

Hiring an Equipper of Equippers

Testing and Interviewing

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Ephesians 4 says that God has placed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Most of the churches we work with understand at some level the concept that pastors and ministry directors are to be hired not to be chaplains or simply to minister to the members, but to equip the members of the body for their ministries. But equippers need equipping too, and this is especially strategic in a multiple staff church. When you are preparing to hire a person whose role includes equipping the other equipping staff, what qualities, values, and skills do you look for? Just as important, how do you determine if those qualities, values, and skills are present?

What is an equipper of equippers?

An equipper of equippers may be your:

- **Senior pastor.** Many senior pastors do not have these skills, but that can work so long as your senior pastor understands that he/she needs help in this area and you have another staff member who collaborates closely with the senior pastor to provide these functions. In churches that are too small to have both a senior pastor with these skills and to also hire an associate to collaborate with him/her, your senior pastor needs to have or develop as many of these skills as possible.
- **Executive Pastor or Executive Director of Ministries.** A church will usually create this staff position sometime between 600 and 900 in average worship attendance. This person reports to the senior pastor, and all the other staff report to the Executive Pastor or EDM. The EP/EDM is basically the COO of the church staff, while the pastor is the CEO. The difference between the two titles is that an Executive Pastor is a pastor, the EDM's responsibilities do not include pastoring. The EDM will often have a background in business. The skills needed for this role are often rare among seminary graduates, so it is usually easier to find this person in the business world.
- **Director of Ministry Development.** This role is appropriate for the mid-size church of 200 to 600. In a church of 200, the most or all of the equippers whom this person will be equipping will be unpaid ministry leaders. In the larger church, this person will also be coaching members of the equipping staff. The primary difference between this role and that of EP/EDM is that in this size church, the associate staff still reports to the senior pastor, and the DMD has a coaching relationship, rather than a report relationship, to the other staff. Also, the DMD is likely to have more responsibility for direct program operations (such as serving as the small group ministries coordinator) whereas in the larger church, the EP/EDM

is more likely to be coaching others who direct ministry programs.

- **Part-time Ministry Coach.** Some churches contract with outside consultants to serve as part-time ministry coaches to their staff and key leaders. While a ministry coach will not have staff supervisory responsibilities, similar skill sets are called for to be effective when equipping the equippers.

Qualities, values, and skills

What are the qualities and skills needed by an equipper of equippers? What questions can help you know whether a given candidate has these qualities and skills? How do you know whether a given answer indicates that a person is or is not a good match for your staff needs?

Every equipping staff member (not just an equipper of equippers) should exhibit the qualities of spiritual maturity outlined as the qualifications for elders in Timothy and Titus. While no one perfectly exhibits all these qualities all the time, these qualities should generally characterize anyone who is going to serve on a church's equipping staff.

Also, every equipping staff member should embody the church's core values. For example, if your church is committed to nurturing intentional Christian community, that must be a core value in this person's life, evidenced by the priority they place on their commitment to their primary Christian community (such as a small group). If your church is committed to evangelism, this must be a core value in this person's life. If your church is committed to the practice of personal sabbath times, that must be a core value in this person's life. If your church is committed to maintaining healthy margins (avoiding workaholism), that must be embodied in this person's life.

Beyond the qualities and values that are important for every equipping staff member, an equipper of equippers must bring skill areas that are not required of other staff members. Skill areas that are most important for an equipper of equippers include:

- Team building
- Coaching and leadership development
- Leading organizational change

To assess whether a candidate has the appropriate qualities, values, and skills, you can use:

- A spiritual gifts survey
- A DISC personality profile
- Personal interviews
- Interviews with references

Of course, if you have a personal history with the candidate, your personal observations of their leadership/ministry style and personal values can be the most valuable source of information about the candidate. Let's look at how you can use each of these tools.

Spiritual gifts survey

At Living Stones, we use the "Discover Your God-Given Gifts" survey by Don & Katie

Fortune which measures the seven motivational gifts in Romans 12. As the definitions of the gifts vary somewhat from survey to survey, keep in mind that the comments refer to this survey.

What spiritual gifts are and are not called for in this job?

- **Administration.** For an equipper of equippers, the gift of administration is essential. This is not to be confused with organizational skills, which are often present with people who have the gift of serving or other gifts. A person with the gift of administration is a big picture person who thinks strategically and who seems to “intuitively” know how to get from here to there. The administrator (in contrast to the well-organized server) gets results primarily through empowering other people, not by doing the work himself/herself. This gift needs to be the person’s strongest gift, or within a few points of being the person’s strongest gift.
- **Encouragement/exhorting.** The exhorter is motivated by helping others take practical steps in personal spiritual growth and ministry growth. The exhorter is excellent at meeting a person where he/she is and helping him/her identify the next practical steps.
- **Giving.** Giving may seem to be an unlikely gift to put on this list. Whether a high score in this gift is an asset for this role depends on whether you are looking for a senior pastor or someone for one of the associate positions named earlier. A person with a high score in giving often makes a great number two person on a ministry team. The NIV translates this gift, “contributing to the needs of others.” A person with a high score in giving loves to help others succeed in their ministries. Because this is the motivation, a senior pastor whose strongest gift is giving often flounders as a directional leader. On the other hand, when the senior pastor is a strong visionary leader, a giver can make a superb partner for developing and implementing the strategy to fulfill that vision, assuming the giver also has a very strong gift of administration.
- **Teaching.** Because this role involves training people for ministry, it is valuable for this to be a strong secondary gift. A person for whom teaching is the strongest motivational gift might not be the best match for this job because he/she might be more focused on helping people develop right beliefs than on practical ministry results. However, a person whose highest score is teaching who also has strong scores in administration and exhorting could be a good candidate. Such a person is more likely to succeed in a church of 200 as DMD than in a church of 600 to 900 as an EDM.
- **Prophecy/perceiving.** While the exhorter identifies with where a person is and helps him/her take the next step, the prophet/perceiver focuses on the ideal and calls people to live up to it. A person whose strongest gift is prophecy, but who scores low in exhorting, may have a tendency to set the bar so high that people become discouraged. Even one who scores high in both prophecy and exhorting may tend to flip-flop between being encouraging and setting the bar too high. On the other hand, a person who scores very low on prophecy may have a tendency to compromise inappropriately to avoid offending people.
- **Compassion.** A high score in compassion (mercy) can be an asset, but is not essential for this job, especially if there are others on the church staff who have the gift of compassion. However, a compassion score that is higher than administration can be a liability in this position, as such a person will tend to be more concerned about protecting

the feelings of people than with helping people connect with the right ministry roles and stretching them to grow. This can lead to people remaining in ministry positions where they are ineffective. On the other hand, a senior pastor whose lowest score is compassion may struggle to be an effective equipper of equipers. While he/she may inspire strong loyalty among some key leaders who are results-oriented, if people don't feel like they are being cared for as persons, they will not follow. A person who scores low in this area can develop greater strengths in compassion as a part of the maturing process and can learn to be more attuned to people's feelings as part of the change process.

- **Serving.** This is the one motivational spiritual gift that is actually a liability for this particular role. God has put many servers in the church because we need so many, but a server will find it difficult to be effective as an equipper of equipers. Why? Because the server's motto is: "I'd rather do it myself." The essence of being an equipper of equipers is that he/she finds the greatest satisfaction not in doing ministry himself/herself, but in empowering others to do it. As a general rule, don't expect a candidate for this position to ~~not~~ have serving among his/her top three gifts.

To summarize, here is what to look for in terms of a spiritual gifts profile for this position:

Administration: This should be either the highest motivational gift, or should be within five (5) points or so of being the highest gift.

Speaking gifts: The candidate should be strong in at least one of the speaking gifts—exhortation/encouragement, teaching, or prophecy. I rank them in that order in terms of their relevance to this position with exhortation/encouragement being the best match.

Giving: If giving is the highest motivational gift, I would consider that to be a negative indicator for a candidate for senior pastor of a multiple-staff church. On the other hand, if it is among the top gifts for an associate role, that is a plus.

Compassion: This does not need to be one of the highest gifts for your candidate, but if it is the lowest area, it is important to look closely at the person's spiritual maturity. Does he/she have enough sensitivity to people's feelings so that a deficit in this area doesn't hinder team building and community building? This gift is especially critical for the staff in small churches.

Serving: Serving should probably be one of the gifts with lower scores (not in the top three).

DISC personality profile

On a DISC profile, an effective equipper of equipers will have an above average score in the D area. This measures how result-oriented the person is. While an immature high-D can be addicted to results and can be insensitive and difficult to work with, this position calls for a person with an above average results-orientation who also works well with people.

Those people skills show up in the I and S scores. An above average I score is also an asset though not essential. This measures the person's capacity to inspire others. As an important aspect of this role is motivational, an above average I score is an asset.

The S score measures how people relate one-on-one, with a high S score indicating a warm person who strongly values personal relationships. I would look for an S score that is in a mid-range. A very low S score suggests that the person lacks enough empathy with other people to be an effective team- or community-builder. An extremely high S score (an S score higher than the D score) suggests the danger that the person may be afraid to correct people or to move them when they are in the wrong position, because he/she may care more about taking care to not hurt someone's feelings than about optimizing ministry results.

If a candidate's highest score is C, it is unlikely that you've found the right person. High C people are detail oriented, and will find it difficult to not micro manage. Note, however, that the DISC survey is setting-specific. For example, if a person has been in a job that requires great attention to detail (such as being in charge of safety at a nuclear plant), a high C score is a great asset. Upon shifting to a new setting, a person's work style will change somewhat. Ask your candidates to fill out their survey based on their experience in a role as similar as possible to the job being considered such as a volunteer ministry they have led. When you have a senior pastor who is a high C, it is important for him/her to partner closely with one or more leaders with high D and I scores. This is because visionary leadership does not come naturally to the high C pastor, but a high C pastor can embrace and cast the vision that is developed in partnership with other leaders.

In summary, you are looking for the following scores:

D = above average.

I = average to above average.

S = mid-range; not extremely high or extremely low.

C = average to below average; definitely lower than the D score.

Personal interviews

First, note that we refer to interviews, not an interview. While a first interview can make it clear that a given candidate is not a match, except in solo pastor churches, more than one interview is needed, assuming you are committed to or moving toward a team ministry model.

Who should do the interviewing?

In the case of a senior pastor, the search committee will have the primary responsibility for interviewing. However, we recommend that in the multiple staff church, each staff member also have one-on-one time with a pastoral candidate before a hire is made, and that the staff be given opportunity to weigh in on the hiring decision. If this person is going to be coaching the present staff, how receptive the staff members are to this person's leadership is very important. (In top businesses that are known for excellence in making hiring decisions, a person may interview with as many as thirty of his/her future coworkers.)

This does not mean that every staff member should have veto power. If you are in the midst of a culture change which you are expecting this new staff member to facilitate, it is possible that some staff members have some measure of resistance to the culture change. In that case, the new staff member will be charged with helping the slow-to-change staff member with the transition. Or, if the slow-to-change staff person does not get on board with the culture change, he or she

needs to be released from the staff. So, if a present staff member objects to the hiring of a candidate, you will need to determine if it is because of a problem with the candidate or because the staff member is reluctant to make needed changes.

Ideally, the process would look something like this. In the case of hiring a senior pastor, if the search committee is ready to recommend a candidate, each staff member, as well as key lay leaders, would have one-on-one time with the pastoral candidate. A strong equipper of equippers will use this time to find out about the ministry of each person and to ask, “If I were to become your pastor, what could I do to help you succeed in your ministry?”

In the case of hiring an associate, ideally the senior pastor would make the initial hiring recommendation, with the advice of any personnel-related committee. Some church’s bylaws require that the personnel committee, by whatever name, hire all clergy staff. This is unfortunate. If you are working under such constraints, the best-case scenario is for that committee to ask the senior pastor to recommend whom he/she wants to hire, then for the committee to provide advice and consent. If the pastor is not gifted in knowing how to build a staff (and many pastors are not), he/she will need coaching in this area, but the pastor should still take the lead in the decision. Once the pastor is ready to recommend a candidate for serious consideration, that candidate should have individual meetings with each staff member and with key lay ministry leaders. Once again, if this is the right person to be an equipper of equippers, he or she will ask each one something like, “If I were to become part of this church staff, what could I do to help you succeed in your ministry?” The candidate will focus the conversation on what the other person’s ministry is and how he/she can help him/her to fulfill God’s call, not on selling him/herself.

Interview questions

To get helpful answers, it is important to ask questions that do not telegraph the “right” answer. For example, the question, “How do you feel about teamwork?” is almost sure to elicit an enthusiastic endorsement of teamwork, but that tells you little about whether this person has strong team-building skills or how much value the candidate places on teamwork versus other values such as autonomy. Similarly, the question, “What is your attitude toward evangelism?” is going to elicit an “I’m for it” response in an evangelical church. But it doesn’t tell you whether the person is regularly nurturing relationships with non-Christians or what role he/she has played in effectively inviting people into a relationship with God and the Christian community.

So, rather than asking, “Do you value such and such?” or “How important is this to you?” you can ask open-ended questions that reveal the person’s values and priorities.

General questions about ministry experience, call, and values

1. Think of times when you have experienced God using you to make a difference in other people’s lives, either individually or in a group context. What would be two or three such occasions that have meant the most to you?

2. Can you think of times when a person has said to you, though not necessarily in these words: “God really used you to make a difference in my life or to touch a need”? What were those situations? What were you doing?

What to listen for: These stories in response to both questions 1 and 2 will highlight the person’s strongest motivational gift(s) and begin to reveal what contributions they can make to the body. A person who is shy about sharing such stories probably has trouble owning his/her own gifts—a warning sign.

3. What was one of your greatest failures in ministry or leadership? Why do you think you failed? What did you learn from this experience? How has it changed the way you do ministry?

What to listen for: A person who will serve as an effective ministry coach will not have to make up an answer to this question on the spot. He/she will be a person who has already given thought to the failures and who has drawn lessons from those failures and applied them. Lessons learned could be anything from “I am not gifted in that area and should not try to do it” to “God has used that failure to enable me to develop a ministry to others who are experiencing similar struggles.” Also, the right person will see trial and error as an essential part of the growth process, and will not be one to try to eliminate risk to avoid failures. You should be able to learn a lot about a person’s attitude toward failure by his/her response to this question.

4. (a) What is one pain in the world that breaks the heart of God that also breaks your heart?
(b) If you, along with a group of others, could touch this pain with God’s love in a way that would bring you great joy, what might that activity look like? What would your role be on the team?

What to listen for: These are generic call-discernment questions. Look for whether the answers to these questions have significant overlap with the staff role for which you are hiring. Also explore the question of whether it would be a win/win to modify the job description to do more to empower the person to carry out this sense of call. Whether that would be appropriate depends on the call.

5. What are some things you do that help other people that also energize you? Even though doing them may make you physically tired, it recharges your spirit?

What to listen for: This is another generic call question. At least 80% of the job description needs to fall into areas that energize the staff person.

6. What are some things you do that help other people that drain your energy? Even though you recognize their value, you usually have less emotional energy after doing them?

What to listen for: No more than 20% of a job description should fall in this area. It is better if you can minimize this to 10% or less through wise assignment of support staff and assigning tasks that don't energize this person to other equipping staff or non-staff ministers who are energized by them. However, a willingness to follow through on un-fun aspects of the job when necessary is an important attribute.

7. Looking back on your work or ministry history, what are two achievements that you found to be most satisfying?

What to listen for: This gets to the heart of what the person values most, while also pointing toward skills.

8. Can you think of one or two compliments that people have given you about your work or ministry that meant the most to you? What were they and why do you think they meant so much to you?

What to listen for: This is another window into values. A person may receive 100 compliments, but if one or two stand out as being most appreciated, that reveals what the person values the most. For example, does the person give greater weight to individual accomplishments or the accomplishments of a team of which he/she is a member? Does the person put more weight on institutional growth (growth in attendance, income, etc.) or on spiritual growth (mentoring, community-building, etc.)?

9. What are one or two growing edges in your spiritual life right now? Where is God stretching you?

What to listen for: A person who is qualified to serve as a ministry coach will be very conscious of one or two areas where God is calling him/her to grow. His/her answer will express some vulnerability. That is, he/she will not necessarily choose a "safe" answer to preserve an image of having it all together, but will reveal a significant area where growth is needed, such as a marriage relationship, workaholism or some other addiction, working at forgiveness/healing of a hurt, etc. How transparent you can expect someone to be depends in part on whether you are interviewing a stranger or someone you know.

10. How have you seen God at work in your life in the last month or two?

What to listen for: Is there evidence that the Spirit is actively guiding and shaping this person's life? Or is his/her approach to faith largely one of "head Christianity" in which he/she seeks to understand principles and apply them to his/her life, living up to a mental image of how Christians are to act? This person needs to be one who listens to and follows the Spirit.

11. What would you say are the three most important goals of this job?

What to listen for: How much clarity does the person have about the goals of the position? How well do these goals match what the church is looking for? Has the candidate left out something you consider essential? If so, could it be that it is not as important to the candidate as it is to the church?

In addition to these general question, you should also ask questions that are specific to the core values of your church. For example:

12. If a member of the church came to you and said, “Given my work schedule, I can attend either Sunday morning worship or my weeknight small group, but I cannot arrange my work schedule so that I can attend both. Which would you suggest I attend?”

What to listen for: In a church where the congregation is seen as the primary structure, you would expect to hear an answer that Sunday worship is priority. In a church that sees the small group as the primary setting for growing disciples and nurturing community, you would be looking for an answer that the small group takes priority.

13. What do you do to nurture your spirit?

What to listen for: In real practice, how high of a priority are personal spiritual disciplines in this person’s life? It is easy to give lip service to spiritual disciplines. The real question is their practice. If the practice of personal sabbath is an expectation for equipping staff, you will be listening for whether that is already a discipline or if it would be welcomed.

14. Do you meet with someone regularly to whom you have given permission to speak into your life? Someone who knows you well enough that he or she knows when you’re screwing up and he/she has authorization from you to correct you?

What to listen for: A person who does not have this kind of accountable relationship can be dangerous as a spiritual leader. At the same time, this kind of relationship is a gift. If the person does not have that kind of relationship now, you can ask if he or she would be willing to commit to this as a spiritual discipline. (We recommend this for all equipping staff. However, whether this is an expectation of staff is a matter of the church’s core values.)

Questions specific to the skills needed for an equipper of equippers role

15. (a) Tell us about a team you led or developed. What was the team’s purpose? What was your role on the team? In bringing the team together?

[After these questions are answered, follow up with:] (b) What did the team accomplish? In

what areas were you disappointed with the team's results? How long has it been since you were a part of this team? What has happened to the team since you left it?

What to listen for: On a real team (as opposed to a working group with a single leader), there are multiple leaders with leadership shifting based on the situation. There is also collaborative decision-making. If the team is healthy, dissent is encouraged to help the team arrive at the best decision. Listen to hear if this person gets his/her greatest joy from helping other team members grow and excel in ministry as opposed to simply getting work done through them. Listen for ways in which the performance level of other team members increased through coaching and collaboration. Also, when an effective team-builder leaves a team, he/she usually leaves behind a strong team that can thrive without his/her being there. If the team achieved its greatest victories in the few years after the team-builder left the team, that is a sign of an effective team-builder. If the team fell apart or declined in effectiveness once the leader left, that is a sign that the team was not built well.

16. Tell us about a couple of people you have mentored, either formally or informally, in a ministry or workplace situation. What did you hope to accomplish through the mentoring? What approach did you use for the mentoring? What did you most enjoy about the mentoring? What was your greatest frustration?

What to listen for: The right person for this job will delight in mentoring leaders and future leaders, and will look for ways to give away other responsibilities to be able to focus more time on leadership development. Look for signs that this person has prioritized leadership development, preferably without asking a softball question such as "What priority do you place on leadership development?" (Everybody will say "high priority," but what really answers the question is time use.) An effective mentor is very relational, and most of the mentoring will be informal—over meals, while working together, etc. Look for stories of people who have experienced rapid spiritual growth and/or rapid development in work or leadership or ministry skills while being mentored by this person. Consider interviewing people who are mentioned as proteges (people being mentored) to see how they experienced the relationship. If the person has been an effective mentor, these people will be the greatest champions of the mentor.

17. Tell us about a time when you had to provide leadership in a situation that involved significant conflict. What was the situation? What did you feel the core issues were? What outcome did you hope for? What did you do to address the situation? How did things come out? What about the outcome pleased you? What disappointed you? If you had it to do over again, what (if anything) would you do differently?

What to listen for: If this person has a "conflict is bad" attitude and just wishes conflict would go away, that will be a serious handicap. Since this person will be a change agent, his/her role will often be to increase the level of conflict in the process of achieving change. So, you're looking for a person who recognizes that conflict is not a necessary evil, but an

integral part of life together and necessary to positive change. Did the person surface conflict that needed to be surfaced to resolve issues? (This is the healthy response.) Or was he/she more concerned with putting oil on the water to try to keep everyone happy? (This is dysfunctional.) Is the person able and willing to speak the truth in love? Is the person skilled at reading the social and political dynamics of the situation? (This is extremely important for this position!)

18. Tell us about a time when you led a significant change process, whether on your job or in volunteer work or ministry. What was the situation? Why was the change needed? What resistance was encountered? How did you deal with the resistance? What process did you use to gain ownership in the needed changes?

What to listen for: How conscious is this person of the human dynamics involved in change (as opposed to simply the right and wrong on the issues)? How effective is this person as a consensus-builder? A vision caster? Etc. This is one of the most important questions, as this person is very much a change agent. He/she must understand how to guide a social group through challenging change processes.

19. Tell us about a time when someone you were supervising challenged you or dissented from what you were doing or wanting to do. What was the situation and how did you handle it? [Follow up question:] What did you learn from this situation? Were you able to make use of any of the ideas of the person who dissented?

What to listen for: Does this person handle dissent in such a way that people feel safe expressing dissent, or does he/she squash it? (The best leaders actively nurture an environment that encourages the expression of dissent so long as it is motivated by seeking the best interest of the team.)

20. Have you ever been in a situation where someone you were responsible to supervise had a negative or divisive attitude that was affecting other members of the team? If so, how did you handle that?

What to listen for: When a staff member is struggling to come up to performance standards but his/her heart is in the right place, you can afford to be patient and give the person time to grow into the job, or perhaps move to another job that is a better fit. But when a person is poisoning the environment with a bad attitude, it has to be nipped in the bud. Such a situation calls for speaking directly with the person, demanding that the negative behavior stop immediately. Setting up a short probationary period to monitor change in attitude/behavior is appropriate. If the behavior doesn't change within that time, the person should be fired. Period. What you're looking for is an attitude of near-zero tolerance for staff members whose attitudes tear down and divide. One such person can cripple the entire church staff.

21. Have you ever been in a situation where you were responsible to develop and implement a leadership development strategy? If so, tell us about that and how you went about it?
[Follow up question:] What do you think would be some of the characteristics of an effective leadership development strategy in our church?

What to listen for: The follow-up question is a bit dangerous, because people can say what they would do even if they don't have the skills to do it. What this person has actually done in the past is far more telling. However, if a person has not been responsible for leadership development in the past and has no cohesive ideas for how to do leadership development in the future, he/she probably can't help you much. If the person describes primarily a classroom approach to leadership development, then he/she doesn't understand how to develop leaders. A person who knows how to develop leaders will focus on strategies that are strongly relational and that make substantial use of apprenticeship and learning by doing. Training events that involve going to outstanding practitioners of whatever it is you're wanting to learn and learning from them (as opposed to taking classes) are effective. The biggest thing to listen for is whether the person "gets" the big picture idea of what it means to be a church that has a culture of leadership development, where leadership development is deeply ingrained in the rhythm of everyday life and a high part of the consciousness of every equipping staff member.

22. [If giving leadership to your small groups ministry is to be part of this person's job description:] How much experience have you had in small group life? For how much of that time were you a small group leader? Have you ever overseen the multiplication of a small group? (If so, describe.) Have the small groups you have been involved in been evangelistically effective? (If so, describe.) What do you think you bring to small group life? What aspects of small group leadership are you not necessarily gifted in? If you had to choose between leading a small group and preaching (or some other task in the job description), and you were free to choose based purely on what you most enjoyed, which would you choose?

What to listen for: You are listening for passion as well as experience. If a person has a passion for small group ministry and has demonstrated an ability to effectively lead a small group, training in other aspects of this ministry can be arranged for (and the church should budget to provide this training for this staff member and other key leaders of the small group ministry). It is not essential that the small group leader be a one-on-one evangelist, but if you expect your small groups to be evangelistic, the person should have a passion about helping the group focus on building relationships with unchurched people and regularly having small group events to which unchurched people are invited to build relationships.

23. What is your vision for our church?

What to listen for: If you are interviewing a person who is not a part of the church, the answer you are looking for is "I don't know." A person who brings a vision from the outside

and tries to impose it on the church does not know how to lead a congregation or staff or governing board in the process of discerning God's vision. Of course, the person can state some biblical principles that apply to all churches. But the specific vision for a specific congregation does not come from one person, even the senior pastor. If the candidate has a very specific vision he/she wants to impose on the church, take him/her to the airport.

If the person does say, "I don't know," ask a follow up question: "How would you go about discerning that vision?" The answer should describe a process that involves a lot of listening, with a team rather than an individual, being responsible for the shaping of the vision.

Also, if you are interviewing for an associate position, this person will in most cases not be responsible for facilitating the vision discernment process. (Occasionally an associate will do this because of having a greater gifting in this area than the senior pastor.) In such case, part of what you are testing for is whether there is adequate overlap between the vision of the candidate and the vision already developed by the church, including the senior pastor.

In the case of a candidate who is a part of the church, it would often be appropriate for the person to be able to articulate a clear vision for the church. In that case, the vision should reflect a good grasp of where the church is and where the core leaders believe God is taking the church. The right person for this job may be able to articulate this even better than some of the core leaders. In fact, part of his/her job may be to help the leaders more clearly define that future vision.

24. What are you reading these days?

What to listen for: The topics someone is reading on are an important indicator of passion. Also, it is important for the person who takes on this role to be on a fast learning curve. So, the ideal candidate will be someone whose passion for learning in these areas is evidenced by reading about such areas as ministry, leadership development, discipleship, team building, etc. Unless your church is part of an oral culture, if a person isn't doing any reading in areas directly related to the job description, that should be a warning sign. By the way, many of the best books in the area of leadership are published not by the Christian press, but by the business press. A person who is on the cutting edge of business literature may have a lot to bring to this position.

25. What have you learned in the past couple of years that has made a difference in how you lead? Give an example or two of the differences it has made.

What to listen for: You're listening for a love of learning, for an eagerness to find more effective ways to do things, for a willingness to experiment (risk failure). You're looking for a person who is on a rapid learning curve and who is energized by that learning. You're looking for an adaptive leader who operates more by principles than by methods.

Reflecting on the interview questions

Almost no candidates are going to hit a home run on every question. What you're looking for, though, is a person who passionately embraces the values you are asking about, and who has a track record of being a team builder, a mentor, and a change agent. And, you are looking for a person who is aware that he/she will be launching on a job where there is a great deal to learn. While recognizing that he/she doesn't know all there is to know to fulfill the job's demands, he/she also is willing to commit to the learning process and is at least fairly confident that he/she can grow into the job. But, he/she will always be operating on the edge, always taking on something that he/she doesn't know how to do yet, but which he/she will learn how to do in the doing of it.

Note that almost none of the questions ask the candidate to speculate about what he or she would do in the job role. Even when such questions are asked, the purpose of the questions is mainly to see if the person will give an inappropriate answer. For example, if a person from outside the church gives a too specific answer to the question of "What is your vision for this church?" that should disqualify him/her. And if a person, in response to the question of what leadership development should look like places the primary emphasis on classroom training, that should disqualify him/her.

Rather, these questions are focused on the person's track record and values, which are the best predictors of future performance.

Interviewing references

If you don't know the candidate personally from having a history together, you will want to interview references. The most helpful interviews may be with this person's former teammates and those this person has mentored, coached, or supervised. They may have the most valuable perspective on how effective the candidate is as an empowering leader, mentor, team builder, and change agent.

Interviewing personal references (friends) is most useful for evaluating character and spiritual qualities, including spiritual and relational disciplines. If the person has a discipleship or accountability partner, that could be a valuable interview.

If yours is a denominational setting with structures in place that oversee individuals in pastoral ministry, it's important to talk with those who have supervised, or at least cared for, the prospective candidate. Rather than asking the typical questions, consider using these more probing questions to facilitate more honest feedback. Most supervisors do not want to disparage the ministry skills of a colleague, which is healthy and normal. But recognizing potential ministry weaknesses or mismatches beforehand is greatly preferred to the pain and ongoing dysfunction of a poorly thought-out staff addition.

Relevant interview questions for the references and ministry colleagues can be selected from the above list.

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