the harder it will be, once started, to change its course. Because of organizational momentum, once a deliberative body has started the ball rolling, they seldom stop to reconsider that decision. So many church leadership teams start moving forward into difficult or unfamiliar things and don't seek advice and counsel until after they have crashed. Damage prevention is easier and better than damage repairs.

New behavior: When facing a complex, difficult, or unfamiliar issue, we will seek help at the start so we can incorporate that help into our initial planning and actions. We will value our discussion and study as much or more than our decisions. We will seek wisdom from others before starting a course of action whenever possible.

- *Do you already have strong relationships with potential advisors?* If you wanted to get help or support, who would you ask for it? If you are part of the EFCA, you already have a built-in network of people from other churches and district staff who would be more than happy to assist. Yet, it's much easier to request assistance from someone you know than from a stranger. This is why it's important to not only belong to a larger group, such as EFCA, but to grow relationships with others in that group. Is there a third party, someone who has no strong emotional attachment to the situation, who might be able to complement our decision-making when we face difficult or unfamiliar issues?

New behaviors: Keep a support team from outside your congregation available and on stand-by by attending your local pastor's cluster meetings – or start a cluster if one currently does not exist. Establish relationships with EFCA district staff by attending meetings, conferences, and responding to digital and telephone communications. For those pastors who think they have enough "outside" support and contacts, ask this question: "Who would my board chairman call if I were suddenly, without any warning, totally incapacitated or gone?" No, really, ask that question – the answer might surprise you.

- *Do we value our independence more than our interdependence?* There's something intoxicating about the American "can-do," independent spirit – the idea of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and creating our own paths. Yet, it's plain silly to expect wonderful results when we set out to do something that we are inexperienced or not good at. For instance, why would we think we know by ourselves what to do during a pastoral transition when we haven't had one in twenty years? As members of the Body

of Christ, we are inextricably linked together with other members – we may think we are independent, but we are not. I Corinthians 12 is pretty clear about this. This interdependence allows us to fulfill two vital roles concurrently – asking for help and providing help. Those of us with needs can ask for help; those of us doing well can provide help. And remember, it’s okay to be receiving help on one issue while helping others with another issue.

New behaviors: Look for ways to assist other pastors and churches by sharing our knowledge and encouragement with them on a regular basis. Don’t assume we are any good at doing something we’ve never done or haven’t done in a long time. Put the word “interdependent” into our vocabulary – and use it often.

Throughout my years of governmental work there was one law that always seemed come true: “Things are harder than expected, cost more than expected, and take longer than expected.” Now that I work with churches and their leaders, I find it to be true far more often than not among churches, too. It is a great benefit to understand the potential dangers as well as the best routes for our journey from someone who has already made the trip. All we need to do is ask.

Since there is so much to be gained from working together and helping one another, why would we choose not to do so and go it alone?

That’s something to talk about.

*Let us know how your conversation goes. Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at [bob@efcawest.org](mailto:bob@efcawest.org).*