

For some, the title above may seem to be an oxymoron; is there such a thing as *an effective committee*? In their experience committees are primarily a subject for jokes:

- *A camel is a horse put together by a committee.*
- *If Columbus waited for committee approval he'd still be at the dock.*
- *A committee is where good ideas go to die.*
- *A committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours.*

Working with a group of people can be messy, for sure. On the other hand, a lone ranger leader who doesn't understand the potential of good committee work will frustrate their constituents, and often end up burned out or disappointed with results. *Good committee work is creative, efficient, and effective when leaders take time to prepare and provide guidance through the process. And working with a good committee can also be a lot of fun!* So, how do you get from the jokes to a positive reality?

Embrace the gifts and abilities of others. The Bible is clear that every church member is of value and needs to contribute in some way to the mission of the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-31). *By taking on too much yourself, you get in the way of God's plan for his people.* Yes, sometimes it's easier to do a job yourself—but only the first time. By developing the competency of others, you'll never have to do that job again. Your ministry is multiplied, and the body of Christ functions as it was designed.

Remind yourself and your committees of their context. The church's mission is to make disciples. How does your committee contribute to that mission? (If your answer is "It doesn't," then it's possible the committee needs to dissolve or be reoriented towards its true purpose.) *When committee work is connected to your mission as a church, its significance becomes clear.*

Be clear about committee responsibilities. *Have specific written duties for every committee.* These should be succinct and consistent with your church bylaws, policies, and practices. Without clear expectations a committee may struggle to accomplish anything meaningful, or may assume they have more authority than the church ever intended. Sample committee descriptions are available at <https://www.texasbaptists.org/ministries/church-administration/resources>.

Give regular guidance. If you are a pastor or staff member, invest time in the committee chairpersons you are assigned. If you are a committee chairperson, check in on your committee members to find out what they need from you to do their work. *Ongoing communication between committee members, chairpersons, and church staff is essential. Keeping committees on track and moving forward takes effort and initiative.*

Celebrate a job well done. *Help the entire church recognize and celebrate the good work of its committees* when a milestone is reached, an event is successful, or excellence is observed. Church gatherings, blogs, social media, or printed announcements may be appropriate places for recognition, but don't neglect a personal word or note of appreciation to individual committee members.

Committee Chairperson Checklist

- I pray for God's direction in leading the committee, and remain humble in my relationships with the church, its staff, and other leaders.
- I regularly communicate the committee's purpose with committee members.
- I stay engaged with the pastor and/or staff liaison regarding specific actions of the committee, and make sure they are invited to all meetings.
- Meetings are scheduled in advance, but only when there is work to be done.
- An agenda is created and distributed to members and staff liaison before each meeting to encourage preparation, participation, and good stewardship of time.
- Perceived hidden agendas are addressed privately and promptly.
- Meeting minutes or progress reports are filed on church property and communicated appropriately to the congregation.

Committee Member Checklist

- I recognize my committee service as an act of following Christ, and look for ways he is using the experience to shape me for his purposes.
- I believe every committee member's input is necessary. If I am an extrovert, I do not dominate discussion; if an introvert, I do not withhold my ideas and influence.
- Meetings are attended with gladness, and the chairperson is notified when a meeting must be missed.

Pastor/Staff Checklist

- I pray for the committee chairperson(s) and members I shepherd, and regard my work with them as a discipleship opportunity.
- I equip the chairperson with information and tools to do a great job, and help them understand their committee's role in the larger mission of the church.
- I express confidence in committee members' gifts and abilities, provide prayerful and consistent guidance, and never manipulate towards personal agendas.
- Church bylaws and policy are followed in providing oversight to committees.
- The church is informed regularly on the work and progress of committees.

The Committee Process

- Most churches utilize a Committee on Committees or Nominating Committee to enlist willing nominees for committee membership. The selection should begin months before new committee members are to be elected by the church.
- A good committee member nomination process encourages new leader development, avoids burning out faithful members, and ensures qualified

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members are selected in areas of their expertise. This is most often accomplished with a committee member rotation system (e.g. three year terms with 1/3 of members rotating off each year).

- Committee job descriptions should be:
 - Written by staff and church leaders who understand the purpose and scope of work.
 - Reflect compliance with any committee statement in church bylaws.
 - Reviewed regularly for needed updates and relevance.
 - Provided to each potential nominee prior to their agreeing to be nominated.
- A Committee Guidebook given to each committee member every year may encourage healthy committee work. This may be provided at an annual committee launch meeting, and should include:
 - Church purpose/mission statements
 - Bylaws and policy statements relating to committees
 - Committee job descriptions
 - Terms for committee service (rotation schedule)
 - Sample agenda
 - Procedure for reserving meeting space and calendar dates
- Committee members sometimes forget (or never knew) when their term of service is complete. It may be a good idea for the pastor and Committee on Committee chairman to write a joint letter of appreciation to all outgoing committee members each year, including the date when their term is over. Committee chairpersons should be copied as well. Here is a sample letter:

Thank you for serving on the _____ Committee. Your willingness to serve is one of the things that makes Sample Church a healthy and happy church family! With our committee rotation system you are due to rotate off this committee at the end of <month>.

Even after <month>, we know you will continue to find new ways to plug in and serve through your church family. If either of us can help you with that please let us know. There is great joy and satisfaction in using the gifts and abilities God has given us to serve Him and his purposes!

For sample committee descriptions, bylaws, and other resources, go to <https://www.texasbaptists.org/ministries/church-administration/resources>.

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