

Something to Talk About – A conversation guide for church leaders

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Focus Isn't Enough – Check Your Aim, Too.

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

I confess that the idea for this article came to me in a crowded men's room at a recent conference. Lest you think this revelation is only a momentary trip back to junior high "gross out" humor, I want to assure you that I am deadly serious about this topic. For those of us who share the ministry of leadership in Christ's Church, focus is not enough – we must check our aim, too.

My career for 38 years was in policing. Among the tools of that trade are firearms, tools provided to us for use in saving the lives of those that others were seeking to end – including our own. Proficiency in the use of this tool required practice, and measures of the standards of proficiency, qualifying scores, were established and had to be met to continue in our employment. We didn't just focus on the target and pull the trigger to make 30 loud noises – we were expected to hit the target, and to hit is repeatedly somewhere near its middle.

We were taught to focus on the two-sided target; on one side a silhouette of a man pointing a pistol at us, and on its reverse a silhouette of the same man, unarmed, with his arms bent by his side. Only shoot at the threatening target. Shooting at the unarmed man results in a failing score. Focus on the target; focus on your sights; breathe properly; gently squeeze the trigger; repeat for each shot.

I had a propensity to shoot low and to my left. That's because I tended to "push" the pistol forward as I pulled the trigger. As a result, in order to consistently earn a qualifying score, I learned to aim slightly high-right on the target, and the rounds went to the middle of the target. My focus on the target was good. My focus on the pistol's sights was good. But, in order to actually hit the center of the target, I had to adjust my aim.

Here's the point of this story. Hitting the center of our target is not just the result of having proper focus. It's also the result of proper aim. The bullet goes where the pistol is actually pointed, not where we think or hope it is pointed. Our aim must be adjusted based upon results, not intentions.

In order to consistently hit the middle of our ministry targets, we must do more than strengthen or narrow our focus – we must adjust our aim based upon actual results.

This is a major responsibility of leaders. We must know the center of our target, and we must consistently and frequently adjust our aim to ensure that we are hitting it. Here are some thoughts that might help you and your leadership teammates talk about it.

- Focus: What is at the center of the church family's target? What specifically are you trying to do, and how are you trying to do it? Remember, while you may have more than one target you are trying to hit, the more targets you have, the greater the likelihood that you will completely miss some – or most.
- Focus: Are there things that we do, have or think that are distracting the church family's focus away from the target? When we meet together, are we focused upon our target(s)? When we are away, are we focused upon our target(s)?
- Aim: Do we as leaders spend significant time assessing where our time, energy, resources, programs and prayers are aimed? What do we believe we are actually aiming at?
- Aim: Do we adjust our aim points based upon the results we are actually getting? If making disciples is our focus, and we believe we have aimed our time, energy, resources, programs and prayers in that direction, are we actually seeing the making of disciples of Jesus Christ? If not, what are the actual results? How then should we adjust our aim to hit our area(s) of focus?

A reality of my work with churches is that many are experiencing disconnects between their stated focus and the results they are getting. Sometimes church leaders, bothered by consistently missing their target, decide to change their focus to a new target. There generally was nothing wrong with the original target or their focus. The problem was with their aim and their failure to adjust their aim when what they were doing did not hit the center of their target.

What is our target? Where is our focus? How is our aim? That's something to talk about.

Let us know how your conversation goes. Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob@efcawest.org.