

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## Nurturing Healthy Teams

How does a team develop a close acquaintance and become a group of friends? Most of the answer can be summarized in four words: training, travel, travail, and triumph. As people work together, they experience events that bond then into a team. Team leaders can accelerate team synergy by doing the following.

### **Spend time with team members.**

Nurturing a team takes place when the team spends time together. Four types of time together are needed by the average team member:

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you.”

—Peter Drucker

Group time for sharing, planning, and study. The more we strategize, the more we harmonize, is the basic principle.

Group time with the families of team members for worship, fun, and bonding. The more we pray and play together, the more we stay together, is the basic principle. A social time at least once a quarter for the entire team is a good practice.

Individual time for work and sharing. Each team member needs a minimum of one time per month with the team leader alone. This implies a formal time of meeting for discussion of ministry and personal issues.

Individual social time for building relationships. Nurturing a healthy team requires time for the team leader to get to know each team member individually. Once a quarter a team leader should take time to socialize with all team members. Such a meeting can happen informally, such as traveling by car to another location, or can be a scheduled social time together.

### **Communicate with team members.**

The best teams communicate with each other. Communication is a major challenge for teams. In fact it is one of the struggles most often mentioned by team members. Healthy teams do not communicate just through e-mail

or memos, but pursue each other for face to face conversations.

Nothing can so quickly destroy a team's harmony and trust level as the withholding of pertinent information. Sometimes team members simply want to know what is going on in every area of the church ministry. This is impossible in a complex ministry environment. On the other hand, it is important that a team member is kept informed about anything that will affect her sphere of ministry. Remember: we are always down on what we are not up on.

Keep team members in the formal flow of information. Build structures to allow team members to come to the person overseeing their work. Encourage one-on-one discussions between team members rather than simply structured meetings. Personal relationships breed trust. Establish expectations of mutual honesty. Good communication can only take place among people who trust each other.

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# Give team members visibility.

Publicly and privately hold team members in esteem.

## Support team members.

Leaders are providers. Thus, whatever the team member needs to do their ministry with excellence, a good leader will attempt to provide.

Publicly and privately hold team members in high esteem. Sprinkle compliments so that they focus on the proper goals and set direction. Going public with praise in appropriate and regular amounts will help each team member sense that their participation is worthwhile. Do not underestimate the value of a carefully, handwritten note sent to a team member. Most people who have been involved in churches for a number of years hold on to such expressions of thanks with much appreciation.

Be sensitive to the hurts of team members. The nature of church ministry means that people go from moments of adulation to moments of rejection. In times of hurt and rejection, team members need the sensitivity and compassion of a leader to nurse them back to health. Minister to, not just through the team. Be sure to demonstrate heart felt appreciation to all team members for their work and commitment. Peter Drucker states that, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you."

In interviews of team members, seven general needs are often mentioned. Team members need . . .

1) to be taken seriously. Team members are often looked upon as gofers for the team leader. However, to do their ministry well, they need to be viewed as full fledged participants with serious ministries to lead;

2) authority with their responsibility. Team members need to be released to do their jobs without someone looking over their shoulders. This implies having the necessary authority to make decisions within the constraints of the mission, philosophy, and policies of the church;

3) open communication to people who make decisions in their areas of ministry. Team members must be able to talk with leaders who make policy decisions regarding their ministries;

4) honest affirmation. Team members need

specific praise for a job well done. They look for honest praise that is grounded in the results of their ministry;

5) to be supported openly. Team members need recognition of support from the team leader. This validates their ministry and creates support throughout the entire body.

6) to be confronted in private. Team members need praise to be public and criticism to be given privately. To criticize a team member publicly will damage the fragile morale of the entire team;

7) appropriate visibility. Team members need regular promotion of their individual ministries. Regular visibility is necessary to demonstrate the importance of each team member's role.

The nurturing of team ministry is an ongoing job. Occasionally the pressure of an expected or unexpected challenge will speed the process along, but in most situations developing a strong team takes time. However, team ministry can be enhanced if leaders take specific steps to build team unity and cohesion.

What ideas can you begin using to build better unity among your ministry teams?

What do you think will your greatest challenge?



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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