Meetings that Work: Maximizing the Effectiveness of your Board and Staff Meetings

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## Functions of the Elders

In order for elder meetings to be effective, they must be designed to serve the God-given functions of the elder team.

According to the New Testament teaching, elders are spiritually mature men called to exercise authority in a local church (1 Tim 5:17) as undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Pet 5:1—4). Elders should faithfully rule as stewards in the household of God (Titus 1:7, 1 Cor 4:2), following the pattern set forth in Scripture. Such elders are a gift to the local church (Eph 4:11).

Digging a layer deeper into the biblical evidence, Gene Getz enumerates the following functions for elders in the local church: teaching biblical truth, modeling Christlike behavior, maintaining doctrinal purity, disciplining unruly believers, overseeing financial matters, and praying for those who are ill.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Spiritual Preparation

Because leadership in the church is spiritual leadership, effective elder meetings also require intentional spiritual preparation. First and foremost, you must start with qualified men!

Unfit or unqualified elders will prove to be a hindrance to the effectiveness of the elders’ meetings and to the elders’ overall leadership. So the first step to effective meetings is to appoint none other than biblically qualified, Spirit-appointed elders.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Elders must also be in continual prayer for one another and the church. They must humbly depend on Christ’s strength for the task rather than attempting to lead in their own strength.

When you lean into pastoral ministry to people, whether you are a paid staffer or a lay overseer, you come face to face with the limitations of your time, energies, knowledge, and gifting. Hopefully, that confrontation drives you to cry out for God’s help. For elders, prayer is not just a duty, it’s a crucial survival strategy.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Elders must also cultivate unity in Christ. They must be able to disagree without being disagreeable, showing one another grace and always assuming the best intentions of their fellow elders.

There are right and wrong ways to talk to one another, disagree with one another, reason with one another, press one another for change, and persuade. Sinful attitudes produce unpleasant meetings; godly attitudes produce joyous meetings.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The elders should develop their relationships with one another, their sense of teamwork, their love for one another, and simply their conspicuous friendship. They may want to have team-building retreats and social times together. They should openly enjoy one another’s company in public. They should expect to laugh a lot at elders’ meetings, as well as cry together if any of them is suffering a trial. Because the conspicuous unity of the elders is vital to the overall health of the church, the Devil will constantly seek to sow seeds of dissension among them. Because of this the elders should spare nothing to preserve their unity.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Finally, elders must hold one another accountable to biblically based standards of conduct and ethics. This means being above reproach in all dealings, being prepared for each meeting, and prioritizing attendance in faithful service to the local church.

## Setting the Agenda

For elder meetings to be effective, they must have a purpose-driven agenda that serves the shepherding and stewarding functions of the elder team within the local church. The agenda should be built with these responsibilities in mind without getting distracted with non-essentials or getting mired in “administrivia” that could be delegated to deacons, staff, or even church members.

Church elders need desperately to understand their God-given priorities, or their meetings will be sidetracked quickly. There are qualified men who want to use their gifts to minister the Word or to shepherd people, but they will not participate in the eldership of their local churches because the elders’ meetings are mired in the mud of administrative trivia. Many church elderships operate merely as glorified deacon boards or as building-maintenance committees. Sidetracked and distracted with details, they fail to lead the church.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Depending on the structure of your elder team, the chairman of the elders should take the lead in building the agenda for each elder meeting with input from the senior pastor and/or the executive pastor. This agenda should be shared in advance with the whole elder team so they can be prepared to participate actively in the discussion and decision-making process.

It’s helpful to have a mental checklist of potential agenda topics to review in advance of each meeting to make sure all necessary business is addressed in a timely manner. Here are some considerations to take into account when building your elder meeting agenda in service to the shepherding and stewarding functions of the elders.

### Congregational issues

* Are there any significant or urgent prayer needs for the flock?
* Are there any church discipline issues that need to be discussed?

### Standing items

* Opening devotional / prayer - grow or re-affirm some aspect of the eldership team
* Ministry reports - allow several ministry areas to share brief updates on their teaching, discipleship, and outreach efforts (provides elder team with shared context of ministry goals and effectiveness, gives opportunity to praise and celebrate God’s faithfulness).

"Meetings also provide an opportunity for elders to acknowledge and thank one another for special efforts or faithfulness to a task… The ministry of encouragement is a powerful, rewarding ministry that is much needed in our churches today. So seek to be a team of elders that continually encourages and thanks God for one another."

* Financial or other operational reports - exercise oversight, but avoid diving into the details
* Extended prayer time at end - agenda, one another, congregation, community/world impact

### Church calendar related items

* Budget season - start process working back from elder / congregational approval timelines
* Church business meetings - advance preparation
* Church and community events - elder leadership and participation

### Someday / maybe items

* Review backlog for any items that can be addressed proactively (new ministry opportunities, new or updated policies, etc.)

As you build out the agenda, make sure to “front load” the important issues that must be addressed, especially if a decision is needed. Be mindful of the time required for each item and be ready to move less pressing items to the backlog for a future meeting, if needed. Perhaps share certain reports offline to make space for more urgent items, when required.

### Running the Meeting

[Content from Dave here]

### Following up

Effective follow-up is the final requirement for effective elder meetings. There are a number of steps the elder chairman should make sure are addressed post meeting.

* Log the meeting minutes and all decisions
	+ Elder team reviews meeting minutes from the secretary
	+ Do any decisions require congregational approval?
	+ How should the decisions be communicated? To whom? When?
* Capture any action items - Who is accountable? By when?
* Capture any future agenda items — start planning next meeting, update backlog
* Update policies and/or procedures, elder handbook, etc.
1. Getz, Gene A. 2003. Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church - A Biblical, Historical and Cultural Perspective. Moody Pub. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strauch, Alexander. 2001. Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elders’ Meetings. Lewis & Roth Pub. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rinne, Jeramie. 2014. Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus. 9marks: Building Healthy Churches [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Strauch, Meetings that Work. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dever, Mark, and Jonathan Leeman. 2015. Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age. B&H Publishing Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Strauch, Meetings That Work. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)