



Promoting Healthy Staff Relationships among Multi-Staff Ministers through Effective Teamwork

Simon A. Ishola^{1*} and Chukwuma Akaolisa Ejikeme²

¹Faculty of Education, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

²Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations battle with unhealthy staff relationship which has a negative influence on organizational goals accomplishment as time and effort are wasted on conflicts resolutions at the detriment of meeting organizational goals. Healthy staff relationship is paramount for any organization that must meet up with organizational goals. For this reason, it is imperative that among multi staff ministers in a church there is the need to consciously seek for healthy staff relationship. One way of consciously promoting healthy staff relationship especially among multi staff ministers is teamwork. Therefore, this paper addresses the strategies for promoting healthy staff relationships among multi staff ministers through effective teamwork.

Keywords: Staff-relationships; multi-staff ministers; teamwork.

1. INTRODUCTION

Man is a relational being as can be seen in the Bible right from creation. At creation, the Bible stated that God saw man alone and created a

help- mate for him so that he could have a companion. Relationship is very vital to any organization as it has the power to make or mar any organization. Relationship proceeds from the truth that no one can do the work alone and

*Corresponding author: E-mail: simonishola@yahoo.com;

therefore need others to work with him in a healthy relational manner in order to be maximally productive. Relationships vary as there are healthy and unhealthy relationships. A healthy relationship will build up an organization while an unhealthy relationship promote rivalry, envy, jealousy with its attendant effect of jeopardizing organizational goals and objectives. Ishola [1] e.g. Ishola [1] asserted that strong relationships do not happen by accident but through a conscious effort by all team members (134).

Therefore, the thesis of this paper is that healthy relationship is imperative in achieving organizational goal and this can be achieved through the promotion of teamwork. Teamwork is premised on the point that God from creation is a team player as is seen in the opening statement of the Bible-“Come let us make man in our image...”(Gen 1:26). The “us” has been subjected to various Bible interpretations but the point that is not debatable was the statement “us” signifies teamwork.

The focus of this paper is to discuss how teamwork can be used to promote healthy staff relationships among multi-staff ministers and the necessary strategies to be used. For the sake of this paper, it is important to clarify the following terms: healthy relationships and multi-staff ministers. Healthy relationships signifies robust, sound, strong and lively relationship; one that is not at war or antagonistic with each other. Multi-staff ministers consist of the senior pastor who is the leader, the team of pastors (music, education and associate), other paid staff (sexton, gateman, secretary and such others) and volunteers.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

Fundamentally, in the church the basic principle of belonging together is the coming together of men and women to become a belonging of God through faith in Jesus Christ with a given mandate of making disciples of all nations through preaching and teaching (Matt. 28: 18-20). The church has a vision and mission (purpose) given by God himself and expected of every church to follow. From the onset, the ministry is a multi-staff ministry with people of diverse gifts and calling coming together to fulfill this God's mandate of making disciples of all nations(Mark 1:15-17;Matt. 4:17-22). It was not an assignment given to one man but to all who

will follow Christ; who have answered the call to be a follower without any distinction whether clergy or laity [2].

Batson [2] asserted that from the Greek word translated church, *ekklesia* is composed of two other Greek words, *ek* (out of) and *kalein* (to call). Therefore, the definition of being part of the church is to be among the “the called out ones” (4). This implies that originally church staff is not referring to paid professionals but to all who are engaged in the propagation of the gospel. To buttress this, Ishola [3] defined church staff as “a group of Christian persons who in response to a divine and ecclesiastical calling willingly covenant with God, a local congregation, and one another to live out their vocational mission, sharing responsibility and authority for enabling the church for mission”. Therefore, the church is for all believers irrespective of status as they are bonded by faith in Christ and exist to serve another in love and be faithful propagators of the gospel.

It becomes imperative that there is the need for healthy staff relationship in order to ease the work of the gospel. Lawson (2000) cited by Hedin [4] stated that healthy staff relationship can make ministry sweet irrespective of the stresses associated with ministry but relationship with a supervisor or fellow associate that deteriorate into isolation, animosity, or indifference can take much of the joy out of even the best ministry. Further corroborating this assertion, stated that every organization should seek for relational fit by recruiting those who can fit in into the team as it is what makes ministry more enjoyable and also enhances enthusiasm and productivity. The key issue discussed is that healthy relationship is of utmost priority to any organization.

Interpersonal relationship refers to a strong bond between two or more people [5]. Interpersonal relationships are formed as a result of individuals working together in the same organization and in the same team. It is also formed between a man and a woman in marriage, among immediate family members and relatives, as well as between friends. According to Adedokun [6], successful organizations thrive when there are positive relationships among staff ditto the church. When there is peaceful and pleasant interpersonal relationships among church staff, the fellowship of the church will be deepened, ministry will grow but ministry will suffer when relationship are fractured (Adedokun, 1996).

Gangel [7] used Philippians 2:1-5 to elucidate elements of interpersonal church relationship. In that Scripture, Apostle Paul mentioned these elements as ingredients that promote interpersonal relationship: unity; like-mindedness; having the same love; being one in spirit and purpose; not working with selfish attitude; working in humility and considering the interest of others (2002).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF TEAMWORK

Kleiner (1996) cited by Biech [8], asserted that the use of teams as an organizational strategy to engage employees and improve productivity is now more than three decades. It began in the early 1970s under the leadership of Gaines- a Topeka pet food plant that launched a novel experiment to transform its workplace into self-directed and cross-functional work teams when no else was doing it (1). Teamwork emanated from the concept of working in a team of which Biech emphasized that team building begins with a clear decision by leadership to encourage, and even to require, employees to operate in teams (2).

There are many definitions of a team. Biech defined a team as a group of people who are mutually dependent on one another to achieve a common goal (1). This is presupposed on the condition that they are functioning well. Elrod [9] defined a team as a group where there is intentional, risk-taking effort toward the three components of task, process and people (184) where task is the purpose or objective of the group; process is the way team goes about pursuing the task and the last is the people who are involved in the team. In a team, there is only one leader who inspires and motivates others to fulfill the purpose of the team.

A fundamental truth about team members is that team members are equal but the members function in different roles and this is where the effectiveness of the leader comes into play, that is, the ability to get different members of the team to fulfill their role (Bradley cited by McIntosh, 2000: 71). For example in a football team, everyone has a wing to cover but they still play for one another because they lose as a team and win as team. Everyone is there to cover the deficiency of the other. This point is elucidated by Bradley who stated that, the point of the game is not how well the individual does, but whether the team wins and this calls for the

blending of personalities, mutual sacrifices for the group success (70).

Teamwork assures of greater productivity as Maxwell [10] pointed out that it is difficult to get an individual who does better than a team. He regarded this as the mystery of the lone ranger. He stated, "As much as we admire solo achievement, the truth is that no one individual has done anything of value. The belief that one person can do something great is a myth" (2). He asserted further, "Look below the surface and you will find that all seemingly solo acts are really team efforts (4). This is not in doubt considering the athlete who mounts the podium. Though he ran an individual race, beneath is the coaching crew at the background who were part of the success story. Reiterating the point further, he stated that teamwork is at the heart of great achievement as "One is too small a number to achieve greatness" buttressed with a Chinese proverb, "Behind every able man, there are always other able men" (4).

In spite of the beauty of teamwork, it is not everybody that patronizes teamwork in the operation of their organizations. There are those who prefer to be lone rangers and such people do not achieve much. There are many reasons why some people are still lone rangers in the modern world in spite of the gain of teamwork. Maxwell identified some of the reasons which are ego trip, insecurity, naiveté, and temperament (6-8).

3.1 Biblical Basis of Team Ministry

The word team does not appear in the English Bible but the idea is expressed everywhere in the Bible [11]. The Bible is replete with team ministry right from the Old Testament to New Testament. The first team portrayed in the Bible is that of the Trinity, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together from time past throughout all eternity (Macchia, 28). To substantiate the importance of team ministry in the Bible, Sweet cited by McIntosh [12] affirmed that Jesus invested everything he had in a team and that the Bible knows nothing of solo ministry (9).

Chronologically from the Old Testament, there are so many instances of team ministry. In Genesis 11, the building of the tower of Babel was a clear case of team spirit. Their unity of purpose and their tenacity caught God's attention that made God to make a statement that because of their oneness, they could achieve

whatever they set their hearts to achieve. Moses worked with Aaron as a team as is seen in Exodus 4: 14-16. When the Israelites were fighting with the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur upheld Moses hand for them to achieve victory (Ex. 17:8-13). In the same Exodus, Moses' father in-law, Jethro counseled Moses on the need to work as team to avoid burnout and death. Moses was doing the work alone and probably would have died of burnout if not for the intervention of the father-in law. This is the bane of many pastors and organization leaders who think that without them the work will not progress only to discover that the work even flourishes in their absence (McIntosh, 88; Macchia, 28-29).

Furthermore, King David had a team, Ittai, Zadok and Abiathar, Hushai, Ziba (2 Sam. 23:8-39; 2 Sam. 15:19-16:4). These were the men who worked with him right from his days in the wilderness till the time he was made king. They were also there with him in his hour of trials. In rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and the temple after the exile, Ezra and Nehemiah had a team. They worked with people like Hanani, Hananiah, Shelemiah, Zadok, Pedial and Hanan (Neh. 1:2; 7:1-2; 10:23; 8:1-9; 13:13). The wise king Solomon advocated for teamwork as can be seen from the following scriptural passages (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6; Eccl. 4:9-12) (McIntosh, 88; Macchia, 29).

The New Testament is not different. Jesus modeled team spirit as can be seen in how he related with the disciples. He selected, mentored, instructed and evaluated them. He also confronted, disciplined, restored and multiplied his staff (Mt. 10:1; Mk. 3:14; 6:31-32; Luke 6:12-16; 9:1). Apostle Paul had a team of people that worked with him to plant and nurture churches. Such men like Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Erastus, Priscila, and Aquila (Acts 15:40; 19:22; Rom. 16:1-15, 21-23; col. 4:7-14; 2 Tim. 4: 10-13). The team ministry was also made manifest in early church where there were multiple elders that Paul ordained in every church (Acts 14:23). Apostle Peter also made mention of church elders from his letter to the elders (1 Peter 5:1). (McIntosh, 88; Macchia, 30).

From all the Scriptural passages highlighted, one notices that teamwork is not alien to the Bible. To emphasize team ministry in the Bible, Macchia came up with an illustration using 1 Corinthians 12 where Apostle Paul described the body of Christ who is regarded as the ultimate team, he changed the word body to team and explained

how the traits of teams are seen in the body of Christ. The traits are trusting, empowering, assimilating, managing and serving. He captured it thus:

T-the team is one unit, the place where trust is born (v.12).

E-One team, no matter our background, is empowered as individuals (v.13).

A-each part is assimilated with another, needing each other to belong (vv.14-16).

M-the team is managed and arranged as God desires (vv.17-19).

S-team members serve no matter how weak, honorable, or presentable they are (vv.20-24). (Macchia, 33).

4. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK AMONG MULTI-STAFF MINISTERS

For there to be an effective teamwork that will promote healthy church relationships it depends on the pastor who is the leader and it requires conscious effort. The effectiveness of the pastor in leading his team will determine to a great extent how the church accomplishes her vision and ministry and at the same time satisfy the needs of the members [13]. Therefore, Cladis (1999) cited by Lineberger [14] stated that the first step in building a collaborative team is to ensure that the purpose of the team is clearly defined and should generate enthusiasm among the team (40), therefore, leadership is imperative in successful teamwork. The following are the strategies to promote effective teamwork:

Lead in team building: the pastor should lead in team building and must be a committed team leader with diverse gifts. This is exemplified by Christ. In Mark 1: 16-18, Jesus spent time with the disciples he had chosen to impart them. He spent his time with them and got to know them. He was involved in their lives in an open transparent manner. A leader should be a leader and at the same time an enabler for the team members. Harold Westing (2012) cited by Lineberger buttressed this point by stating that "the strongest form of a relationship works within a framework of honesty, intimacy, and interdependency. A very unhealthy one is characterized by despair, depression, isolation, active addiction and numbed feelings (47).

Where the leader leads his team in all honesty and promote intimate relationship, there will be a reciprocal response from the rest of the team members (Lineberger, 46-47; Philips, 228).

Be aware on a regular basis the work being done by the staff member: a leader should know what work the staff is doing. This calls for inspection and monitoring of the staff's activities. He has to spend time to inspect what the staff is doing asking pertinent questions where necessary. Every staff has a task tied to the productivity of the organization and when one is not doing his own task, the productivity level comes down. It becomes imperative that the team leader is not an observer to the process but an active member by supervising to see that things go well. He delegates without abdicating. It is just like a coach in the team who though not directly playing but he is monitoring and giving instruction. He observes what is going on and passes instruction for correction (Lineberger, 47-49; Philips, 227).

Being Accessible to Staff Members: nothing kills an organization faster like the inaccessibility to the leader. When a leader makes himself inaccessible to the workers, he is creating room for failure. He should not just lock up himself in the office without interacting with the staff. A team leader who practices this will know when things are going wrong as people will not hide from him. Moreover, by not being available, it can promote eye service where people might be working just to please the leader not because they want to work. It will kill initiative from workers and people will not be willing to make sacrifices (Lineberger, 49-50; Philips, 223-224).

Encourage the staff member's growth in his or her job: growth in a particular job produces expertise. When the staff is encouraged to grow in his/her job, there is gaining of experience that leads to the productivity of the organization. The team leader should encourage staff to stay on the job instead of shuffling him all the time. Also, it is good the staff should be allowed to go for training on the job or it can be organized for him/her by the organization (Lineberger, 50; Philips, 223).

Handle potential problems with mutual respect and support: one of the obstacles in teamwork is conflict that arises as a result of differences in personality makeup. According to Fagerstrom (2006) cited by Linberger, "Each member has a unique background, spiritual gifts, experiences,

longevity, and style and desires to be recognized for his or her unique contribution. ...Where diversity exists, conflict is inevitable. It is the leader's role to bring conflict resolution skills to the table" (51). Conflicts should not be left unattended to as it can cause a lot of damage. It can go underground and poison the spirit of the team thereby destroying the entire ministry of the church (Lineberger, 51).

Express respect to all staff, including ministry assistants and support staff: in 2 Sam 19:7 an example of how a leader should treat his team members is demonstrated with the counsel of Joab to king David on how he should go out and encourage his soldiers who helped to restore his kingdom after the rebellion of Absalom. He was asked to go and speak kindly to his servants who had risked their lives on his behalf. The American psychologist William James stated that an element of humanity is that everyone wants to be appreciated. Therefore, it is important that a leader uses both verbal and written form to appreciate his staff. (Lineberger, 52-53).

Extend compassionate ministry to the staff members and his or her family: a staff should made to enjoy compassion from the leader. When the staff or family members are affected by unpleasant circumstances, the leader should extend compassionate ministry to such a staff. It is this attitude that stimulates the staff to want to put in his or her best seeing that the church is available for him/her at critical situations (Lineberger, 54).

Encourage cooperation and not competition: one of the things that kill a team spirit is when people are competing instead of complementing each other. There are different gifts among the staff and naturally, people may be attracted to a particular person more than the other. The pastor as the team leader must lead by example by not competing with the other staff. He should rather mentor them and promote healthy nurturing of the diverse gifts for the good of the church, he should also let the members know that they should recognize that all of them are working as team and no one should be cherished more than the other. This will help to stave off jealousy and envy. This is made clear by Apostle Paul in Romans 12:3-8 calling everyone to utilize his/her gift for the good of all (Ishola, 204; Lineberger, 69:[11]).

Promote good and effective communication: there should be good line of communication

among the team. Good communication will always produce good feedback. The pastor has so much to do in promoting good communication pattern for the church. Therefore, he should not feel threatened but rather he should encourage the staff to have freedom to relate to one another anywhere within the organization for the purposes of communication without suspicion and fear (Ishola, 205; Philips, 226).

Have a well written job description: job description gives detail of what is expected of a staff. It clearly provides guidelines for every role, describes each one's responsibility and give out appropriate authority. When a staff is guided by a good job description the tendency of having role clash will be minimal except when one is a bossy or nosey person. Job descriptions help to guide one from crossing boundary (Ishola, 205; Philips, 218).

Cultivate a positive relationship with one's supervisor: every team member should seek to cultivate a positive relationship with the supervisor. It is not about being an eye pleaser but borne out of respect for the office one is occupying. A saying says "what goes around comes around." When a staff seeks for positive relationship with supervisor, he is directly positioning himself for promotion. Apostle Paul enjoined Christians to respect authority (Romans 13:1). The pastor as the leader of the team derives his authority from God and if the team members do not recognize this, then, they are failing God (Hedin, 64; Philips, 224).

Treat all staff members as fellow believers in Christ: this is an important step in promoting healthy teamwork among staff members. The church is first a gathering of called out ones in Christ. When people work, they are working for the Master who has called people to be engaged in His work-preaching and teaching. This understanding commands respect for the other staff by the pastor who is the team leader. Apostle Peter regarded the elders as recipients of God's grace and follow sufferers of Christ that will share in the glory to be revealed (1 Peter 5:1).when the team leads with this understanding, there will be effective teamwork (Hedin, 61; Philips, 221).

Practice Relationship Skills: every member of the team should practice relationship skills. This calls for good attitude from staff members. The practice stems from the fact that the staff come from diverse backgrounds. There is the need to

learn how to be courteous to fellow workers. Learning to take interest in fellow workers; saying thank you, not criticizing openly and other stuff like that. One must then not look to his/her own position or interest but look out for the interest of others. Organizations suffer at times because people are selfish, always wanting things to be done according to their own views. This is a negation of apostle's Paul call to the Philippians church for members to eschew factors that promote unhealthy relationship in the church (Phil. 2:1-11). Therefore, it is important for each team member to know how to answer one another in love, tolerance in opinions, and promoter of unity and above all submitting to team discipline (Hedin, 64; Philips, 225-228).

Courage to evaluate staff and remove those not measuring up: the staff should be told that they are being evaluated from the onset and the criteria for evaluation should not be hidden. It must be clear and be understood by all. When a staff is continuously found as the weak link in the organization, he should not be left behind at the cost of the organization. A coach does not leave a player who is not doing well to remain in the team. As a sign of warning, he may be substituted and after many efforts to improve the player is done and no result, he sells off the player or releases him at the end of the day (Philips, 229; Lineberger, 44).

5. CONCLUSION

Every organization should seek to promote healthy teamwork in order to be maximally productive. Effective teamwork does not just happen but time and energy must be expended to get it done. Promoting healthy teamwork is profitable as one will chase a thousand while two will chase tens of thousands. Healthy teamwork is promoted when a leader eschews ego trip, insecurity, naiveté and immaturity but rather go for virtues like accessibility, appreciative heart, trust, unity and such like. Healthy teamwork is promoted when there is clear communication, good job description, compassion, understanding what is expected of one and practicing relationship skills. Effective teamwork is not only dependent upon the leader but the team members also have a role to play. Effective teamwork is achievable if efforts are made by all and benefits are there for all to gain. Therefore, the church as an organization should go for multi-staff ministry since it is biblical but this can only be achieved when everybody sees that no one can do the work of the church alone hence

putting heads together to work with one heart, goal and vision.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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