

Defining Moments
Volume 63—Navigating Staff Transitions

THROUGHOUT HISTORY GOD HAS EMPLOYED AND DEPLOYED, assembled and reassembled church teams. We all long for smooth staff transitions that deepen the respect and love between the parties involved.

Whether you are a staff person leaving or a leader saying good-bye to a key player on your team, the following paragraphs outline some steps that you can take to successfully navigate a staff change.

ADVANCE INVESTMENT & A RADICAL STANCE

It may seem radical for leaders to welcome other churches to “shop” their staff, but if those staff prayerfully consider any offers, their leaders are in a no-lose position.

If the Holy Spirit leads them to make a change, then making that change is the best thing that can happen. If the Holy Spirit leads them to stay, then they will gain a greater sense of resolve that they are right where they should be.

If you establish open, respectful, trustworthy relationships with your staff, should they feel the Holy Spirit prompting them to make a change, they will feel safe talking about it with you.

IS THE HOLY SPIRIT STIRRING?

Following a prompting from God may not be easy, especially if He calls you out of a familiar position into something new. You may feel terribly uncomfortable—even disloyal—doing so, but it is vital that you find out if God is leading you to make a change.

Come Early, Come Honestly

In the kingdom, ideally, we should be free to speak openly and honestly while considering a job change.

If you suspect that the Holy Spirit may be leading you to make a change, talk to your direct supervisor. Share your thoughts and feelings about leaving and ask for his or her support as you explore new opportunities.

Take Time to Fully Investigate

It can take a long time to know if and where the Holy Spirit is leading. You may want to consult a Christian counselor to make sure that there are no underlying emotional issues driving your restlessness.

Don't rush the process—take the time that you need to fully investigate all the possibilities involved.

Use Discretion When Processing

It is normal to experience confusion and to uncover raw emotions as you sincerely evaluate whether to make a change. Therefore, use discretion when deciding who to seek counsel from.

Talk to mature people who will keep your discussions confidential and who know you well, such as your spouse, counselor, accountability group, and/or mentors.

Once You Decide...

When you make your final decision, contact your supervisor immediately. If you decide to make a change, allow ample time for those you leave to prepare for your departure.

AVOID THE CORPORATE MINDSET

If you are a supervisor whose staff person has just told you that he or she thinks the Holy Spirit may be leading him or her to make a change, it is not unusual to feel ambivalent. Although you want to be honorable and supportive, you probably feel terribly disappointed.

At such times, it is important not to preempt the work of the Holy Spirit. Resist the urge to compete for the staff person or engage in other marketplace practices. Instead, focus on God.

Thank the staff person for coming to you. Encourage him or her to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit *wherever it leads*. Offer to support the staff person in every way you can.

However, if you *sincerely* believe that a staff person is misguided, advise him or her.

HOW TO ANNOUNCE A DEPARTURE

How you handle a departure can be a trust-buster or a trust-builder in your church. Done well, a staff change can help a congregation understand how a transition can be positive. Done poorly, it can demolish the sense of trust they have in their senior leaders.

Carefully consider what to say and who to tell first. Perhaps you should start by telling the church leadership individually, and then advise the church staff, and then make an announcement to the congregation.

MORE THINGS TO AVOID

The following list describes some actions to avoid when leaving a position or responding to someone who is leaving:

Volume 63—Navigating Staff Transitions

Page 4

- Precipitously deciding to leave without engaging in deep dialog with the people who know you the best.
- Running from something (such as increased responsibilities). If you run—you may regret it for the rest of your life.
- Speaking recklessly to a departing staff person out of fear that he or she is irreplaceable. In doing so, you can seriously injure that person. Choose your words carefully and trust the sovereignty of God.

God can be trusted today and will be good tomorrow. One day you may get a great staff member from another church. Another day you may give up a great staff member to another church. Both events are a part of Kingdom life. Let's enter into this part of Kingdom life with a trusting and open spirit...and watch God work!



© 2000 Willow Creek Association

Bill Hybels is the founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. He is the author of many books, including *The God You're Looking For*, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, *Fit to be Tied*, *Rediscovering Church*, and *Making Life Work*.

Lee Strobel is a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church. He is the author of *God's Outrageous Claims*, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, *What Jesus Would Say*, and *The Case for Christ*.

Russ Robinson is the Director of Ministries and Small Groups and serves on the Management Team at Willow Creek Community Church. He provides leadership for the 200 staff who oversee more than 2,500 small groups. Prior to his staff role, Russ served on Willow Creek's Elder Board for four years. He is also an attorney and started his own law firm in 1989.