

Effective Staff Communication at Faithbridge Church: A Success Story

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In a Houston suburb called Spring, Texas, a congregation gathers to worship each week at Faithbridge Church. The church was planted 13 years ago and God had blessed it, especially when they moved into permanent facilities.

To those who are faithful, much is given. And to those whom God gives, He requires much.

Brian McGowan, executive pastor at Faithbridge, saw the new challenges that the church staff was facing as they grew to effectively shepherd their increasing flock. With all of the new hires, McGowan wanted to get a pulse on the mood of the staff. He turned to the BCWI Employee Engagement survey. The initial results were both encouraging and challenging and Brian used them as a baseline for their follow-up survey two years later. McGowan wanted to know if the people working for the church were just a staff or actually a team. He knew he could count on the BCWI survey results to reveal just that.

Their most recent survey results showed exceptional growth, from 4.34 (on a 5.0 scale) to 4.45, some of the highest scores we've ever seen from a church. Both years they qualified as a Certified Best Christian Workplace.



Faithbridge Church in Spring, Texas

So what is it that has made the staff culture at Faithbridge so healthy despite the significant staffing increase?

For one thing, they have a weekly one-hour staff meeting that starts off each week called "Staff Link" and it does just that – create a link between the staff and the leadership. The meeting includes worship and teaching and it really helps with team building and fosters a feeling of family.

Another aspect of communication is performance reviews. Faithbridge leadership learned the importance of this after having to let a couple of people go who were shocked that there was a problem. So now they do monthly check-ins between staff and their supervisors. Additionally quarterly reviews are administered, which are abbreviated versions of the

annual reviews. This way both corrections and celebrations can take place right away.

One of the most important factors for staff engagement at churches is authentic Christian leadership and this also relies heavily on good communication. To develop character at the leadership level Faithbridge has focused on transparency. Sharing stories from their lives has proven remarkably helpful. Thus through humility the leadership shows Christ's work in their life and the staff can put their trust in God's working rather than just the leaders themselves.

The BCWI survey has revealed that Faithbridge staff feel their jobs are meaningful. This means that both the general mission of the church is fulfilling, but also that Faithbridge knows how to align the specific

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gifting of staff members with appropriate jobs. In fact, being a “steward” of the staff is part of McGowan’s job and he takes it seriously. Although Faithbridge doesn’t see a high turnover, people are often changing jobs within the church as they see an open position for which they are better suited. Also, if the leadership realizes that someone is in a position that doesn’t suit them, they will try to move them quickly since they want people to serve in their strengths, not their weaknesses. In order to do this, communication is essential and the regular performance reviews in particular are helpful.

McGowan’s role of steward of the staff also includes holding everyone accountable to get appropriate rest by taking their vacation days and also to spend time with their family if they had to put in extra hours at the church. Here communication takes the form of encouraging accountability.

Recognizing that the health of an organization requires good communication from the bottom-up as well as top-down, they don’t just recruit from within. They take advantage of the perspective new people have to see the things that others overlook.

In order to foster trust in their work culture, managers walk around the office to interact with the staff and really get to know them. This is

especially good for the more introverted staff. The managers take advantage of this time to make sure staff hear about things such as a new direction the church is taking or new ideas that will be implemented. They want the staff to be the first to know. Despite so many employees, McGowan still tries to know every staff member’s name and their basic “story” (i.e. are they married, do they have kids). Although not all the leaders do this, enough do to break down the barriers.



**Brian McGowan, Executive
Pastor at Faithbridge**

Compensation is always a tricky subject, but one organizations have to master in order to have their staff feel that they are being treated fairly. Faithbridge has been careful to communicate to their staff that fair is not always equal, so they focus on the term “reasonable”. Also, they give their staff both vacation days and sick days as compared to paid time off because they really want the staff to take vacation. Also Faithbridge offers a retirement plan that ranks within the top 5 percent

for churches in the nation. These are ways that they communicate what they value in tangible ways and the BCWI survey scores show that the staff at Faithbridge appreciate these ideals.

Despite their success, Faithbridge is still striving to learn and grow in terms of communication. They are in the fledgling stages of formally developing their staff. McGowan makes it a point to meet with some of the male staff to talk about life, their walk with God, etc. He encourages all the leaders to do this with those of the same gender under their oversight. McGowan’s hope is that they will become more intentional about this in the future.

Communication is at the heart of so many aspects of a healthy organizational culture. Faithbridge church has recognized this and by making communication a priority, reaped the rewards of an engaged staff despite significant staff growth in the last few years. You can listen to the full interview that this article is based on at the BCWI Positive Core Podcast series (www.bcwinstitute.org/podcasts.xml).