



So, who should be in the dock?

TN55 Training Notes series: Management

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These Training Notes take a somewhat different form from usual. In what follows you will find an extract from the notorious legal case of the Charisma Chapel leadership team v their membership (2024).

If you followed the case when it hit the national headlines recently, you will recall that the Charisma 'Chapter' (the name of their leadership team) had accused their members of lack of spiritual commitment in not using their gifts in the life of the church.

The members were represented by Sir Septimus Stranglehold KC. In this short extract from day 17 of the trial, Sir Septimus (SSS) cross-examines the Charisma Chapel Chapter (CCC).

Note: any resemblance in this piece with correct procedures in a court of law is entirely coincidental.

SSS You have told this court that your members are *(consults his notes)* lazy and uncommitted. Yet has the number of activities that your church runs not increased by ten per cent every year for the past three years?

CCC Indeed. We are a successful church – our activity list proves it.

SSS *(Raising his voice)* Your activity list proves no such thing! It proves that your church thyroid gland needs attention. You are simply doing too much. Why do you never close anything down?

CCC To close something down is a mark of spiritual failure. The point is that some of our key members have suffered nervous breakdowns this year and we need to mobilise others to fill the gaps they have left.

SSS *(With a flourish to the jury)* Would you not consider it remotely possible that other people do not want to join them in having a nervous breakdown?

- CCC *(After a pause for thought)* We must all suffer for the cause of the Gospel.
- SSS Huh! I put it to you that your approach is entirely centred on the jobs to be filled, and not on the spiritual health of your people. I have here your teaching syllabus for the past three years and notice that you never cover how practical service, properly handled, can enable a disciple to grow, but major instead on the essential need for all members to be in your church's service whenever they are not at their normal place of work. Is that not so?
- CCC Most certainly. Most of our members are doing absolutely nothing that will forward the work of the church. They need challenge and discipline and....
- SSS *(In a highly theatrical tone of voice)* Absolutely nothing? Absolutely *(pause)* nothing? Strong language indeed! Let me remind you of a few points. First, Mr A. I note that not only is he a school governor, he runs a highly successful Saturday club for kids on a local estate, and is an active member of a major political party. In all these he seeks to bring a Christian viewpoint and example into the world we live in. Absolutely nothing, did you say?
- CCC But none of those is church work! God gave him gifts ...
- SSS *(Interrupting)* Indeed God gave him gifts and he is using them out there in the world where it counts. And you at Charisma Chapel refuse to pray for him or to credit him with any Christian service because it is not done within your own four walls. Your attitude is entirely selfish and church-centred.
- (At this point proceedings were interrupted by loud cheering from the church members packed into the visitors' gallery and the judge had to intervene.)*
- SSS *(Continuing)* Let me next turn to a different matter. You say that you organised a gift survey of your congregation. How did this go?
- CCC We had over 100 replies – it was very successful.
- SSS Successful on whose terms, may I ask? Another of the defendants, Mrs B, was strongly convicted by God to offer her IT skills to the church – but no one ever came back to her about this and she felt completely let down. It was hardly successful for her, was it?
- CCC But no one warned us how much data we would have to process. It takes time to analyse 100 replies, you know.
- SSS *(Dismissively)* Time, indeed! But two whole years have gone by and you still claim to be analysing the data. In any case, how have you helped people to discern their gifts? A seven-page survey was hardly helpful, especially to those who find such things threatening.
- CCC All they had to do was fill it in.
- SSS Fill it in? I tried it myself last night and it took me over an hour. It listed 247 spiritual gifts that some bright spark had devised and expected people to tick various boxes beside each one with no explanation of what they meant. Let's take one *(pulls out a large file of papers and leafs through them slowly)*. Ah, preaching. Only two people are allowed to preach at your church so how can anyone else know if they have this gift?
- CCC But no one else has got that gift.

- SSS How do you know that, if you never give anyone a chance to try?
- CCC They would probably fail – we like to keep our standards high.
- SSS So it is better not to fail but miss gifted people, eh? Why was there no attempt to get alongside people, perhaps in groups, to look for hidden gifts and to ask others what they perceived in people they knew?
- CCC *(Stuttering)* Well Well
- SSS Well, well indeed! Let's move on to Mr C. He claims he did not offer for the post of leader of your teens group because the previous leader had carried out this task for 23 years without a job description, expenses, annual review, thanks or support of any kind. Mr C seems to be eminently sensible, to my way of thinking, to avoid being treated in this cavalier way by you as leaders. And you have the affront to tell this court that he is not committed enough?
- CCC But we should not need support if we are Christians. And in any case the leaders are far too busy doing other things to get involved in such matters. We are all up to our eyes in
- SSS Then you are all doing far too much. In any case you initially asked for volunteers for this teens group in your weekly service sheet. That is hardly a wise way to go about finding the right person for such a key appointment. Can you blame Mr C for not responding to such an impersonal approach before you tackled him personally?
- (Turning towards the jury who seemed to be enjoying the show immensely)* If the Chapter saw their responsibilities as supporting Mr A in his exemplary community work, responding gratefully to Mrs B's offer in an appropriate way, and acknowledging that Mr C's reticence was entirely justified, you would find that you had many, many more people involved in ministry than the 20% you claim at present.
- No further questions, m'Lud. *(Loud stamping and cheering from the gallery.)*

Exercise

Here is a list of questions you might ask within a leadership group setting. You might also use them with a group of activity leaders or others responsible in any way for volunteers in your church.

- 1 List each of the serious errors made by the Charisma Chapel Chapter in the way they handled the ministries of their members.
- 2 So what should they have been doing instead for Mr A? How is your church supporting members whose main areas of Christian service are outside the immediate scope of your church? What might you do to improve your support for them?
- 3 What was the mistake made in the case of Mrs B? How might your church conduct a gifts survey of some kind to avoid the danger of what occurred here?
- 4 In the case of Mr C, does your church have people who have been in post for many years? Is there any danger these posts could be difficult to fill when the present holders move on? If so, what action might you consider now to avoid such dangers?

- 5 Thinking rather wider than these three cases, if your church leaders were in the dock, and Sir Septimus was representing the members, how would your leaders fare? What might be held against them other than the examples above?
- 6 What one overall action might you now take to improve matters at your church?

See Article A43, *Every member on active service*, for a more thorough treatment of this subject.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN55. They are based on a piece written by the author for a newspaper article a few years ago. See also Articles A6, *Job descriptions*, A43, *Every member on active service*, and A47, *15 principles of volunteering*, plus Training Notes TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, TN34, *Closing down a church activity*, TN100, *Why some offer, why some don't*, TN139, *Church workers in teams*, and TN153, *How not to manage volunteers*. You might also like to look at TN84, *How to say 'No' when you should*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN55 under Management.

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