



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
“Staff Development Keys for a Healthier Culture”
January 22, 2018

Scott Wiggins

Female: Today’s podcast is brought to you by BCWI’s 360 Leadership Assessment.

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us today. How can you continually develop a staff both professionally and spiritually to better advance the vision and mission of your Christian ministry? Our guest today has walked this path and has more than a few practical insights and stories to help you strengthen your people and improve the health of your culture.

Today we have the pleasure of visiting with Scott Wiggins, the director of staff at Pinelake Church, a multisite church in Mississippi. Pinelake has over 125 staff and, today, has a very healthy staff culture. Scott’s role is to train and develop the staff both spiritually and professionally. Hi, Scott, and welcome to our podcast today.

Scott Wiggins: Al, thank you very much. It’s just a pleasure to be with you.

Al: Glad you’re here, Scott. I have to admit that you have a very unusual career path. Tell us how a Delta pilot transitioned into a church staff director. What brought you into your current role?

Scott: Yeah, a little bit different road than a lot of people travel. I was a pilot in the United States Air Force and the Air National Guard, and then through the Guard process was flying for Delta full-time as well. As I was approaching retirement in active duty, I got called back to active duty after September

11. Honestly, I was preparing to go back and fly at Delta. I had been a part of Pinelake for a number of years. I had actually been an elder in this church.

As I was doing that, I met with Tim Smith, our senior executive pastor, at lunch one day, and Tim proposed a role for me to come onto the team. Candidly, Al, I laughed. I told Tim, "I will do anything you want me to do, but I don't see me coming on staff." He just said, "Scott, would you give me an honest prayer about it?" And I did. God spoke very clearly to me that my next step was not going to be in another cockpit of an airplane but it was going to be to surrender to ministry. So I called Tim the next day and told him I was on board and we're on the journey now.

Al: Wow. From US Air Force, retiring, coming back into service, and now in church ministry. As you came to Pinelake Church and became the director of staff, tell us about the challenges facing you and your leadership team. What were some of the things your culture needed in terms of attention?

Scott: When I joined the team, I really believe I joined as an additive to an already really solid foundation. At the time, Pinelake had grown to four campuses, and senior pastor Chip Henderson and Tim Smith began to enter into a season where they really needed to begin to give away some of the ministry they were leading.

They were doing good things, but we needed them to do the great things, so to speak. So Tim and Chip allowed me to step into the pastoring piece to the staff, the developmental piece, and the hiring piece, really to free them up. I don't know that there were glaring weaknesses. There were really just opportunities for us to get better.

Al: Yeah, for them to delegate and through the delegation to allow the church to grow. A couple of years after you started at Pinelake, you embarked on a journey to actually measure the health of your staff culture with the Best Christian Workplaces Engagement Survey. What were you attempting to accomplish through the process? What was the trigger, if you will, that began the process?

Scott: There were a couple of specific events, but also kind of a general undertow. Primarily, we measured staff health too often based on the last conversation we had with an individual. If someone left our team and a perception existed that staff turnover was bad, all of a sudden this emotion began to permeate that our staff health was not good, or if we had a discussion about somebody's performance that maybe wasn't meeting our expectation, that singular issue kind of became imprinted throughout the team.

So we wanted to gauge our staff health more holistically, more accurately, and kind of remove the emotion from that. In talking with fellows who had similar roles to mine, they just said, "You need to turn to the experts," and, Al, you're the experts. They said you guys could really give us a great perspective on where we actually were as to where people may think we were.

AI: That's interesting. From your pilot experience, actually looking for a gauge to help identify health and measure it. Let's talk about what you found out. When you did do the survey, what did you do with the results?

Scott: We did find that some of our assumptions were validated by the facts. We believed our team felt supported in outstanding compensation. We also felt there was significant and wonderful talent around them. Similarly, we believed we had areas to improve when it came to communication and growth for our staff. Those things were validated by the results you provided. With those results in hand and, honestly, some exceptional coaching that Cary Humphries on your team provided as well, we launched some specific next steps.

One of those was developing some WIN teams (What's Important Now), that acronym of bringing folks together, tasking them, but also empowering those folks to give us steps as to how we can continue to improve. We wanted to accentuate on the positives but also see how we could improve those areas of negativity or areas where we needed to improve. So we constructed those teams across campuses, across ministry assignments, gender, and age lines, and really gave those guys voice to help us in how we could get better, and I think that has been key.

AI: How many WIN teams did you start off with in that first year? Do you remember?

Scott: We started out with just two. One team took the communication piece, because that was one of the areas where we felt we really needed improvement. Again, I'll go back to Cary's coaching. Cary said, "Don't forget about the areas you're already excellent in. Continue to breathe life and opportunity in that." So when it came to the compensation piece and the outstanding talent piece, we had another WIN team that spoke into that as well.

AI: Wow. So as you looked at your results, what was your leadership's reaction to such a positive outcome with the *rewarding compensation* factor? I know our listeners would be interested in what was behind your favorite scores with compensation and benefits. Tell us about that.

Scott: We had a little bit of background previously. We had used salary surveys and some other things to help ensure we were compensating our staff sufficiently. We were blown away by the overwhelming positive answers, because, honestly, compensation is not necessarily an area that gets a lot of accolades, so to speak. I mean, people accept it and appreciate it.

I think it was just a lot of affirmation for certain members of the team that "Hey, we really are doing well in this particular area." So that piece was encouraging. Then the WIN team recommended we continue to build on this area. "If God has given us favor, let's not simply just reap the blessing, but let's multiply the blessing on top of that. Let's not sit on our laurels, so to speak."

Al: That's great. In that first report, your staff responses indicated they were impressed with the way the top performance is rewarded and that, in addition to that, you promote highly qualified employees. What are some of the practices you utilize to achieve high scores in the *outstanding talent* area, particularly around retention and promotion of your best talent?

Scott: A little bit of this is going to sound like a chamber of commerce line, so I apologize to folks who are listening if it sounds like I'm beating the drum of Pinelake. The currency here really is a spiritual currency, so I think when people come onto the team they realize the primary thing we're looking for is "Are you in love with Jesus, and are you in a growing relationship?" Even as someone assimilates to the team, while, obviously, professional competencies are important, it starts with that.

Then upon that we continue to build into the individual, and we really do try to reward and grow from within. Not that we don't have external candidates who come in, but as people come to the team, whether it's bonuses, whether it's new opportunities... As you grow your ministry, we want to give you the opportunity to speak into more things. We really do that. So I think our staff feels excited about the opportunity. "Man, if I work hard and bring a good work ethic constantly, we're going to have more opportunities in the future."

Al: That's a great story. Again, outstanding talent at Pinelake is clearly one of your strengths, where you're recruiting, you're retaining, you're promoting, and rewarding your top talent. Tell us a favorite story about how outstanding talent has contributed to the increasingly healthy culture.

Scott: I guess as a military officer I loved all of my lieutenants. Right? I love all of my staff, but if I was going to pick one, certainly the congregational care staff at our Reservoir Campus is a great example. Jeff Holland leads that team, a former senior pastor. He's assisted by Pastor Darren Miley and a great administrator in Jennifer Bassett. They work incredibly well together. They're a great cohesive unit.

The beauty is they've had opportunities to do other things, but they feel they are absolutely in their sweet spot, that they're gifted to do it, called to do it. They feel empowered to do it, and the blessing our congregation receives from them at our Reservoir Campus... It's just obvious they're in the right seat on the bus for them in this time. They're a great WIN story.

Al: I trust you're enjoying our podcast today. We'll be right back after an important word for leaders.

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AI: All right. Now let's hear more from today's guest.

You surveyed the first year, and then you came back and surveyed a year later. The church engaged your staff again with the survey and had a very nice improvement in that second year. In your second year, you had 96 percent of your staff participate, which was really great, and you saw the actual scores improve very nicely, almost to our flourishing level. We noticed you had a nice jump in our *inspirational leadership* factor, today in your top 10 strengths, and a lot of our listeners know what that means.

Included in those are the fact that you're well managed, that leaders demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit, that there are high levels of trust, that you focus on Christ daily in decision making, and that there are rich levels of fellowship at Pinelake. Pick one of these strengths that has been increasingly significant in your culture and overall ministry. What are some of the key action steps you took to get there?

Scott: When we engaged in our process to try to move the needle, so to speak, we primarily did that intending to hopefully address the area of healthy communication. While we did see minor improvement in that area, it was mostly felt in the *inspirational leadership* category. When it comes to decisions at a multisite church, it can kind of be confusing as to who owns the decision.

That lack of clarity was manifest in our team feeling sometimes poorly managed and sometimes unclear as to what their next step would be. One of the things we did was we started a conversation using our entire staff and ultimately landed on a multisite strategy (a multisite document, for lack of a better term) that outlines where decisions rest and where freedom exists and where autonomy can happen.

This document and its implementation were absolutely huge for our team in understanding what we were asking each person to do in order for them to be successful. People want to win. They want to do what is expected of them. They want to be a key contributor to the team, and ultimately we believe we gave them a playbook and a resource and a scorecard to help them do that.

AI: That came right out of the survey, because you wanted to improve communication. This was probably an outcome of one of your WIN teams. Is that right?

Scott: Absolutely. The WIN team was a huge part of that. Like you said, it was areas where we already had high levels of trust with our senior leadership team, but we wanted to continue to build upon that to show our entire staff, “*We are listening and you do have the best ideas, and we want to move forward with those ideas.*”

Al: That’s fascinating. While you pushed on that communication lever, inspirational leadership improved as an outcome in addition. They are connected. There’s no question. This year, our results indicate you have 70 percent of your staff in the *engaged* category and are well ahead of the church average, which is about 54 percent.

One of the FLOURISH factors that increased the most was *life-giving work*. We see this factor almost as important as *inspirational leadership* in churches, yet some feel it’s hard to get our arms around this driver, this concept of life-giving work. How do you and your leadership improve the perceptions that the work the staff does is important?

Scott: I’ll reference that multisite document again. I think the clarity it provided was helpful, but there were a couple of other subtle things I think helped in this arena. First, we simply did some rebranding with our vision, mission, and values to provide more clear direction to our team and our church in totality. The vision of Pinelake Church is to see Mississippi change one life-change story at a time, and that really does drive everything we do. It drives our ministry plans. It drives our calendar. It drives our budget.

We try to minimize and try to eliminate anything that doesn’t do something to further us in accomplishing that vision. So that clarity certainly helped our team. I think another subtle area that helped us improve was just focusing our attention on staff development. Previously, I would have given us probably a gentleman’s C in how we were doing as developing our team. I think we’ve moved to a B-plus. I think when people feel equipped they feel empowered and prepared. It’s simple, and I think we’re doing a better job at that.

Al: How do you help your staff see opportunities to use their skills and spiritual gifts in their roles? That came out pretty well.

Scott: I have a great person I get to collaborate with. While I get the opportunity to lead the staff, Jeff Redding, our executive pastor of ministry, leads the ministries at Pinelake. Jeff is responsible for overseeing all of those areas. There’s just no better pastor/coach/teacher/trainer than Jeff is, and it’s really due to his efforts. He helps take the theoretical vision of the statement and then craft and release our staff to go pastor communities.

Many times, I think our staff felt encumbered by having to come up with strategies and processes, and we’ve been able to take that burden away from them and release them to go love people. Let me tell

you, pastors love to love on people, and when they can do that and not be necessarily tied to some other processes, it really gives them freedom in life, and I think that's where we saw the greatest move in that area.

Al: Wow. You really let them focus on what they're good at in loving people. That's clearly where their gifts are. That's interesting. Scott, if you could single out an individual staff member or department, who would be the best ones to demonstrate their skills and their spiritual gifts at work and change your culture for the better? What would that be?

Scott: Adam Day, our Reservoir middle school pastor, is just a great story. He's a gifted mobilizer of people. His pastoral heart just absolutely captures you. He has grown the ministry in two years from 100 students and 25 leaders to over 350 students and 100 leaders weekly, but he hasn't simply grown the ministry as a recruiter; he has grown it as a pastoral heart, a shepherd, so to speak.

I am just amazed at how... I think it's John Maxwell who says you can't ask for somebody's hand until you capture their heart. That's Adam Day. He captures people's hearts, and they see the direction he's walking, and they say, "Hey, I want to go *that way*." He's just a great story of winning for us.

Al: It's interesting. As you talk about that, not only do you measure the number of students who are attending the ministry but the number of leaders who are involved as well. Those two go hand in hand, don't they?

Scott: Absolutely. We believe ministry is what you leave behind when you're following Christ. If God leads Adam away sometime in the future to a different ministry, we're going to know his ministry was great, because it's going to continue to flourish because those leaders bought into the vision.

Al: At the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, we believe a healthy culture is a true and worthy end in itself. We also believe a healthy to flourishing culture leads an organization to growth and greater impact in their community. What's the biggest improvement you've seen in how your culture has been influenced and encouraged and how the overall ministry impact has improved at Pinelake?

Scott: I think numbers are a part of anything, and I could talk to you about how baptisms are up, small group participation is up, worship attendance is up, servant leader participation is up, and giving is up. I believe all of those are impacted directly because our staff believes and sees how they are being developed, empowered, and released to lead in their area of gifting and assignment.

There's an obvious correlation between our partnership with BCWI, the staff survey, our senior leader 360 reviews... All of those things have a very linear effect to how we're getting better. The investigation, the analysis, and the action were critical ingredients in helping us empower and develop

our staff. We simply walked the direction our partner at BCWI directed. What do they say? “Where there is good root there’s good fruit.”

Al: I like that. “Where there’s good root there’s good fruit.” Scott, you mentioned 360s. Just give us a brief summary of that process and how that was helpful at Pinelake.

Scott: Our senior leaders took the lead on that. Chip Henderson and Tim Smith really wanted to know, “How am I doing as a leader, and how can I get better?” We just disseminated that to staff. They gave us incredible feedback, and then on the heels of that, Tim Smith wanted all members of our senior leadership team to participate in that.

So over the last two years, we’ve had a couple of members of the team and then, ultimately, our campus pastors as well jump into that opportunity to grow, and the staff has given us great feedback over that time. Each one of those guys has embraced that and then applied that into their objectives and goals as to how they can get better as leaders.

Al: As you say, developing that plan with objectives and goals coming out of that is very helpful. Well, Scott, we’ve enjoyed what we’ve learned today. I really appreciate the way you’ve communicated your approach to following up on the staff engagement survey with your WIN teams. That follow-up is really critical.

The outcome of your multisite playbook that came as a result of improving communication, helping people understand what their roles are, to have them, like you said, comfortable in their roles so they can really focus and work hard and be free to do the job they need to do; even the way you’ve, as a result, rebranded your vision to be very clear and to bring clarity so people can really exercise their gifts... Those are all really helpful stories and examples for our listeners.

Given all that you’ve experienced and the ongoing transformation and greater health in your culture, I’ll bet you have one final thought you’d like to leave leaders based on our conversation and your experience.

Scott: I would say whether it has been military experience in combat in Afghanistan or Iraq or working at Pinelake, there is a principle I’ve always applied to what I do. Again, I’ve stolen this. I didn’t originate it at all. I really believe in the idea that you want to touch a person’s heart before you ask for their hand.

By doing that, I’m ultimately always going to go to the vision God has called me to, but along the way I am called to equip and empower people to do that with me. I would just encourage leaders out there. Jesus said as you go, take people with you and take them to the vision God has called you to and equip and train them to be the best they can be. It’ll make all the difference.

Al: Amen. That's great. Touch a person's heart before you ask for their hand. Well, Scott Wiggins, director of staff at Pinelake Church in Mississippi, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to the leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've shared with us today. That's fantastic.

Scott: Well, thank you, Al. Pleasure to be with you.

Al: Thank you. To our listeners, thank you for investing this time in your workplace culture. This is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives a greater impact and growth in your organization. I'll see you again soon on the Flourishing Culture Podcast.

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