



**THE SECRET TO TEAM UNITY** |





## Bart Rendel & Doug Parks

Church leaders need a solid, scriptural, and effective system for discussing and evaluating issues and moving forward as a team.

As we have helped church leaders around the country increase their kingdom impact over the last 11 years, we've often heard of meetings that descended into scums and battles over opinions, with arguments based upon anecdotal evidence, and random comments tossed around based on limited perspectives or past successes.

To help churches stay on course, leaders should align behind a set of gospel-centered standards. Our hope at Intentional Churches is to establish these standards in every church we work with. It's part of our dream of helping church leaders develop a clear vision and plan to double their kingdom impact again and again.

# SO, WHAT CAN A CHURCH DO?

**First, a team must agree to some foundations on which to build objective evaluation. The Bible describes the fundamentals of what church is all about.**

## FOUNDATIONS FOR EVALUATION



1. We are in a spiritual battle. Eternity is at stake. The Bible clearly shows our churches are locked in a spiritual battle for the hearts, souls, and minds of people. Paul says we do not fight “against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12), but that fact is easy to overlook. There are forces at work behind the scenes; there are rulers, authorities, and powers of a dark world, along with all forms of evil in the spiritual realm. We need to understand the nature and stakes of the battle.



2. The mission is the Great Commission. Jesus taught that we are to preach, baptize, and train followers to be on mission with him and to make more and better disciples. This enduring mission is the call of every church. Acts 2 suggests the strategy for the church. We gather, preach, develop relationships, and call for increasing surrender because this strategy reaches and grows people. It’s biblical!



3. A clear vision—a double vision—is needed. Every church needs a clear call and vision for growth. Yes, every church . . . the shape, size, or age of the church doesn’t matter. Every church has a purpose, and no church was meant to die. What would it look like to double a church’s kingdom impact in the next five years or less? Dream, write it down, and discuss it as a team.



4. It’s all about the ONE. Jesus’ mission was to seek and save the lost, and he gave us the same mission. He shared three powerful stories in Luke 15 that emphasize focusing on the lost versus the found. The church is meant to reach the lost and then grow them. The “99” are meant to be on this mission as well (vv. 3-7).

**Now that we’ve identified the foundations for evaluation, let’s look at five evaluation methods that are ineffective, along with some suggestions for improvement.**

## FIVE POOR BUT COMMON EVALUATION METHODS



**1. Personal Preference.** As leaders, we cannot evaluate by our own personal opinions and preferences. It can be difficult to refrain from doing this, as church can be a very personal subject; the tendency to judge by our own standards is deeply ingrained. We must remove our preferences from the criterion and do what's in the best interest of advancing the body of Christ.



**2. Past Success.** We cannot expect to be relevant in the future if we evaluate based on past success. It's easy to rest in the victories of the past and become complacent. Every church has had a high point and a low point, but we fight a battle in a world that is ever-changing and culturally evolving.

Nostalgia can be fun. It's enjoyable to watch an old movie, pull out a scrapbook or photo album, and review highlights of champion sports teams. But nostalgia is all about dwelling on the past. Tomorrow's effective strategies may look nothing like those of years gone by . . . or even the ones in vogue today.



**3. Improvement.** It's easy to judge today's status by considering the progress we have made. It's important to stop from time to time and celebrate accomplishments with the team, but that should never be an end goal. Leverage those times of celebration to find new ways of improving while hearts are full and motivations high. How can leaders get better while measuring the success a church has already achieved? Let those times be motivation to keep going!

## FIVE POOR BUT COMMON EVALUATION METHODS (CONTINUED)



**4. Comparison.** Most of us enjoy going to conferences, and it's helpful and biblical to connect with other church leaders. But here's a suggestion: Focus on learning and encouragement during these occasions rather than using them as opportunities to compare one church with another.

*If a church staff attends a conference and the speaker indicates his church's staff size and budget are significantly larger than most of the churches in attendance, does that mean approaches of the smaller churches are wrong? If a church in town starts a recovery ministry, holds a summer VBS, or launches a food pantry, should other churches in town do the same?*

*Every church is unique, and when comparison is the main focus, a church risks diluting resources from what is important to its ministry. Comparison is a poor and potentially dangerous way to measure success.*



**5. Anecdotal Evidence.** A church cannot rely on a story or two to frame reality. It's common to walk the halls of most churches and hear thoughts, opinions, and feelings expressed. These stories may include kernels of ideas worth exploring, but that's rather unlikely. It's easy to prove any point through anecdotal evidence. A church leader can always come up with a story that supports his position. A single story isn't the basis upon which a church should chart its course.

**As these poor evaluation methods are abandoned, church leaders can supplant them with new standards and methods. This new approach involves asking objective questions grounded in biblical foundations, while fighting against the tendency to revert to past unhelpful, unbiblical standards.**



## NEW EVALUATION STANDARDS AND METHODS

A good first step for improvement is to adopt a unified evaluation standard coupled with a rating system. In fact, we are proponents of individual leaders “flash-grading” a specific ministry or outreach of the church (children’s ministry, fall festival, worship service, etc.) prior to discussions and decision-making. We have found that doing so prior to detailed discussions creates healthy tension that drives productive conversations.

Here's how it might work if small-group ministry is the topic for evaluation. Each team member can assign any score they wish (see the color voting system below). But each person must use the foundations listed at the top of this article as the lens for evaluation and be ready to explain their vote.

**Here are key, objectifying questions at the root of each of the four foundations mentioned earlier:**

- *Is our small-group ministry led with a sense of urgency?*
- *Is our small-group ministry activating the Great Commission (by striving to create more and better disciples)?*
- *Is our small-group ministry moving us toward doubling our kingdom impact?*
- *Is our small-group ministry built for the “ONE” first . . . or is it built for the “99”?*

With those key questions in mind, have each team member grade the small-group ministry according to this rating system (one of several we use in ChurchOS, the biblically-based leadership system we have developed):



A red rating means the program or system is not helping to activate the Great Commission or driving the doubling of its kingdom impact. It is potentially broken or barely functioning to these standards. Attention is needed.



A yellow rating means the program or system is having some impact on Great Commission activation and double kingdom impact, but there is room for improvement. It is not at its top level of effectiveness related to the standards. Further action is needed for it to become optimal.



A green rating means the program or system is in position to activate the Great Commission and drive double kingdom impact. It is effective and healthy. There might be room for improvement, but far less room than something rated as yellow. Continue to ensure this item has the resources and attention it needs.

## TEAM TIME

Here are the final, simple questions that will drive an objective discussion: Why did you vote the way you voted? If you voted “yellow,” what do you sense is weak? If you voted “red,” what do you sense is outright wrong and must be fixed? Take lots of notes.

Multiple perspectives can be very helpful. (Don’t fall into the trap of poor evaluation!) What rises to the surface from this type of objective discussion? Were there consistent thoughts from the team? Prioritize what needs immediate action and, just as importantly, what can wait for now.

**God will honor a church’s courage to objectify these gospel conversations in light of his mission. Be honest with one another. The church’s team will align, and God will move.**



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(800) 543-9770