

September 2014

'you're hired'

How to hire the staff you need – and avoid my mistakes!

Over the last twenty years, a significant number of churches in the UK have begun employing staff. Youthworkers, evangelists, worship directors, children's workers, and Operations Directors are just some of the posts that have taken their place alongside the traditional roles of the clergy. But how do you know *who* to employ? What criteria do you use?

Over the last 22 years, I have employed many staff and here are some of the lessons I have learned – and mistakes I have made...

Firstly, any staff appointments need to be driven by vision and strategy. Over 16 years ago, we had to go through a process of 'realignment' as we asked ourselves the fundamental questions: 'what sort of church is God asking us to become? What staff do we need to help us become that church?' How you answer those questions will determine the staff posts you need – or will need in the future.

Our starting point is to create a full-time staff post when a ministry area becomes too big for a volunteer church member. We advertise as widely as possible – through personal contacts, social media, website and in appropriate publications. After that, and determined by the vision and strategy we believe God has given us, comes the appointment of the staff. We always have a clear job description and criteria we want to measure the candidates against. This, together with an agreed probation period, allows us to objectively assess each person against the role we are seeking to fulfil.

We will ask people to come for an interview and often a second visit. It is vital not to shortcut the time it takes to appoint. We try and get to know the person as well as we can – and always ask if they have thought through what it will be like to worship in the place where they work. If they haven't begun to think about that or dismiss it as not being a problem, alarm bells should start to ring!

I try and use seven criteria in interviewing potential candidates – and will always involve other staff and church members where appropriate. A panel of four to five people helps give a balanced impression of the candidates. The criteria I bear in mind are ...

Character

The most basic ingredient. Are they people of integrity? Are they teachable? Are they humble? Is their evidence of them being a servant? During an interview, we often ask 'if we were to ask your close friends, how would they describe you?'. The answer is quite revealing – both as to how they are perceived or would like to be perceived.

Chemistry

Again, a very basic question. Do they give you energy? Do they get on with you? When they walk in, do you feel happy or tense? Do you / will people want to spend time with them? You are going to be spending a lot of time with each other – is there a real chemistry with you and, if relevant, the staff team? If not, why would you appoint them?!



This is one we need to be honest about with ourselves – and if necessary, give ourselves permission to take it seriously.

Competency

Do they demonstrate the necessary ability to do the job? In their application form, have they shown you experience that is transferable? James Emery White has written ‘We often appoint on competency but dismiss people because of character.’ The former can be taught but you need to be convinced that they have the necessary skills.

Catalyst

Do they bring something you haven't already got? Often, especially with the first appointments to a staff team, it can be tempting to play safe. Appointing from within the church family has its advantages – you know what you are getting. Some of my best appointments have been church members. But could it be that you are missing a trick?

Will this person bring something to the staff team and the church that is not already there? What added extras might this person bring? How do they complement your gifts as the senior leader? Try and appoint people who are better than you – you will not regret it. Poor and insecure leaders appoint people who will not threaten them – great leaders appoint people who are better than they are.

Culture

Do they get how we do things around here? Each church and staff team has its particular culture. Some of this may be written down or articulated – in the values of a church or team. But there is the unwritten culture – how we do things around here. A new staff member will need to adjust as well as challenge these values, but if they show no sign of understanding what makes your church or team tick, then do not appoint them. A key question to ask is – ‘do they or will they fit?’

Capacity

How much can they handle? It is one thing to be



successful in one environment – it does not mean that this person can replicate their success in another. (I write as a Manchester United supporter who has witnessed one of the worst examples of succession planning over the last 12 months!) If you are in a large church, has the person worked for a large church before? If not, do they understand the different dynamics at work in different sized churches? They are not better or worse – just different.

One of the most difficult situations to handle is when you realise a position has outgrown an existing staff member's capacity. Some of the most painful conversations I have had have been with good and faithful colleagues who have not had the capacity to adjust to the demands of a growing church. I regret I have not handled those as well as I could have done – necessary though the change was.

Call

This is perhaps the most important question of all, and is the first we include in any application form or interview. Why do they want *this* job at *this* time?! Why do they think God is calling them to your church for this post at this moment in time? How has that been demonstrated? What research have they done on you as a church? Have they visited you on a Sunday? What excites them about your vision and strategy?

If they cannot demonstrate this, then you are just one of many job applications they are making – and if not you, then it could be any other church they end up working for. If they cannot show you that God is calling them, never appoint them. At some point in the future, the call of God will be the only thing that keeps them going. If they don't have that, they will quickly give up – or stop giving of their best. They, you and the church you lead deserve better than that. If you are in any doubt, wait and re-advertise. It is far better to wait for the right person – however painful that might seem.

You're hired

Appointing staff can be an exciting but daunting process – but if your church is going to grow, you need the right team to take it forward – paid or unpaid. Take time to appoint prayerfully and carefully. It is time well invested.

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