

*Special Supplement Report for
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Effective Communication for the Office Secretary or Volunteer

Tips to Help You Perform Your Duties More Effectively

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As a volunteer or paid staff of your church, you are personally responsible for your own work. But others play an important part in how you accomplish your goals. We cannot isolate ourselves from the rest of the church if we expect to perform our best.

This does not mean that you suddenly have to become a social diva or volunteer for every little thing that comes up. But you must make sure that the people know who you are and you must allow them to know you enough to trust you.

I am an introvert by nature. And I do avoid many events and functions because of that side of myself. Yet, I've managed to negotiate improvements for my squadron with the base commander while serving in the United States Air Force, serve as an officer in a family business, manage a non-profit 501(c)3 organization where I also facilitated board meetings, coordinated between customers from all over the world and tech managers, managed a coffee shop, and more.

To top that off, I also worked in a church office where I had to do more than just be there and do my work. I had to exchange with the people walking in to the church. Some were happy, some were angry, some were grieving from the loss of a loved one. In some cases, the pastor was away and I was the only one who could answer their concerns.

If I can do all that and still be my own hermit self, you can do this too. Let me give you just a few of the pointers I learned from my experiences.

Communication with the pastor ...

It is almost always necessary to keep the communication flowing between you and the pastor, or else your work may suffer.

Churches are busier than ever these days. Even if you don't see much of it while serving your duty in the office or while volunteering from your living room, the pastor does. Weekly, even daily, events adjust office needs, alter assignments, change deadlines, etc.

You must keep a channel of communication open with your pastor to minimize the stress of completing your duty. Once you're stressed, your job performance lowers and your enthusiasm for your job or volunteering duties lowers.

Communicating regularly with your pastor does not need to be intrusive:

- Attend the church services on Sunday - this not only is good for your own happiness and spiritual growth, but also a good time to catch small notices of ongoing events and needs with the congregation members and church.
- **Make a habit of connecting with your pastor one-on-one during one session during the week - This time is for you and the pastor to collaborate on needs in the area or areas you are working on, and for some personal bonding as pastor and congregation member. It's important that you do your duty as your job describes**

or as you've volunteered to do, but it's also important for you to trust in your pastor's actions.

- In between time, keep the communication channels open in a way that's convenient for both of you. With the internet, using email as a contact medium is a good means of doing this and it allows both of you to ask and respond to one another on your own schedules. In some cases, the phone is a good option also, but with that line of communication, you're taking a risk of the other person not being available or of interrupting something important. Remember, sometimes your pastor will be in a conference with someone and will not be able to answer, and the phone may still be intrusive, even when not answered or when the cell phone is put on vibrate.
- **Set up an inter-office system for messages to one another. Perhaps a wall holder for folders and notes from each other. When I worked in a church office full time, the pastor and I kept a notebook on my desk. If one of us was away, we'd leave notes for the other. When the absent person returned, that person would check the notebook to see if there were any needs from the other.**

I suggest using all the above methods of keeping in touch with your pastor. Set up a system with your pastor that works for both of you. Some weeks this is going to be very easy, on other weeks things will get so out of hand that you may miss your one-on-one session. But the other methods, if used, should pick up the slack and minimize the damage to organizing your time.

Feedback from others ...

As humans, sometimes we are over-confident, vain, and egotistical. It's natural in all of us. At other times, we're so lacking of self-confidence that we doubt ourselves and whether or not we're making a difference or even doing the right thing.

This is where feedback from the pastor and other people in the church can help.

Affirmation from others that we're appreciated in the work we do, and that they believe we're doing it right, gives us confidence to keep doing our work and enthusiasm for doing it even better next time.

Honest opinions on when we've done something they see as wrong from others gives us direction. When we're told a design or a report didn't appeal to them or, in the extreme, insulted them, it helps us to adjust how we do the job next time.

In my experience, pastors are usually pretty honest and will tell you if you're doing something right or wrong, either way. They understand the need for affirmation, and they know the consequences well of not doing things right.

Alternately, in my experience, congregation members are more apt to complain if you did something wrong, rather than tell you that you did something right. This is where keeping that communication channel open with the pastor is important. Some people are comfortable coming to you and saying to your face that they didn't like something you did. Others aren't, and they

will complain to the pastor instead. For this reason, the pastor needs to know what you are doing in your projects ahead of time, usually approving them before anyone else sees them, and you need to know from your pastor what the complaints are about.

Note: I'm referring to complaints about a project, not you personally. That's a whole different discussion topic.

Keeping the communication open with other people involved in the topics of your project and your church is important for others to understand you and your schedule also.

Often, secretaries more than volunteers, are given work at any time and the person expects the work to be done immediately. Secretaries often work hard to accomplish these tasks for the person, who then takes it for granted that that is how things are done at the church.

This fosters the ill feeling of being taken advantage of by the secretary. What started out as a gesture of goodwill towards a church member turns into a job done in resentment.

Effective communication between you and the other members involved will help keep you from experiencing feelings of being taken-for-granted and that your services have been abused.

When you get positive feedback and affirmation that your efforts are right on and appreciated, it's easy to feel good about yourself and the job you do.

But what about when you receive negative feedback?

Normally, you can probably separate yourself from the advice and opinions being given and think about how you can do better next time. But not everyone is tactful in how they give their opinions. Sometimes it will come across as they are attacking you and belittling you.

This is where you need to grow some thick skin and realize that it's not about you. Think about why the person is unhappy about what you did or wrote, or how you did it. Think about how you can do it differently, and if you should.

No one is going to be happy about everything you do all the time. It's a fact of life.

If you made a mistake in reporting personal information, apologize and make amends in whatever way you can. Make a public apology at Sunday's service, if that's what's needed.

If a design or picture you used offended a person, apologize and talk it over with the pastor afterwards to see what you should do next time.

If the design or wording of a piece didn't work for a person, analyze why and see what you can do differently next time. Sometimes talking this over with the person will present you with a better idea. If they had a strong opinion about the topic, they must have an idea of how they would have rather seen it done.

Granted, once in a while you will get the individual who really is attacking you and it may not be that easy to resolve. This is where you need to make sure the pastor is involved. You are not the great negotiator of the church. If there are disturbances, it is the pastor's duty to see them resolved as painlessly as possible.

Sometimes others will help you with proofreading your projects...

An example of consistent feedback is getting others involved with your publication projects. You may be the one putting the publication together, but getting the input of others can help you spot ways to improve it or find the typos and other errors in it.

For me, with putting together newsletters and other church publications, I write them and the pastor proofreads them. There's no reason there couldn't be another proofreader in between you and the pastor.

Coordinating between the pastor and others involved ...

While keeping those channels of communication open between yourself and members of the church, you should also be working on coordinating your efforts.

Proper planning with your pastor will help

- Avoid last minute assignments.
- **Present clear work instructions.**
- Clarify expectations.
- **Allow plenty of time to meet the deadlines.**
- Solve problems before they form.
- **Stabilize your workload.**
- Delegate authority.
- **Coordinate assignments.**
- Foster flexibility between schedules.
- **Limit interruptions to workflow.**
- Support compromise in work duties.

When you have a project that relies on reports or input from other members of the church, it's important to communicate with them about the project's schedule. When you're working against a deadline, it's essential that the other contributors know and understand what deadline you give them to have the information to you.

Most secretaries work under pressure from the deadlines because assignments are not handed in until the last minute. You must remain steadfast on your deadline and make sure the other people know you are serious about it. They must respect your schedule and not take you for-granted.

In closing...

If you know of someone who could use this information, please pass it along. All I ask is that you leave the entire report intact, as is, and give me credit for it.

For those of you reading this report and who are not signed up for my weekly newsletter, "The Successful Church Secretary News", please visit my website at <http://www.digitalchurchsecretary.com/successfulchurchsecretary.html> and sign up for it. The newsletter is delivered to your door on a weekly basis, and delivers helpful information and resources for church secretaries and church volunteers alike.

Also, feel free to visit my site The Digital Church Secretary at <http://www.digitalchurchsecretary.com>

At the rate of one or two per month, I'll be producing office guides for church secretaries and church volunteers. These guides are priced so that small to mid-sized churches can afford them, and each purchaser is entitled to the updates to the guides for free.

Read, visit me on the internet, and enjoy. Feel free to send me comments, needs, or requests to digitalchurchsecretary@gmail.com

And thank you, for helping spread the Word of God and bring more people to Jesus.

God Bless,

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