

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 or busy doing everything. 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 Organiser

An organiser/calendar can help us manage our lives more effectively. Record every interview and activity for the day in your organiser. Good administrators do this consistently. Manager type people will be frustrated by a pastor who is unreliable simply because he forgets to record upcoming interviews and activities in his organiser. Writing down events and commitments also eases pressure on the pastor's mind and helps him keep matters in perspective.

It is useful to allow 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 write down your regular nights at home. That way if people are too demanding and want to see you that night, you can say that in consulting your calendar 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 purposeful 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 must be worked on throughout the day and when they are achieved, cross them off. Do this in your organiser. 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. Never let it pile up. Any mail kept should only be looked at once more before it is discarded. 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 administrator 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 in this while others do not. Successful delegation frees up the pastor to tackle more important activities.

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

1. Pastors lacking in administrative skills should attend special seminars on this subject.
2. 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.
3. 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 127:1,2 reminds us that God's oversight of our work is more important than our activity.
4. 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.

5. 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 four times about running the race, 34 times about walking.
6. 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.
7. 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.