

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Promote from Within or Without?

Ted Engstrom, former president of World Vision, was an expert on leading and managing organizations. He once wrote, “One of the problems faced by all organizations is the question of whether it is in the best interests of the organization to only promote people from within the organization to positions of leadership, or whether the organization should, from time to time, look outside itself for new blood.”

This is still a major question, and one that is particularly important for middle-sized to larger congregations.

In the last few years the emphasis has been on promoting from within a church. This is encouraged by church leaders who suggest that lifting up people from within a church is the best way to keep the focus on the vision of the church. While this may be true, it is not the only aspect that needs to be considered when promoting leaders.

Arguments For and Against

The basic reasons a church may want to promote from within are to: 1) maintain the essential DNA of the congregation; 2) reward people for excellent ministry; 3)

encourage good people to stay; 4) build long-term loyalty; 5) keep the church running smoothly; 6) focus on leadership development; 7) preserve continuity.

The basic reasons a church may want to promote from without are to: 1) encourage fresh thinking; 2) eliminate ingrown *group think*; 3) challenge ineffectiveness; 4) discover new models; 5) motivate lazy workers; 6) employ the best people; 7) lift the level of excellence.

The Basic Rule

If your church ministry is going well, it is best to promote leaders from within to maintain the good procedures and practices. However, if things are not going so well, it is best to promote from without to encourage fresh ideas, new procedures, and better practices.

The basic rule: “If you want things to change, promote from without. If you want things to remain the same, promote from within.”

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Digging Deeper

One or more of the following issues should be considered with deciding whether to promote from within or without.

First, it is common for outsiders to be resisted or resented.

When people are promoted from without, it is normal for insiders to feel the outsider does not really understand the church, nor have they worked their way up through the ranks. Along with the fact that outsiders often receive more pay than insiders, it often leads to feelings of resentment. If you promote from without, how do you plan to mitigate the potential ill feelings of insiders?

Second, people who have worked in direct ministry areas have often developed skills that are effective in relational ministry, but they may not have the skills to be effective in management. Simply because a person is fruitful at one level of ministry does not mean the or she will be effective at another level. If you promote from within, how will you determine if a person has the skill-set to lead and manage at a higher level?

Third, if a church never brings in people from outside, there is a danger of becoming ingrown, and developing senior leaders who resist change. If you promote from within, how will you overcome these challenges?

Fourth, to maintain unity within the church, it is crucial to educate leaders on the different roles that people fill and the gifts that they bring. How are you helping current leaders understand the need for people with different gifts and the necessity of having gifted people in the church?

Fifth, churches only grow as leaders grow. How are you training leaders to grow in their present and future areas of responsibility?

Sixth, it helps to maintain morale if leaders clearly understand potential career paths in your church. Have you analyzed and described potential career paths for your current leaders? How are you communicating and training leaders for potential promotions?

Seventh, as people are promoted, it is helpful if they receive a new title that communicates to others that things have changed. In today's church climate where equality of people and calling is highlighted, how are you communicating that some leaders have greater responsibility than others?

Think it Through

Does your church need an infusion of fresh ideas and practices, or do you want things to stay the same?

What is your philosophy of promoting leaders?

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