



Effective staff meetings

TN128 Training Notes series: Management

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Many churches or groups of churches have a number of staff: Ministers, a Families and Young People's Worker, Administrators, a Pastoral Visitor or others.

Perhaps they meet together on a regular basis. But in my experience such staff meetings are not as straightforward as they sound and can result in frustration at wasted time or hurt for those excluded. So, if you have any form of staff team at your church, here is some guidance to help you think through some of the issues.

You: the consultant

Imagine that you've been called in by the staff team at St George's Church. Staff meetings are not happy occasions. Here is the list of staff. Assume they are paid and full time unless marked otherwise.

Gareth	The Minister
Gloria	His wife (<i>not on the paid staff</i>)
Glenda	Associate Minister (<i>3 days pw, unpaid</i>)
Grant	Minister of the daughter-church
Gina	Administrator (<i>12 hours pw</i>)
Gemma	Families and Children's Worker
Gerry	Pastoral Assistant (<i>hours as needed, unpaid</i>)
Garth	Intern (<i>just left uni</i>)
Gwen	Caretaker/Bookings Secretary (<i>25 hours pw</i>)

Seven common frustrations

You talk to each of these people and discover the following about the weekly business meeting (all these points are ones that have been shared with me on many occasions).

1 **Wasting my time**

Grant (the daughter-church Minister) feels that most of each meeting is irrelevant for him. The others have no real involvement in his church and so almost all the business is about the main congregation. But 15% of his time is supposed to be working with Gareth, who is, very reasonably, keen to demonstrate that Grant is part of the team.

2 **Too much of my week**

A one-hour meeting represents 2% of Gareth's week, if he puts in 50 hours (he does more than this in fact), and so he feels this is an hour worth spending. But the same one hour represents more than 8% of Gina's 12 hour week. She cannot afford to be away from the office for as much as that if she is to get through her workload so feels she has to see the meeting as falling outside her paid hours.

3 **I'm not seen as staff**

Gwen works 25 hours per week in a role as Caretaker and manager of room bookings, of which there are many. But she is not invited to the meeting because caretaking is not seen as a staff role, even though decisions are often taken about groups booking rooms. She feels undervalued and regularly moans about this.

4 **Why are they invited?**

Gemma, the Families and Children's Worker, objects to Gloria's presence at the staff meeting. Gloria was never appointed to any role in the church and so has no legal right to be seen as staff, but Gareth wants her at the meeting to back him up, so Gemma says. Gareth puts it around that Gloria leads the church jointly with him.

5 **It should take half the time**

Gareth always chairs the meetings in his gentle, laid-back way, but this annoys Glenda who is highly efficient and could do a much better job, she thinks. But she is not paid staff and Gareth would, she says, be frightened of her taking over and showing him up. So the meetings continue in a rambling way with no sense of urgency or agenda.

6 **It's the wrong day and time**

The meeting is held on a Monday afternoon but Gerry has a care home service to take then so cannot get there and so cannot be part of discussions on pastoral care. Monday is Garth's day for his Bible training course in a town 25 miles away so he has to miss the meeting too and no one remembers to tell him about any decisions.

7 **It's in the wrong place**

To avoid interruptions, meetings take place in the Minister's cramped living room rather than in the church office. This seems sensible but it makes things awkward for some who feel that they are on Gareth and Gloria's home territory. Glenda, who is single, certainly feels this because she offered her more appropriately sized sitting room in her house just down the road but Gareth ignored her suggestion.

So how would you advise this so-called team? No, it's not straightforward, but many church staff teams have at least one of these issues rumbling away in the background. One clear problem here is that the staff have no real forum in which to be honest with each other.

These examples show up the need for some key principles to work to if you are starting from scratch.

Seven ideas to consider

1 **Define what you mean by 'staff'**

It might be paid rather than voluntary, or pastoral not organisational, or an inner staff and a wider staff. But in each case, why? Look at the frustrations and annoyances raised because of the lack of definition in this case study. You may want to drop the word 'staff' if it is too confusing.

2 **Define who then comes**

There need to be criteria that show fairness to all. Does it depend on availability, or on hours worked, or on role, or what? Are spouses of key staff invited to the meeting and, if so, are there clear reasons why them and not others? What about a voluntary church officer who insists on coming?

3 **Split into groups**

If people are wasting their time being there you might need 20 minutes of business impacting everyone then some leave and others meet in two smaller groups. Do you need a senior staff group or a clergy group for some items?

4 **Consider when and where**

Is it then possible to find a day and time that all can manage? Is Monday always best if people are tired after the weekend? Is it possible to find a suitable venue for what you are doing which does not create any tensions through what it 'says'? Should you have a disciplined cut-off time?

5 **Decide on chairing and actions**

Does the Minister need to chair (and what does it say if Gareth sees this as his right)? Could someone not produce a one side of A4 set of bulleted actions by Monday evening so everyone can see what actions they all agreed to take?

6 **Arrange special sessions**

These might be for special items of business such as to review a book everyone has been asked to read, or to plan a special event. But there can be value in a day away, an occasional social get-together (with partners?) or a session just for prayer.

7 **Have an occasional review of staff meetings**

Most people who express frustrations to me are part of a staff team where the weekly pattern is never questioned. So use these notes or other reason for a time when the meeting's purpose, timing and content can be openly discussed by everyone, rather than being forever fixed.

Fourteen reasons for meeting

But why meet at all? Here is a list of possible content for church staff meetings. This should help you decide what you want to include in yours and so who needs to be present for which types of content. You cannot manage all of these in one meeting! In alphabetical order....

- **Advice or help required**
This might be one-offs (does it need everyone present?) or it could be preparing the teaching input for next Sunday (in which case some will not need to be there).
- **Business pre-sort for another group**
You may need to obtain the staff's view on an issue coming up in a church council or equivalent. That might be for an inner core of your staff or for everyone.
- **Communication of information**
This is a vital role for many staff meetings. It can be that pastoral staff need information from administrative staff and vice versa. But keep this short.
- **Corporate prayer**
This is different from business although your prayer might be for your business. But it needs an idea of boundaries of who is included and may usefully be combined with 'Communication'. This is more difficult if some admin staff are not Christians.
- **Daily Office**
Some Anglican church staffs say the Daily Office together as their prayer time. Attendance is usually voluntary, but who comes and who stays away?
- **Diary co-ordination**
It is important that everyone on a mixed staff knows what is happening so a check of everyone's diary can be beneficial. But it's easy to waste time on this unless firmly chaired.
- **Discipleship training**
Some staffs have a weekly or monthly session studying a Scripture passage together and applying it to their discipleship or work. One danger is the clergy/preaching staff showing off their Bible understanding to others. Again, there can be problems if some employees are not Christians.
- **Personal support**
Being together offers an opportunity for people to share joys and problems both in their ministry but also in their own lives. This demands a culture where people are prepared to be open and honest with each other, with confidences kept and love assured.
- **Planning the future**
From time to time there will be a need to plan for major events in the future: main festivals, special weekends, etc. Does this need everyone? Is it worth going away for a day from time to time?
- **Planning the week**
This is a common agenda item but, again, this needs to be firmly chaired or it can take up more time than necessary.
- **Review: past week**
This is a common component – usually of a meeting early in the week to assess the previous Sunday. Review is a vital activity, but is honesty encouraged or do other staff feel they cannot criticise the Minister if his or her sermon was poor?

- **Review: staff areas of work**
But there are many other aspects of review, including the assessment of one area of church life or one member of staff's output if the sense of team is strong and honesty is enabled.
- **Sharing personal news**
This would normally be part of a time of prayer but can be painful for those not invited to the meeting, or this part of the meeting, if they feel they are therefore not valued.
- **Training/team-building sessions**
These need to be separate occasions and may have an external enabler to tackle issues of team-working, leadership, line management, communication, etc.

This list may help you create a pro-forma agenda for your meetings: but don't try to do too much. You might aim for a three-week cycle with some points changing each week. You may combine prayer, study and business or keep these as separate meetings.

Record keeping

Staff meetings will not normally need formal agendas and minutes. Part of the business will be assumed (as above) but the formula should be checked out from time to time to see if it is meeting everyone's needs. It is also important to give advance warning to everyone about any special items to be discussed so that no one is taken by surprise.

Although minutes might be too formal a term, there does need to be some record of actions agreed. A staff meeting 'report' should normally have the following features;

- No more than one side of A4 and often less.
- A list of actions agreed listing those responsible and deadlines.
- Minimal in any description of debate or other narrative.
- Produced and distributed, ideally, on the day of the meeting.
- Checked quickly, item by item, at the next meeting.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN128. See also Article A32, *Be creative as a line manager*, plus Training Notes TN50, *Should the staff lead the church?*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice on staff meetings or teams.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN128 under Management (with a link to Structures).

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