

IS YOUR TEAM CULTURE MORE CORPORATE THAN CHRISTLIKE?

Are the people on your team better Christ followers because of your leadership? Are those you lead better Christians because they've been hanging around you and your ministry?

If you're going to have a spiritually healthy team, you must integrate these two qualities into the fabric of team life.

Authentic Spirituality

There must be a vibrant, life-giving God orientation to how we do team. As you read those words, your reaction might be "Well, of course. After all, we're a ministry. It's a given that there should be prayer and time together in the Word and spiritual growth on the team. That's what we're about."

It's the Christian Life 101, but it's a gaping hole in the life of many staff cultures. We mistakenly assume people are on track spiritually; therefore, we can focus all of our collective efforts on the ministry's vision. We spend our meetings talking about plans

and goals. Prayer is like the national anthem at a sporting event, a mere formality. The books we give to staff are about leadership; all the training is about ministry skill.

Over time the environment can begin to feel corporate and lacking in spiritual vitality. The kind of spiritual life we talk about on Sunday is not what the team is experiencing through the week. This becomes a breeding ground for cynicism that can poison the entire leadership culture.

That's why we must work hard to raise our team's spiritual temperature. A great starting place: simply have more God conversations. Share what God has been doing in your life or what he's been teaching you. Ask others what he's been doing.

Another way to raise the spiritual temperature is to regularly open God's Word together. Spend a few minutes unpacking a passage with your team. Memorize a passage together.

Pray together. I mean really pray together, about anything and everything. Have planned times *and* spontaneous times of prayer. Make prayer a part of how you do team.

When I was at Saddleback, God used a little boy named Ethan to help our team learn how to pray together. Ethan's dad, Steve, served on my team. Steve was full of life, a good leader, and a lot of fun. One day in our meeting Steve shared that he and his wife, Lisa, were concerned about Ethan's development; they'd taken him for some tests and the preliminary diagnosis was autism. At the time they weren't sure how severe it might be or all of the implications, but simply hearing that your child might be autistic is enough to terrify you as a parent.

As Steve shared, you could tell he and Lisa were reeling, afraid and anxious, trying to process this new discovery. The news had rocked their world and changed their lives forever. During this tender time, the guys did a great job in rallying around him with lots of prayer and personal care.

As Steve and Lisa walked through the testing and discovery process there were some very difficult days. I remember several

occasions over the next few months when Steve shared and all of us sat quietly with tears in our eyes. We didn't have magical words to make the pain go away, but we could care, be present, and pray for this precious family.

Developing People

Ministry leaders are usually better quarterbacks than coaches. We like to be out on the field, personally leading the charge, calling the plays and directing the team.

Coaches are about developing people and getting the very best out of them. While quarterbacks make plays, coaches make players.

If we want healthy teams, we must learn the skills of a coach. The greatest multiplication and impact of your ministry will be through the people you develop.

Parachurch ministries often seem more dialed in to this truth than those of us who lead in the church. Years ago a friend who leads a parachurch college ministry taught me a valuable principle: "More time spent with fewer people equals greater impact." That certainly was the strategy of Jesus. He found a handful of followers and for three years poured himself into them.

Your leadership team, your staff are your handful. How are you doing at developing them?

One of the most definitive passages about discipling and developing people is found in 1 Thessalonians:

You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.¹

This passage oozes with relationship, and it's a good reminder that our first priority is to build people, not a program. In the earlier verses Paul said he'd been like a mother caring for her children; he and his team had shared not only the gospel with these believers

but their very lives.² Now Paul likens himself to a father who encourages, comforts, and urges.

So, how do you know when someone, right now, needs to be encouraged? Or comforted? Or urged (challenged)? The only way you know what they need “right now” is to be in relationship with them.

All three actions Paul mentions are crucial in developing people. Encouraging is about affirming and blessing. It is finding people doing something right and praising them. It is helping them discover their unique gifting and contribution.

Comforting is all about helping people through the difficult things. When life gets hard and when ministry gets hard, we walk alongside to provide comfort and support.

Urging is about challenging people—nudging them and pushing them to improve and grow. It is about stretching them and not letting them settle.

Relationship is what gives me the right and insight to encourage, comfort, and urge the people on my team.

Developing people has obvious implications for your schedule. Getting intentional about it may require serious adjustments to how you spend your time. But I can't think of anything with greater long-term benefits than personally developing your team members.

When Paul concludes 1 Thessalonians 2, a chapter largely about developing people, he says, “What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”³

Paul says when Jesus returns the one thing he will be most excited to show him will be these Christians. At the end of the day, what's most important is not the buildings or programs we build but rather the people we develop.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What do you do with your team to nurture personal spiritual growth?
2. What are some things you could build right into your meetings that would help create a spiritually vibrant team?
3. Who played a development role in your life? What did they do with you that was developmental?
4. Instead of being a better “player,” how could you be a better coach for your team?