**Meetings That Work: *Conducting* Board or Staff Meetings**

Part 2 of “Planning & Conducting Board & Staff Meetings

**Dave Burggraff │**Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, STS

**Introduction**

Most of us dislike meetings. Mack Tennyson, author of *Making Committees Work*, humorously comments, “To write good things about meetings is almost like speaking well of Adolf Hitler. Everyone loves to bad-mouth meetings. No one speaks well of them. Most people see them as evil.”

As much as they like dislike meetings, most church leaders (actually all leaders in any profession) realize that they need to meet together as a group because church leadership is shared servant-leadership. But too many leaders fail to understand the profound importance of their meetings. They fail to recognize the impact of their meetings have on themselves and on every aspect of the life of the local congregation.

Leadership team meetings – whether it’s the elder team, pastoral team, deacon team, a specific ministry department, or the church staff meeting – are one of the most underused tools in the church’s life. They help build unity, clarity, communication, and connection. Why? Because e**very strong ministry team thrives on shared vision and meaningful connection.**

When leaders are aligned, when communication flows, and shared purposes are clear everything gets healthier. That’s where simple but strategic Leadership Team Meetings come in. Productive meetings don’t have to be fancy or long. Just consistent. Bring your ministry leaders together in one room and watch what happens.

We practice an elder-led, congregational rule polity (governance). We believe this is the NT model as revealed (hermeneutically) and demonstrated in Acts and the Epistles. As such, this study will use elder meetings as an example of how the whole congregation lives, functions, and works together. Elders act as a body, a team, a council that leads and directs their local church. A significant part of their work can be accomplished only by means of working together, and a good example of that is seen when meeting/working together. Meetings have an important function that cannot be replaced by anything else, requiring that they meet regularly together. The principles in this study that apply to elder meetings should be the pattern, the principles, and the practices for other ministry meetings in the local church.

**Why are elder meetings important?**

* They impact the spiritual health of the Church.
  + They are multifaceted meetings involving fervent prayer, careful study, problem solving, decision making, coordination of church ministries, information sharing, brainstorming, planning. What they talk about, what they do or don’t do, how they act toward each other and what they plan or fail to plan affects every member of the flock. There is a clear connection between the quality of elder meetings and the health of the local church.
* They build character.
  + Although elders must be qualified (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1), they are still imperfect human beings with weaknesses, character flaws, defective skills, annoying eccentricities, blind spots, and imbalances that need improving. These imperfections at times make working together painfully difficult. Under the pressure of meetings, our pride, bad tempers, lack of consistent love, poor people skills, and/or controlling spirit are exposed and cry out for correction. As our godly brethren sit beside us in meetings, they become the “iron that sharpens iron” and our character is enhanced (Proverbs 27:17).
* They develop leadership skills.
  + Good elder meetings provide on-the-job training for developing pastoral leadership skills and godly wisdom. The dynamic interaction that takes place during their meetings sharpens one’s mind, one’s communication skills, leadership ability and one’s facility at providing wise counsel. Each meeting (even the frustrating and unproductive ones) become learning opportunities. Newer and less experienced members watch experienced leaders care for people, deal with difficult people and make wise group decisions. “He who walks with wise men will be wise” (Proverbs 13:20). Meetings, then, are a graduate school for continual improvement of one’s: teamwork, communication skills, tact with people, personal organization, leadership abilities, competence in counseling matters, and shepherding skills.

* They enhance group morale.
  + Elder meetings should develop the friendship-relationship aspect of the leadership team as well as the task-organizational aspect. Developing loving relationships among the elders is a key element and it demonstrates that people are more important than the agenda of a meeting. Elder meetings provide a regular setting for mutual encouragement and deep spiritual fellowship with one another and a place where personal burdens can be shared with godly brothers who truly care for each other. They also become a place of real accountability for each man.
* They train leaders to become part of a team.
  + Because of all the benefits listed above, the elders must accept responsibility of preparing future shepherds as a crucial element of their meetings. They cannot be passive about this matter. The key to reproducing leadership is to clearly plan for it. And a key part of this training must be in the realm of organizational teamwork. Elders must learn to submit to one another, to wait patiently on one another, to love and forgive, to be open and truthful and to repent of pride and selfish independence. Good team cooperation does not come naturally to most of us.

And if they are not achieving this, then the elders need to refocus their meetings. They are not to be used to discussing deacon matters in detail such as church-wide dinners, deacon care, etc., instead they are to focus on people, prayer and the Word (Acts 6), church newcomers, and the lost who need to be pursued. In other words, a people-oriented meeting agenda.

Prayer should be a major part of the meeting and reflecting on God’s Word—specifically defining, clarifying, stating the Church’s foundation, nonnegotiable beliefs, its doctrinal distinctives, ministry priorities, spiritual values, mission and vision.

In the meetings, elders (for that matter, any ministry leader in any ministry department) must always maintain a Christlike attitude, which means an attitude of humility, love and self-sacrificing servant leadership.

**Good meetings require good participation. Each meeting participant should know and practice several key principles.**

* Be a faithful attender
* Be an active, responsible participant
* Be a peacemaker and unity builder
* Be a person of integrity and not a manipulator
* Be fair; refrain from making judgments without all the facts
* Be trustworthy with confidential information
* Be self-controlled, not angry
* Be careful in your communication
  + Skillful communication is hard work (requires wisdom, self-control, good habits)
  + Learn to Speak gently, calmly, graciously, and tactfully)
  + Learn *if* and *when* to speak
  + Don’t block communication with lecturing, the “silent treatment,” monopolizing time, over-sensitivity, etc.
  + Make every effort to be a patient listener
  + Clarify responsibilities and work assignments
  + Provide adequate instruction when assigning a job or task
  + Don’t leave people in the dark
  + Don’t spring important decisions on people
  + Stop the rumor mill with frequent, open communication with the congregation

**There are several principles of good meeting etiquette. Note the following:**

* Meeting etiquette is a standard of behavior that is expected while you are in the office or in meetings. Good etiquette includes being on time, being off your phone for the entirety of the meeting, providing a detailed meeting agenda, staying attentive, and avoiding interruptions.
* What are the three words of etiquette?

The basic etiquette rules and principles are based on respect, consideration, and honesty. Respect includes the acknowledgment of other people's rights and boundaries, consideration refers to an understanding of their needs, and honesty includes being sincere and having integrity.

* What is the golden rule to follow when attending a meeting?

Always arrive on time – preferably a little early than the assigned time. This shows that you value the time of the other participants, and you take commitments seriously. Moreover, arriving early actually helps you settle in, get comfortable in the space and build your composure before the meeting starts.

**There are principles for good meeting management, to keep everything in order, in priority and with group discipline. These include:**

* Keep priorities straight (people, prayer, the Word of God)
* Determine the frequency of meetings (no fewer than once per month and very rarely cancelled!)
* Start on time! End on Time!
* Establish a conducive meeting place (avoid those dark, depressing settings which will affect the mood of everyone; try to make the setting comfortable as possible; have refreshments; etc.)
* Set an agenda
  + Determine the agenda in advance
  + Make it available to all elders ahead of time (a day or two before the meeting if possible)
  + Don’t overload an agenda
  + Distinguish between structured discussion and free-flowing / unstructured discussions
  + As a group plan your future topics of discussion
  + End conclusively (summarize what was accomplished, decided and the timeframe for action). Do not end with any misunderstandings, unclear assignments, or confusion. **If anyone leaves a meeting unsure of what to do next or where to find the information they need, it was not effective.**
  + Follow through on action items
* Keep and then archive minutes (date, names of those present, key points of discussion, all voted upon items, action items)
  + Have them on file where all elders know how to retrieve them
  + Archive policy statements as well
  + Inform new elders where the minutes and policies ae stored
* Practice self-evaluation and seek to improve your meetings
* Make each meeting count!
* Effective meetings should end by systematically closing the conversation, ensuring that everyone has been heard, establishing that participants have agreed upon any next steps, and recognizing what the group has accomplished.
* Delegate, Delegate, Delegate! Elders need to remember they are not the sole ministers of the congregation. They cannot and should not be doing everything in the church, but in many churches they do. (Ex.: In one church, a group of elders spent more than two hours deciding which carpet cleaning company to use. Instead, they should have spent 2 minutes delegating the work to others. Better yet, they should have established a committee or team to be responsible for cleaning and maintaining the building so that they could focus on leading God’s people.) Principles: Identify what needs to be done; select the right people; Tell people what is expected of them; give people the proper authority, accountability, and ownership to make the job fulfilling; Let people know that they are appreciated and that the elders (ministry leaders) are there to help.

**What is a good length of time for daily, even weekly-type, meetings? (i.e., department meetings, staff meetings, etc.)**



Studies suggest that the human attention span can begin to wane after about 10-15 minutes of concentrated activity, with a significant drop in engagement after 30 minutes. This is why many productivity experts recommend keeping most daily meetings under 30 minutes whenever feasible.

**What do 90% of people admit to doing during meetings?** Some 90% of people report daydreaming in meetings, and 73% admit that they use meeting time to do other work.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Example of Elder Team Meetings:**

**Elder Team at The Shepherd’s Church of Cary, NC**

***Elder Board Style –***

The Board will govern with an emphasis on:

* future vision rather than past or present preoccupation
* collective rather than individual decisions
* respect for diversity in viewpoints
* strategic leadership more than administrative detail
* clear distinction of Board and staff roles and pro-activity rather than reactivity

***Criteria for Potential Elder Board Members –***

• Expertise within the Elder Board should reflect an individual’s gifts and calling and where possible a healthy mix of the following areas: missions, evangelism, facilities management, finance, law, governance, business/non-profit leadership, church leadership, fundraising, public relations, theology and human resources. Areas of expertise not represented among Board members will be obtained by the elders from outside resource persons as needed.

• Candidates for the Elder Board must evidence the capacity to perform the responsibilities with spiritual maturity, the disposition to embrace the requirements of elders of the church, and wholeheartedly embrace the Statement of Faith and the vision of the church.

**Elders' Meetings**

The elders normally meet on a monthly basis, but also maintain regular contact with each other through email and phone conversations. The elders serve together, but are also friends who pray for each other and hold each other accountable in our Christian walks. Meetings are planned to best utilize our time together and to consider the most necessary areas of church needs.

**A typical agenda of an Elder Board meeting might be as follows:**

• Scripture reading and prayer

• Elder Team reports/updates, followed by discussion of each and actions to be taken

- Financial update by Financial Team (FT) and CAO

- Personnel update by Personnel Team (PT) Chairman and/or Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor

- Facilities needs update by Facilities Team

- Membership care by Membership Care Team (ex: discuss any potential church discipline issue)

• Review contacts or issues with members, identifying needs or additional contact needs

• Update and discuss a specific ministry (or ministries) (ex: VBS, upcoming events, etc.)

• Discuss evangelistic outreach opportunities and how to best involve the congregation

• Discuss and suggest plans for small group and large group studies, impact, etc.

• Discuss, study, or present research on a doctrinal issue

• Spend time as a group in prayer for congregational members, ministries, opportunities, etc.

Sometimes we do not complete the agenda, in which cases we might meet an additional time, or delegate to a specific Elder Team to do follow-up and present their work to the Elder Board, or carry on a discussion via email.

When we bring on new elders, we introduce the new elder(s) to their ministry and elder team.

We have found that a two- to three-hour period is not always enough to pray, discuss church family needs, deal with issues of discipline, and make plans for the church. So, we might plan a retreat, or an entire evening, to concentrate time on a single pressing matter or the larger planning issues of the church.

In our times together we have learned to value openness, forthrightness, gentleness, and humility.

**Voting: Seeking Full Support**

We are committed to taking a vote when making decisions on certain issues. We follow parliamentary procedure which over the years has proven to be very effective. Normally, after discussion on a matter, the elders often reach a consensus, a motion is made and seconded, and if no further questions are raised the vote is taken; in such cases the vote is unanimous.

Very godly men do not always agree on all issues. On those occasions when a few or even several elders continue to be concerned about a particular proposal, the wise course of action is to table the matter to give ample time for further research into any particulars of the proposal, and ample give time for reflection and prayer, and then to revisit the issue.

There may be occasions when, after discussion and then a motion is on the table, but someone still feels out of harmony with a proposal, he has an opportunity to voice his concerns in open discussion. However, if he still is not convinced and the greater majority of elders still feel comfortable with the motion, he can then cast a "negative vote" but then must "agree" to support the majority. In essence, this is an effective way to arrive at "consensus."

**Guiding Principles for Elder Board Members**

As spiritual leaders in our congregation we must demonstrate by example godly Christian relationships, attitudes and behavior. **As members of the church Elder Board, we commit ourselves to:**

1. Pray daily for members of the Elder Board, the pastoral team and the ministry of our church.

2. Speak respectfully about each other in all contexts.

3. Address and resolve conflicts between us quickly and biblically.

4. Extend forgiveness to one another when offended and carry no grudges.

5. Care for other Elder Board members when they are in difficulty.

6. Come to Board meetings prepared, informed and in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

7. Speak to the issues at hand.

8. Support the Board once it has made a decision. If unable to do so, then be willing to resign.

9. Be honest in all Board dealings and discussions, voluntarily identifying potential conflicts of interest and never pursuing a personal agenda.

10. Hold all Elder Board and Elder Team discussions in complete confidence.

11. Agree that the Board Chair speaks for the Board when speaking before the congregation.

12. Agree that each of the Elder Teams has the authority to make decisions within their assigned roles, and such informed decision-making is done on behalf of and represents the entire Elder Board.

13. When an elder is unaware of issues or church matters being biblically addressed and handled by other elders or Elder Teams, and when/if approached by church members seeking information that the questioned elder feels unable to answer at that time, he will seek to obtain the correct information or defer to the appropriate elders rather than offering personal opinion or misinformation.

14. Carry out their legal duties by acting with honesty, loyalty, care, diligence, skill and prudence.

15. Agree they have no individual authority outside of Board meetings unless specifically assigned by the Elder Board or Elder Team. Each elder is to act as a shepherd and overseer, not an authoritarian.

16. Hold one another accountable of these principles and agree to resign if significant and/or consistent violations of these principles occur.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Suggested Resources for Meetings**

Berkley, James D*. Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration: Practical Insights from a Cross Section of Ministry Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001.

Busby, Dan & John Pearson. *Lessons from the Church Boardroom: 40 Insights for Exceptional Governance.* Winchester, NJ: ECFA Press, 2019.

Gangel, Kenneth O. *Feeding and Leading: A Practical handbook on Administration in Churches and Christian Organizations*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984.

Getz, Gene A. *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2003.

Newton, Phil A. and Matt Schmucker. *Elders in the Life of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Press, 2014.

Strauch, Alexander. *Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elder’s Meeting*. Colorado Springs, CO: Biblical Eldership Resources, 2025.

Tennyson, Mack. *Making Committees Work*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.