**Common Mistakes Pastor Search Committees Make**

Every Pastor Search Committee is different. Every church is different. However, there are some common mistakes that are easily identifiable among Pastor Search Committees we train.

1. **Reacting against their previous pastor.**
2. **Being closed off to anyone different from their previous pastor.**
3. **Having unrealistic expectations.**
4. **Failure to agree on the pastor profile.**
5. **Having unorganized and unproductive meetings.**
6. **Failure to have a common response to congregational questions.**
7. **Not casting a broad enough net for candidates.**
8. **Rushing the resume process.**
9. **Not comparing candidates to the profile.**
10. **Failure to communicate with the congregation and manage expectations.**
11. **Being too influenced by special interest groups.**
12. **Failure to ask the right questions.**
13. **Failure to engage the spouse.**
14. **Taking too long with the interview process.**
15. **Failure to perform adequate reference and background checks.**
16. **Not notifying candidates.**
17. **Judging candidates by preaching ability alone.**
18. **Putting too much emphasis on a particular style of preaching.**
19. **Failure to follow church bylaws.**
20. **Not following through with promises made during the recruitment process.**
21. It’s just human nature, really. Church folks have this tendency to want their incoming pastor to have none of the perceived faults of their outgoing one, especially when the previous pastor’s tenure has ended negatively (or when it is perceived as such). This tendency leads them to focus on what kind of man they *do not* want at the helm instead of what kind of man God *does* want there. So how do we keep from being mostly reactionary in a pastor search? How do we help committees lean in to what’s ahead instead of purely reacting against what’s behind?

Do the work of the three profiles and prayerfully follow the process recommended in this handbook. The committees who do this prayerfully and diligently are usually more unified in determining the profile of their prospective pastor. They tend to lean into the man God has ahead of them instead of reacting against what is behind them.

1. Lack of communication with the church body. “Well, have you found our pastor yet?” That’s funny once or twice. But three, six, twelve months into the process, it’s not. The church usually, in some way, affirms the members of the Pastor Search Committee. They know who these men and women are, and they most likely had a hand in their selection. The members of this committee are acting as delegates on behalf of the church body. And the church body wants to know that there is forward movement.

We encourage churches to communicate with the church body at least biweekly. This is easily accomplished through a blog or printed statement. The committee should only stand before the congregation when there are significant things to report (and even then, this should never interrupt the flow of the worship service or take more than 3-5 minutes). Otherwise, biweekly communication is best accomplished in written form and located where the members of the church body know to find it – either digitally or in print.

*What should they communicate?* A short report of what the committee has been working on together. Specific prayer concerns. When they are opening and closing resume reception and how they are receiving resumes. When they have narrowed down to 5-10 candidates. When they are closing in on one candidate. Dates for the candidate’s reception and details of the in view of a call weekend.

*What should they never communicate?* Names, locations, or current churches of candidates. Disagreement or division within the committee. Frustration with the process or with candidates. When there seems to be no progress.

Always keep things moving forward, and always communicate that things are moving forward.

1. Not reaching out for help. You do not have to do this on your own. Your local association and your state convention have trained and experienced ministerial employees who will gladly come train your committee and coach you through the process. As for the SBTC, this ministry comes to you at no direct cost because it is a fully funded ministry of churches participating through the Cooperative Program. Often these men or women have helped dozens of committees through this process and have personal wisdom on top of the departmental wisdom their organization possesses from years of service in this area. They can help your team avoid common pitfalls and give practical suggestions for process. They can listen to your specific needs and help you think through contextual issues. They can coach you through moments when you seem to be “stuck.” They can help you get resumes from good, reliable sources. They can encourage you and pray for you through the process. The key is not to wait until you are stuck or overwhelmed to ask for help. As soon as the committee is formed, have someone from the local association or state convention come in to train the committee at your first or second meeting. This establishes the helping relationship early, and it will keep you from burning bridges you did not know existed.

You do not have to do this on your own. You have a larger family of faith who loves you and is for you. Reach out for help.

1. Refusing to work as a team. We know it is hard to believe, but sometimes a member of the Pastor Search Committee just refuses to bend to the overall direction of the committee. Remember, this is not about the kind of pastor *you* want. This is about finding God’s man in God’s time, with no exceptions. We pray and trust that the Lord will work through the team, as a team, to make His will known.

Everyone has his or her own ideas and preferences. Committee members must learn to curb those desires and fit them within the overall direction in which God is leading the team. If all other members of the committee are leaning toward one candidate, but you prefer a different candidate, (1) graciously let your concerns and desires be heard, (2) ask for a reconsideration of your preferred candidate, then (3) after reconsideration, if the direction of the committee has not changed, go with the flow.

1. Rushing to Resumes. Your first responsibility is not to start looking at resumes but to prayerfully seek God in searching out the kind of man He would have lead the church in the future. Often, when committees post the job and begin receiving resume immediately, there is no plan in place for processing candidates. In such instances, members of the committee will give their hearts to a particular candidate early in the process, without having done the diligence of the three profiles, of searching the Scriptures and of getting input from the church body.

When committees rush to resumes, they look for the wrong things and they are not all looking for the same things. One committee member will see a picture of a candidate’s family and be sold in him immediately. Another will watch a sermon video and develop an unhealthy priority on pulpit delivery or charisma. The process in this handbook is outlined for a reason. It will keep your team moving forward together, in pursuit of God’s man in God’s time, with no exceptions. Embrace the process, and prayerfully expect God to work through it.

1. Not following proper Pastor Search Committee ethics and

etiquette. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance throughout the process. Every resume you handle and every name you entertain represents a man who is prayerfully considering uprooting his family, ending his tenure of ministry at one location and beginning a new season of life and ministry elsewhere. When a candidate’s confidentiality is breeched his family suffers, his church suffers and your church suffers. We firmly believe that if the committee’s careless actions disrupt God’s work in the life of a candidate or his current church, the committee members will answer to God for it.

Social media is where many committee members make their first mistakes with regard to confidentiality. It is not appropriate to “friend” or “follow” any candidate. As you search through his profile and postings, be sure not to react to or comment on anything. The way social media platforms matrix their respective feeds, any activity at all on a candidate’s page or postings will invite the social media site to make secondary and tertiary connections based on your activity.

Another common breech of confidentiality is in verbal conversations with friends a committee member thinks are trustworthy. This is not a social club. This is a serious matter—a grave task. If you share a name or any clues (biographical, city, age range, family, etc.) about a candidate, the potential to create chaos within the church is increased exponentially.

Follow proper etiquette and ethics when it comes to the confidentiality of each candidate.

1. Failing to ask the right questions. Do not assume anything. If you sense a red flag, ask the question. If there is a check in your spirit, make it known. Some questions are difficult or awkward to ask, but they must be asked anyway. For example, questions need to be asked regarding pornography, personal spiritual disciplines and salvation testimony.

Sometimes, during an interview, a candidate’s response to a question will give rise to another question. Ask it. For example, if you ask about the candidate’s leadership style, perhaps a good follow up question would be whether he has ever had any conflicts in his leadership, how he handled them, and what he would do differently given the chance.

Use the questions in this handbook as a guide. Pour through all potential questions and, as a team, select the ones you feel need to be asked. Do not leave any important question unasked. Do not assume anything. Failure to ask the right questions will be detrimental to the church in the long run.

1. Forgetting the details. Cover all the bases. Work through salary packages and moving expenses. Put things in writing. Communicate all pieces of information and arrangements with the appropriate committees. This handbook is extensive enough to help you think through all the details. Read and discuss it thoroughly.

1. Not notifying candidates after narrowing the field. Every candidate who submits a resume should be contacted in some way. When the candidate field is narrowed, those who are no longer being considered deserve to be notified. Some rejected candidates will respond and ask for reasons. Do not feel obligated to answer these questions—otherwise you may get into conversations in which you need not engage. Simply notify candidates when they are no longer being considered (using the suggested letters in this handbook), then move forward as a team.

1. Finishing or quitting too soon.

God’s man in God’s time, no exceptions. When it all boils down, your church is still pastorless for one of two reasons. Either (1) God’s man is not yet ready to pastor your church, or (2) your church is not yet ready to receive God’s man. Allow the Lord to shape and mold you, and your committee members, through the process. Don’t get so caught up in the end goal that you miss what God has for you through the journey. We promise there will be unexpected hang-ups in this process. There will be moments you feel stuck. Do not give up. Do not quit. Reach out for help. Your SBTC employees are available and willing to help coach you through any part of this process.