

Time Management

Although administration is one of the gifts of the Spirit many pastors struggle in management and administration. I find that pastors can be busy doing nothing, busy doing everything or are just plain lazy. Learning how to take control of one's life is the key to fruitfulness and productivity.

Many pastors are highly driven. This may stem from low self-esteem and the belief that being busy makes a person important, or it may simply reflect a life that has become unmanageable. We need to take responsibility for our lives by planning time for devotions, work, family, rest, and recreation. These things do not happen on their own.

The Diary

A diary wisely used can help us manage our lives more effectively.

There are many *types of diaries* about. Some pastors use a pocket diary when travelling, while the other stays in the office back home. If you use two diaries, be extremely careful that they are used in conjunction with one another. Record main activities in *both* diaries.

The most useful diary for a pastor to have is one where each page is divided into 15 minute segments, as well as having a blank part where intentions for the day are recorded. Some diaries have space on each page where financial transactions are recorded. Record in your diary every *interview and activity* for the day. All good administrators do that. Nothing is more frustrating for managers who control companies, to have a pastor who is unreliable simply because he forgets to write down impending interviews and activities into his diary! Writing down all events and activities also relieves the pastor's mind of considerable pressure. It helps him keep things in perspective.

It is useful to record a little *time out* between interviews, especially if they are likely to be emotionally draining. This will give you time to recover and refresh yourself before the next one. It is good also to pencil into your diary a regular night at home. That way if people are too demanding and want to see you that night, you can say that in consulting your diary you have a prior engagement. You can make another evening available for them. People who have experienced marriage difficulties for 5 years can normally wait another week before they see you. Do not respond immediately just because it makes you feel important or to win value in the other person's eyes. Some people will never be satisfied however much time you give them.

It is helpful to *prioritise the list of activities* that have to be worked on throughout the day and when they are achieved, cross them off. Do this in your diary. At the end of the day, any jobs still not completed should be written down in the column for the next day. Any special meetings to prepare for or articles to be written, should be noted at *least a week in advance*. This way it will give you more time for effective prayer, research and preparation.

It is advisable for the average pastor to plan to spend the morning in his study for prayer and sermon preparation, etc. and leave the afternoons for appointments. Otherwise the pastor will have no solid time for prolonged prayer and concentration. As the church grows even these arrangements may prove to be unsuitable.

Encourage people to make their telephone calls to you in the afternoon. Take control of the amount of time you are willing to have on the call but never make yourself unapproachable.

Handling the mail

This can take up unproductive time as every type of organisation (secular or Christian) cries out for your attention. If you have a secretary, then let that person screen the mail for you. Try and handle the mail only once. Decide whether the mail can be actioned immediately, or later, or can be thrown out straight away into the rubbish bin! Never let it pile up. Any mail kept should only be looked at once more before it is discarded. This is sometimes easier said than done!

It is amazing how some Christian organisations send up to three or four circulars to the one address. This is a waste of their resources and they should be notified accordingly.

Administrator

Having an administrator can be a time saver in answering the telephone, screening the mail, typing and making appointments for interviews. However, if a pastor is computer literate, he can often save time in typing his own letters.

Any secretary must keep certain matters confidential, have a pleasant personality in dealing with the public and have typing skills.

They need to have insight into how their boss functions and looks at things so they can make decisions when necessary based on what is significant to him, not themselves. Pastors need to trust their secretary's loyalty and discretion.

They should not normally take on the role of a personal confidant for the pastor. Never, if there is any possibility of physical attraction.

Delegation

Pastors must learn to master the art of delegation. Some succeed, while others do not. Successful delegation frees up the pastor to tackle more important activities.

The twelve of Jesus' followers in the early Church called the rest of the disciples and gave them authority to choose seven men full of the Spirit to look after the practical arrangements of caring for the poor. This enabled the twelve to give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. (Acts 6v1-7). Well done.

Let people make mistakes (which can be hard to do). As they grow in confidence and skill, learn to back off. They will love you for that.

Points to note

- Pastors lacking in administrative skills should attend special seminars on this subject and also release people within the congregation skilled in administration to give a lead in that area.
- Over the years there has been a shift in management procedures from becoming task orientated, to having a greater interaction with people. Keeping this perspective is a positive move.
- Do not just prioritise your schedule, schedule your priorities. Plan in the time for the things that are important. This will enable you to develop and grow not just keep 'on top' of the present.
- Do not compare yourselves with others. Time for reflection, 'pottering around', 'switching off' and sleeping are essential for us all to be refreshed, but some temperaments need longer times for these things. Psalm 127v1,2 reminds us that God's oversight of our work is more important than our activity.
- There are different seasons in our lives. Sometimes an over stretched period is unavoidable but take control of your life to make sure it is followed by a quieter period.
- Be mindful of the fact that appearing hassled and driven by time pressures is not a Christ-like witness at all. When you are falling into living under this kind of pressure, plan to withdraw and reflect on what God wants in your week and decide to live accordingly. Explanations to other leadership may be necessary here. Paul talks 4 times about running the race, 34 times about walking.
- Forward planning: Make decisions that will be seen to be right 5 years on. Look forward down the road, but do not be tied up with firm dates and commitments a long way ahead. 1 Corinthians 16v5-9 shows that Paul had definite plans regarding the immediate (Ephesus until Pentecost), but further ahead the plan was less structured.
- Offer yourself to God every morning. He has given you this day as a gift. Lift His Lordship over every event and interaction with others. Do this in detail for the expected things and in general for those things you have not yet encountered.