Case Study of First Baptist Church Division of Youth and Family Development

November 24, 2015

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Abstract

This case study focuses on leadership issues that arise during a transition, when a change in employee expectation occurs. The study identifies leadership issues within the Youth and Family Development division of First Baptist Church in South Carolina. Next, the study shows us how the leadership issues were handled by the Youth Pastor, and the outcomes caused by his decisions. Finally, recommendations are made that other leaders could use to better navigate similar transitional situations.

Keywords: leadership, youth, accountability, resources, values, group cohesiveness.

Case Study of First Baptist Church

Division of Youth and Family Development

First Baptist Church (FBC) is a thriving Independent Baptist Church in South Carolina. Approximately 1,000 attendees gather for worship services each Sunday morning. In the year 2000, FBC employed Mark, a full-time youth pastor, who was responsible for leading the 7th-12th grade students. At that time, there were approximately 70 students in Sunday attendance, and approximately 40 of those in Wednesday night discipleship programming. Mark had an endearing personality and liked to have fun. Mark created a ministry around his personality and had success in growing attendance. During Mark's four year tenure, FBC had also grown, moving from a temporary school-based facility to a church-owned, new construction space that included a worship center, office space, meeting space and multipurpose building. After that transition, the elders of the church began looking at metrics beyond attendance. They began to focus on measurements like increased discipleship, number of baptisms and participation in service projects, to gain a greater perspective about the church's success. Although Mark was popular and well-liked, the new focus on depth showed areas of weakness in his ministry that had not been previously evaluated. This case study is intended to evaluate the process of youth development at FBC under Mark's leadership by identifying key issues that Mark faced, analyzing the outcomes of Mark's leadership, and making recommendations that could have increased his success.

Discussion

Key Issues

Accountability. The first key issue that Mark faced at FBC was that the system and measurements for accountability changed during his tenure. Accountability is the responsibility

an individual has for his/her actions to justify their decisions to stakeholders (Hurd, Barcelona, &

Meldrum, 2008). In Mark's case, the stakeholders are the members of the church, as represented

by a board of elders. When Mark was hired, the church was young and there was a substantial

focus on attendance in order for the church to be able to financially sustain itself. Once the

church proved to be financially solvent, the pressure to focus on attendance became less

important and the elders realized the need to focus on other metrics. Once the elders determined

what areas they deemed important, they created areas of focus for the staff and tied those areas to

staff evaluations. Mark had used his dynamic personality to increase attendance, but the new

criteria for success required that Mark change his methods to meet the new goals. Additionally,

Mark realized that he would have to create some accountability among his volunteer staff to

make sure that his staff was meeting the new expectations. This is key because if team members

could not make meaningful contributions to the goals, the entire team would suffer (Hurd et al.,

2008).

Limited resources. Next, Mark had limited resources at his disposal to accomplish the new

goals. Departments need resources in order to meet organizational goals (Hurd et al., 2008).

While Mark had been given resources, he had designed programming around activities that

increased attendance and built excitement around his programming. The new goals would

require that Mark reallocate his resources. However, Mark knew that he would still need to

maintain or even grow attendance. Mark was not sure if he had enough resources to meet the

new standards.

     Lack of shared values. The next issue is that the new goals required caused the group to

question their shared values. As is typical in church-based programming, Mark's team was made

up entirely of volunteers. Mark had built a volunteer base around people that were good at

creating fun atmospheres, designing entertaining events, and being relational and non-threatening with students. Since the main focus was attendance, the values of the team were based on getting as many students to events as possible. As long as attendance steadily increased, the team was considered to be successful. The new structure would require Mark to split up students into smaller groups for discipleship, because discipleship is difficult to execute in large group settings. Because of this change, Mark needed to establish accountability among his volunteers, which did not previously exist. When this accountability was enacted, the individual members began to question the values of the department, and not all the volunteers agreed with the new set of goals.

Group cohesiveness. Finally, the new goals created a lack of group cohesiveness. When the elders changed the goals for success, many of the current volunteers did not agree with the new metrics. They had built a group that thrived on increasing attendance and building excitement. The new goals required different skill sets and talents that the current group did not possess. This caused the team to feel threatened and disheartened. By changing the goals, the group felt like its past success had no meaning and they felt undervalued. This caused conflict among the group members, which added to Mark's leadership problems.

Analysis and Outcomes

Accountability. This was a particularly difficult leadership component for Mark. When the Senior Pastor at FBC began to evaluate Mark based on the new success criteria, he did not do so well. Mark had created a system that was never intended to reach the new goals and he struggled to modify that system accordingly. His personal strengths did not fit with the new goals very well, and he became somewhat bitter because he was hired based on a set of old goals that no one seemed to value anymore. Additionally, Mark set up accountability systems for his

volunteer staff so that he could measure the team's success and report back for his evaluation.

The existing team did not like this level of scrutiny and became frustrated about the metrics and

the feelings of failure they caused. Mark's frustration toward his leadership became obvious to

his volunteer staff, and thus created resentment toward the church leadership. Accountability

metrics were never successfully reached, and the volunteer staff basically ignored the metrics.

Since Mark's staff was entirely voluntary, this left Mark in a precarious situation.

Limited resources. Mark had a $25,000 yearly budget for his department. This included

activities, supplies, professional development, volunteer training, and a stipend for meals with

students and parents. When the expectations changed for Mark, there was no budget adjustment.

While the elders began to evaluate Mark using new criteria, the expectation for the types of

events and the frequency in which they occurred did not change. Mark tried to do less events so

that he could shift those resources to discipleship curriculum, but parents and students began to

complain and the leadership told Mark that he could not decrease events. With limited resources,

Mark tried to write his own weekly discipleship curriculum. This had some initial success, but

eventually was unsuccessful. Mark was very relational and soon he became emotionally drained

because he had limited time with students due to the time it took to develop curriculum.

Lack of shared values. As previously mentioned, Mark had developed a team that was

built around the concept of getting students to events. When Mark introduced the new goals to

the team, they felt frustrated. The team felt that they were not included in the development of the

goals, and that they were being forced to change their structure without any representation. Some

volunteers decided to quit because of this issue. Additionally, some volunteers did not feel that

they could be successful in this new model. Since the new goals were based on discipleship and

proselytizing, many of the team members felt ill-equipped for the task, due to lack of Bible

knowledge and poor speaking skills. Some volunteers tried the new model and were able to provide discipleship for the students, but others were not. Eventually, more volunteers left and Mark began to try to replace them with new ones. The volunteer turnover was not a smooth transition because the new volunteers did not have a relationship with students, which stifled discussion is discipleship classes.

Group cohesiveness. As the group failed to successfully reach the new goals, morale began to drop. The team experienced new levels of conflict that added to the stress of the situation. The team became disconnected and talked about their frustrations individually. Eventually, the team began to deteriorate.

Mark did not remain employed at FBC for very long. He gained employment at a different church in a new town about 18 months after the change of expectations.

Recommendations

Accountability. The first major issue that challenged Mark's leadership was that of redefining the model of accountability within the department. With an all-volunteer staff, it may have been helpful for Mark to be more strategic in what Posner and Kouzes call "enabling other to act" (2012). They recommend designing team-based strategies that change rewards structures to be more team-based and less individualized. By changing this focus, Mark may have been able to recruit additional volunteers with discipleship strengths to capitalize on his already good attendance numbers. He then could have focused on the overall group success but reported individual metrics back to his supervisor. Posner and Kouzes also recommend revising strategic documents to support collaborative work (2012). This could help the team to see the benefit of multiple strengths being used to accomplish a shared goal, instead of feeling that one strength is more valuable than another.

Limited resources. Mark struggled to find enough money in the budget to accomplish

the new goals. One way to stretch resources is through a partnership. Research shows that

organizations can multiply resources by combining resources of multiple organizations with like-

minded goal (Posner & Kouzes, 2012). In fact, some research goes so far as to call partnerships

and alliances central to success (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Mark was

surrounded by many churches in the area with similar youth groups that had similar missions. By

combining events or rotating venues local youth groups could have saved money to help them

stretch their budget.

Lack of shared values. Mark allowed his frustrations to show to the group about the

change in goals. This could have been a leadership opportunity for Mark. If Mark could have

taken this new challenge to the group with excitement and a plan for the future, he may have had

greater success. In this way, Mark failed to model the way. Had he created a plan that celebrated

the new values and small victories, he may have been able to capitalize on that excitement and

lead his team into a new era of effectiveness. Celebration is key to the success of an organization

(Posner & Kouzes, 2012).

Group cohesiveness. One main point that Mark may have overlooked is the "curse of

cluelessness" (Bolman & Deal, 2013). He had built a cohesive group based around a certain type

of success. Having been successful, this group may have begun to act foolishly because of issues

like pride, or even a fear of change. In its minds, this group had been told that its past successes

were no longer adequate. It is possible that individual members of the group let pride effect

whether or not they could transition into a new model. If Mark could have taught his group to

reframe the current situation, he may have had a different outcome. Reframing requires an ability

to think about situations in different ways and come up with new strategies for success (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This technique could have been very helpful for Mark's Team.

Additionally, Mark could have built group cohesiveness by creating effective means of communication. Studies show that successful teams communicate in multiple ways (Pentland, 2012). For instance, successful teams not only communicate with the team leader, but also with each other, via side conversations. Successful teams also go outside the team and bring useful information back. Teaching the team effective methods of communication could have increased its overall success.

Conclusion

Mark faced many leadership challenges during his time at FBC. When the elder board changed the expectations of success, Mark and his team struggled. By understanding the situations that affected Mark's team and learning from the recommendations in this case study, leaders can be more prepared to successfully navigate these leadership challenges.

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