
GROWTH POINTS

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Diffuse Arguments: Part 2

Church ministry is not all sugar and spice and everything nice. As someone put it: “Sheep bite!”

It happens to all pastors: a church person or family takes offense at your preaching, teaching, methods, perspectives, or something else about you or your church, and picks a fight.

When individuals or families pick a fight, what they’re saying is they feel neglected, fearful, or hurt. Often their feelings arise from past hurt. Remember: “Hurting people hurt people.”

When a person or family picks a fight, seek to diffuse the situation with the following steps:

First, Thank Them.

Doing so will surprise them, perhaps even confuse them. Try to remember the attack is not personal (although it occasionally is personal). Breathe deeply and thank them for having the

courage to talk to you about the issue. It’s difficult, but stay as cool as possible.

Second, Ask them.

You can’t ignore their hostility. Doing so sends a message that you don’t care about the issue. Practice these words and let them be the first words out of your mouth: “My, that’s unfortunate. Tell me more.” Or, “I’m so sorry to hear about this. Tell me more.” Or, “Wow! I’m surprised to hear about this. Tell me more.” Then listen. Really listen to what they say. Don’t interrupt, or debate, or deny. Just listen to what they say.

Third, Repeat Them.

Start your part of the conversation with the words, “Let me see if I understand you completely.” Then restate their argument or concern. This accomplishes three things. First, it let’s them know you are listening. Second, it gives them a chance to calm down. Third, it lets them know you are taking their concerns seriously.

Fourth, Agree with Them.

Even if you think their entire concern or argument is nonsense, find at least one thing with which you can agree. For example, say, “I agree the youth meeting shouldn’t have gone so late,” Or, “I see your point about” By conceding a point or two at the beginning, the person or family knows you are not defensive and desire to solve the problem.

Fifth, Rebut Them.

Build off your agreement with the words, “Now, about your other concerns” For example, “**I agree** the youth meeting went too long. **Now, about your concern** that the youth pastor is incompetent, I can’t agree with that. I’ve found him/her to be very competent.”

Tone Down Emotions

Always work to tone down the emotions.

One of the best ways to do so is to use “I” statements rather than

“You” statements. It’s wise to begin any response with the word “I” and not “You.” For example, say, “I sense you’re upset,” rather than, “You are upset.” Or, “I don’t think that’s quite right,” rather than “You are wrong.”

If the person is still upset after working through the five steps, ask “What would you like for me to do?” Answer with one of these options:

- (1) Okay, that sounds reasonable. Then follow through to do whatever you agreed on.
- (2) I’ll consider it. Then actually give it some thought, make a decision, and get back to the person within one week.
- (3) You’ll need to talk to (person) about that issue.
- (4) I can’t do that. Be nice, but direct. Don’t leave any expectation that you agree with the person.

Put this process to use this week.



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