

3 Hard Decisions of Generosity

The desire for a more generous culture is an inspiring one. After all, we all need more resources released into ministry. The discipleship conversation around giving is filled with hope and expectations. Pastors light up, ministry teams engage, and downhill momentum is gained. Then it happens, right in the middle of a robust conversation, reality hits. At first there's denial, followed by resistance, and then the room goes silent. Teams are dug in. I've seen it over and over again. Yet, developing a generous culture is within reach, but not without making some really hard decisions. What are the three hardest calls that can ultimately result in experiencing a generosity surplus?

#1 – REDUCE staff expense.

Having served on church staff for decades, I 100% support a well-compensated team. The job of a pastor is both rewarding and grueling. Being on call 24/7, giving up your holidays, living in a glass house, all while trying to advance the Kingdom is a noble life effort. However, most church budgets will invest somewhere around 50% of their expenses toward staff – this is a big chunk of your resources.

As a church grows both larger and older it tends to expand staff, often times in advance of the income. Over time, work that was done by volunteers has now become work for hire. Then, once a staff member is well entrenched relationally it becomes difficult to recreate your staff budget allotment. Churches need to make the hard choice to steadily reduce staff expenses from 50% to 45%, then toward 35% and some may even dare to achieve 25%.

I know you are ready to stop reading, but what would you give to have 10-20% surplus over the next few years?

REMEDY: Develop a new staff structure and empower more volunteer leadership. If you are going to reduce your staff expense, you will need to reorganize with a few multi-managers at the top of the organization. Then move from an activity or even ministry-based framework to a process and systems framework. This will enable you to hire a less expensive management level team to implement. You should also be able to hire more within the organization reducing the risk of outside hires that end up as misfires. Finally, you will need a solid leadership development pipeline and training process. Volunteers can and will do more. Most high capacity volunteers sit on the sideline unengaged.

#2 – FOCUS on the one thing that matters most.

Most pastors are uber confident in their vision crafting and casting prowess. It is really hard to get most pastors to evaluate their vision. Nevertheless, I find most churches exist on a vision that is some version of "we want to do church bigger and better next year than we did last year." I so appreciate the drive for improvement and expansion. I also understand the fear of saying something that may feel less than the maximum best.

However, if vision is not clear, accountable, and actionable by every staff member, then it is not clear enough. Vision should clearly determine how a staff member goes about his/her work. It should be an obvious filter of what we do and do not do when the pastor is not around to help. It should direct all resources toward the main objective. Finally, it should be powerfully obvious to all when we succeed as a team.

When a vision is not crystal clear, pastors struggle with rogue staff and a disunited team. Team members struggle with clear direction and proper support. All levels of an organization are drained by sideways energy and less forward momentum than originally hoped.

REMEDY: Create one clear unifying goal each year and lead all ministries to rally around it. I know it can feel very limiting to have only one goal and terribly unspiritual to measure what God may do. Please hear me, when you create one strikingly clear goal like, "Provide people with a clear path of personal discipleship seeing a 50% increase in small groups participation," you have not limited what God can do. However, you have made a choice to do one great thing together instead of five isolated, unconnected wins in different ministry silos. You have to believe me when I tell you that I have seen staff members release their budgets for the greater cause of a clear vision.

#3 – STREAMLINE ministries and supportive programming.

You know you are doing too much because you are tired. Your staff is tired. However, another Sunday is coming and expectations have been created. There was a day in your past when you "surrendered to the call of ministry," only to now be living the life of a highly effective event manager. Unfortunately, I have seen it time and time again. Ministry success is measured by great events in amazing environments that cause large groups of people to leave feeling happy. I am all for high quality events, full rooms, and inspiring moments. No one wants their ministries to stink! However, successful activity is not the same as accomplishing the vision of kingdom expansion.

Remedy: Spend time measuring every ministry activity to determine its ROI (Return On Investment) toward your clearly articulated and measurable vision.

I would suggest you put your leadership in a room and do an objective analysis of the resources invested in all calendar events versus the return on the investment in terms of mission advancement. Measure the following using a simple green, yellow, red grading system, green = good to go, yellow=hey, wait a minute, and red=police flashing lights in your rear view mirror if you keep your foot on the gas.

- Does this ministry activity align 100% with our clearly articulated and measurable vision?
- Are we investing the proper amount of trained staff and volunteer time?
- Are we investing the right amount of financial resources?
- Does this ministry activity happen in the right room, at the right time, and at the right time of year?
- Are we providing this ministry activity the proper marketing support?
- Does this ministry activity provide a proper anchor for our strategy or bridge to the

appropriate next step?

- Does this ministry activity accomplish its desired and clearly stated goal?

These three conversations consistently receive the most resistance in my generosity coaching with pastors. If you finished this blog CONGRATS TO YOU! I know you probably wanted to challenge my thoughts many times. However, what would it be like to lead a church in 3-5 years which was led by a smaller more nimble staff, that were clearly unified and rallying together around one clear goal that produced obvious results over and over again. Not to mention you have created more margin spiritually, relationally, physically, mentally, and financially. Being a church with surplus goes way beyond preaching on money, leading a Financial Peace class, and capital fund raising. You must have the hard conversations. You can actually accomplish more, do less, and enjoy a surplus to reinvest in ministry and your team.

Are you facing some hard decisions related to generosity? [Connect with an Auxano Navigator to learn more about how to work through those decisions.](#)

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