

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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The One Year Rule

Several years ago Charles Arn and I surveyed pastors and asked them to identify the most frustrating part of their job. Can you guess the most frequent response? *“Getting laypeople to help with the work and ministry of the church.”*

You've heard it before—the hems and haws from church members when asked to volunteer for this task or that job. *REV!* Magazine found that our old assumption about 20%

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of the members doing 80% of the work is optimistic (Jan/Feb 2009, 52). It's even fewer!

One of the major reasons people are reluctant to serve in and through a church is the feeling that they'll be stuck in the position for ever, or at least a very long time. Thus, we have found that it is good to establish a One Year Rule. This rule states that no one should be asked to take a church responsibility that lasts longer than a year. Of course, some positions, say on the church board, may require a longer commitment. However, most positions in a church don't require such an extended time for accomplishment.

Why is it that *church work* is dreaded by so many laypeople? One reason is that little effort is given to finding the right place for the right person. The qualification to hold many volunteer positions in the church today seems to be the invitee's ability to say, “Well, I guess so.” Once the volunteers have agreed to take on a responsibility, there

is little training, accountability, or evaluation for how they are doing. And many members know that accepting a responsibility in church can easily become a life sentence! It doesn't take too many such experiences for members to become reluctant to accept future opportunities to serve.

What is your approach to inviting people to serve in a ministry role or task in your church? One insight is that the length of time people are asked to serve affects the response they give. The general rule is, the longer the commitment, the fewer people will say *yes*. In fact, if there is no end date to the duty, and the church member is smart enough to know that, it can be next to impossible to find

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

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What is your approach to recruiting?

People often dread church work.

anyone willing to say *Yes*.

So, this rule of thumb says, don't ask prospective volunteers to commit to any more than one year for any one position. Applying this rule will: 1) increase the number of those who say, *Yes*, 2) decrease the drop-out rate of volunteers throughout the year, 3) increase the percentage of your members/attendees who have a meaningful role or task, and 4) improve the morale of those involved.

Each ministry position, from the lowest level of influence to the highest, should be a one-year term. In the minds of your members, one year goes by a lot faster than ten years! If they can try a new activity and have the freedom to leave at the end of the year without guilt, many more will be willing to try it.

This doesn't mean that all volunteers must give up their position after one year. In fact, if they enjoy the task, if others affirm their skills and gifts in this area, and if they want to continue for another year . . . by all means, let them! In fact, those who are presently filling ministry positions, and who enjoy them, should get "first dibs" on that position the following year. But if there are some who find they just don't have the time, desire, skills, or gifts for the task, this policy gives everyone an easy way out.

What You Can Do About It

Review all the roles and tasks in your church-volunteer, elected, appointed. If you have any position (i.e., committee member, deacon, Sunday school teacher, choir member, small group leader, etc.) that does not have a specific duration, make

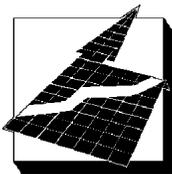
it one year. If you have any position that presently lasts longer than one year, change it to one year.

I like the idea of some churches that create a written *job description* (or, better, a *ministry description*). The document begins with the importance of this position to the overall purpose of the church. It includes an organizational chart showing how the position relates to those above and below the chain of supervision. A specific description of activities and time requirements is given. The name and contact information of his or her supervisor is included. Questions and answers that might be pertinent are provided. Last, a letter from the pastor affirming the important role of each member as a contributing part of a healthy body of Christ concludes the document. This ministry description booklet can also be given to prospective volunteers to provide more information about the position, its expectations and its responsibilities. Give people a copy of this document to take home and read, think about, and pray over and you will greatly reduce the chance of unpleasant surprises for those who eventually take on the task.



Adapted from *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Baker Books (2013)) by Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn .

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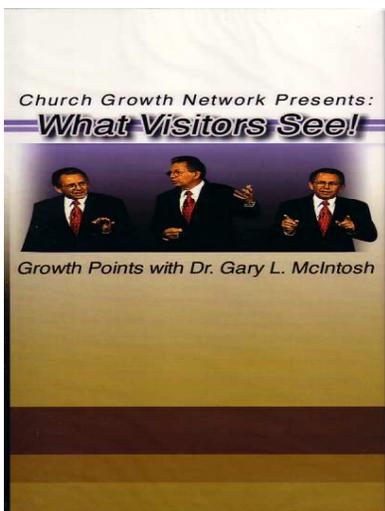
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As President of the McIntosh Church Growth Network, a church consulting firm, Dr. McIntosh has served numerous churches in over eighty-three denominations throughout the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

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