



MICHIGAN
MINISTRY
NETWORK

HOW TO HIRE THE RIGHT STAFF PLAYBOOK

Welcome,

This guide is designed to help you, the pastor, understand how to communicate well during the hiring process and know what to look for in potential candidates to best serve you and your congregation.

First, we ought to answer the question: Why are the *right* staff important? Often when a position needs to be filled within the church it can become a source of stress or tension, which can force a pastor into a sense of urgency. While it is important to fill a position so the church can continue to operate at full capacity it's imperative that urgency doesn't overshadow the quality of the person being hired. The right staff can be hard to find, but it's always worth the extra time it may take to find someone who fits the pastor, the congregation, and the community you serve. Hiring the right staff helps a church's overall productivity both administratively and ministerially and safeguards against potential hurt between staff and body.

A healthy staff is able to minister to their church, accomplish day-to-day tasks to maintain the church, and work together to reach the lost in the community. There's a lot that goes into running a church and working with others. That being said, working with people can be complicated and messy, but a healthy staff is able to work through any disagreements and act as a team to achieve the vision of their church. Things like chemistry, communication styles, and expectations are all essential attributes in determining who will be a good fit and promote health among your staff and congregation.

This guide walks through three phases of the hiring process and details important things to communicate, observe, ask, and consider when looking to hire either a pastor or an administrative role.

We hope that this guide will be a helpful tool as you, pray, fast, and seek the Holy Spirit for your new hire.

Aaron Hlavin
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THREE PHASES OF HIRING THE RIGHT STAFF

BEFORE YOU PROCEED WITH ANY OF THESE STEPS, WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE AND RUN THOROUGH BACKGROUND CHECKS, BOTH CRIMINAL AND FINANCIAL AND CONTACT THE MMN SUPERINTENDENT FOR ANY INSIGHT ON YOUR POTENTIAL CANDIDATE

PHASE ONE: Initial Process

In the initial stages of hiring, you may be conducting a few phone interviews or have met with the candidate in person. During this process, there are a few important things to note. This section is geared mostly toward hiring for a pastoral role, but many of these points could also be useful when hiring administrative staff. This guide can also be adapted to bring both paid and unpaid team members onto your staff.

Before starting this process, take time to submit this decision to the Lord. Ask for His guidance and grace over figuring out who to bring onto your church staff, and trust that He will order your steps.

Important things for you to communicate:

- **Culture:** Describe the current culture of your congregation and staff. This means explaining the feel of your church, its focus, and its strong points or struggle areas. If you are seeking to change the current culture of your church, be sure to also describe the culture you are aiming to cultivate. This will give the candidates a quick overview of the atmosphere they're joining and allow them to prepare for the future, especially if the church intends to make a shift. Additionally, ask the candidate what type of culture they are looking for, so you as the pastor can begin to think about their ability to integrate with your staff. If you need further clarification on what items might be encompassed by culture see the appendix at the end of the guide.
- **Community:** Describe the community your church resides in. Discuss the demographics, successes you've had in outreaches, or things that are lacking in the community that your church wants to provide. This is important because the church works to serve its community through various outreach programs, and therefore, a pastor will be an active member of the community

they're hired into. If the candidate doesn't fit into or identify with the community your church serves, it may be difficult for them to thrive on your staff. Ask the candidate about their impressions of your community and how they feel about being involved.

- **History:** Share your church's history in the community and as a congregation. This is a heads-up to the candidates about what they're getting into. If your history is positive, this is a fairly easy conversation and gives the candidate a sense of legacy. However, if your church has a complicated history, this may be a much more difficult conversation. Do not shy away from being completely honest for the sake of comfort. If you're worried your church's past will hinder a candidate from wanting to join your team, it's even more important to share it. Honesty is particularly crucial if the church has a poor reputation and/or a strong sense of community or congregational hurt.
- **Passions/Values:** Describe what is important to you and your church. What your church strives for and emphasizes is part of what defines it. Communicating this helps you determine whether the candidate shares your passions and values personally and in their approach to ministry. This would be a good time to address your church's mission. Why does your church exist? What makes your church unique?
- **Vision:** Describe where your church is headed and what the future looks like. What new ministries are you trying to grow or launch? Expressing these goals not only provides clear direction but also demonstrates an emphasis on progress as a church body and staff. Ask the candidates where they see themselves in the future and where they want to end up as a minister. Do they resonate with where the church is headed? There is a difference between explaining the culture of your church and demonstrating it through responses to scenarios. Try to pick a few specific examples to share with your candidate that will better demonstrate your pastoral and church vision. Also, take time to define what motivates you as a pastor, and then on a larger level what motivates your church to do what they do. Explaining what drives you will help your candidate understand why you and your church have certain priorities, and further help them buy into the vision of the church.
- **Expectations:** Describe what you expect from them in terms of attitude, contribution, time commitment, and level of work. Setting these standards during the initial process helps weed out candidates who might be unwilling or unable to fulfill the role to your expectations. Also, take this time to ask the candidate what their expectations are coming into this role. Make sure to lay

out a clear job description, so the candidate has a complete understanding of the job they may undertake and to prevent miscommunication about their role in the future.

While conducting these initial interviews, don't forget to involve the candidate's spouse. Hiring a married couple means bringing both individuals into your church and work life. While the church may not directly employ the spouse, their passions, vision, and expectations can affect your newly hired staff member's performance and transition onto your team. It's important to keep the spouse in mind during every step of the process and make an effort to get to know them, just as you are attempting to get to know your candidate.

It's also important to clearly define your expectations of the candidate's spouse in the event of hiring. Expectations can range from setting boundaries about the level of the spouse's involvement in the candidate's job responsibilities to things such as interaction with church members and attendance at church events. Unless you state these expectations directly, the candidate will have no way of knowing what your internal thoughts are. For this reason, honesty and communication are some of the most vital elements in the hiring process.

If, after reading through this guide, you realize you don't know the answer to many of the above questions about **culture**, **expectations**, and **vision**, take some time to reflect. Knowing these answers will help you better articulate your preferences during interview sessions. It may help to physically write out your responses to each of the categories or type them up to use throughout the process. Remember, hiring the *right* staff starts with you

PHASE TWO: Deep Dive

This section pertains only to hiring for a pastoral role. Visitation is vital in hiring the right pastor for your church. A visitation allows you, the pastor, or the hiring committee to meet the candidates on a deeper level and observe them in job-specific settings. Visitation also provides an opportunity to introduce them to other staff members to gauge team chemistry.

Short Visitation (1-2 Days):

If your church or candidate is only available for a short visitation, it's important to make the most of the limited time. Make sure to bring the candidate on a day that allows them to demonstrate their ability in a job-specific role. For example, if you are looking to hire a youth pastor, it would be most beneficial to bring them in on a night that the youth meet, rather than a traditional Sunday service. This might look

like having them lead the youth session by preaching a message or handling a small group. Other examples could include having a potential worship pastor lead a set on a Sunday or having a potential kids' pastor run the kids' service. By placing candidates in these situations, you can observe their abilities rather than hiring based solely on personality. However, there are definite benefits to having a candidate sit in on a Sunday service, as it will allow them some familiarity with your church structure and overall feel. The most important part of any visitation is your ability to meet the candidate face-to-face, get to know them, and introduce them to important members of your staff and church body.

Long Visitation (3-5 Days):

A long visitation is the optimal amount of time to interact with and observe a potential pastor. This allows you to spend office time with them, see them in a job-specific setting, observe them on a Sunday morning, and take personal time with them. Taking the time to be intentional with the candidate and learn about them on a personal level can offer more insight than attending a service or leading in their specialty. During your personal time with the candidate, you can connect with them and ask deep questions. Don't be afraid to dig. This is the time to find out if you will be able to work with this person for the foreseeable future, and if they will promote health by joining your staff.

Some examples of being intentional with a candidate might include having dinner and a game night at your house, going out for coffee, taking them on a town tour, or doing an activity like an escape room. In each of these settings, you can talk with them on a more personal level and observe their interactions with people, their thought processes, and even their problem-solving skills.

During any visitation, a priority should be to introduce the potential pastor to the rest of the staff and Deacon board. This can be both professionally and personally. Watch how they interact during a service, and then invite them over for a game night. Look for communication styles, tension points, and overall chemistry. Make sure the spouse is included in all of this, as your staff will be interacting with the couple regularly as well as the newly hired pastor.

At this stage, make sure to go through your policy manual or handbook. This details the type of conduct you expect from staff members and acts as a rulebook for confrontations, communication, and overall professional conduct.

Working Relationship:

- **Leadership:** Describe the type of leader you are. This might include things like communication style, prioritizing hours worked or productivity, and your work-life balance. After communicating your leadership style, be sure to ask the interviewee what type of leader they need. This conversation alone could be the deciding factor for hiring a candidate. Being able to mesh and

communicate is non-negotiable when taking on a pastor. Furthermore, ask what type of leader the candidate's spouse is expecting you to be. Be ready to listen and consider whether you will be able to fulfill their leadership needs. This is a great time to recommunicate your expectations for someone fulfilling this role.

- **Friendship:** Describe the nature of the staff's typical relationship with you. Are you looking to mentor them, invite them over to your house, and establish a more casual connection with them, or are things mostly professional? Additionally, ask your candidate the type of relationship they are looking to establish with you and the staff. There is no one way to pastor or lead a staff; both approaches to leadership are valid, but they need to be communicated for the health of your candidate.

Resources for personality tests can be found in the appendix at the end of the guide.

Something to note: If you are unable or unwilling to mentor a newly hired pastor, consider hiring someone with a good level of experience. Hiring a first-time pastor can be wonderful for both you and your congregation, but only if you're willing to put the time in to teach them and support them as they learn. If you're looking for someone who doesn't need a lot of management or direct involvement, a pastor with experience is more likely the better choice.

PHASE THREE: Hiring

This section discusses the differences between hiring for a pastoral role and an administrative role. Additionally, this section will cover how to utilize a candidate's references and provide examples of the types of questions to ask.

Important things to consider when hiring a pastor vs an admin:

- **Time:** The time commitment for each role will look different. A full-time pastoral role may require a highly flexible work schedule, and their time commitment might fluctuate based on the season. For example, a pastor may need to be at (x) amount of church events during a regular week and work office hours, whereas an administrative role may have a more structured schedule, like working a 9-5 or during the established church office hours.
- **Proficiency:** Each role has different non-negotiable skills that are needed for an individual to fulfill their job requirements. For example, a pastoral role requires good people skills, whereas an admin role requires strong organizational skills. While it is optimal that individuals possess both strengths,

the higher priority for hiring lies in the specific needs of the role. Additionally, different roles require different areas of expertise. An admin may need to have an understanding of Excel or some elements of graphic design. A pastor may need to be familiar with tools like Planning Center and ProPresent. Consider what the job you're hiring for entails and make sure to pick a candidate based on their ability to fulfill your needs and expectations.

- **Proximity:** An admin will most likely work directly with one specific person or a few specific people. With this in mind, consider before hiring if these people share qualities that can work well together. When hiring for a pastor position, on the other hand, it is more likely they will be more involved in working with the entirety of the staff on a day-to-day basis. Take time to evaluate if this candidate would be able to work well with everyone on the team.

References, Things you need to know:

When talking to a candidate's references, it's important to ask questions that are geared toward what matters to you in a candidate. A few common concerns may include the candidate's temperament, work style, organizational abilities, flexibility, response to constructive criticism, and ability to anticipate needs. This could be a different list for you. It may be helpful to take time and write out traits or characteristics you're looking for in a candidate. It's important to remember that a candidate is unlikely to list a reference who will willingly talk negatively about them, or give them a negative review. For this reason, you have to be more intentional with your questions. Try not to ask questions that can be easily answered with a yes or no, but ones that require explanation or use of a specific example from the candidate's work history. Below are a few example questions:

- In what ways has [Candidate] changed since starting with you?
- Can you give me an example of a time [Candidate] encountered a conflict or difficulty? What did they do to resolve it?
- What was [Candidate's] typical attitude toward tasks assigned to them, especially if it was something they had no experience doing?
- Did [Candidate] ever miss a deadline? Why?
- What was your favorite part about working with [Candidate]?
- What is something [Candidate] can improve upon moving forward?
- Was [Candidate] previously in a leadership position? If so, how did they motivate members of their team?

- If you could hire [Candidate] again, would you? Why?
- How did [Candidate] handle themselves when receiving constructive criticism?
- How did [Candidate] communicate on a day-to-day basis or regarding big projects?
- What would you consider [Candidate's] biggest strength? Biggest weaknesses?

Overall important things to note:

Before hiring anyone, make sure you have a clear and well-thought-out job description ready for initial interviews. Also, be sure to have an established salary/payment plan to communicate to your candidate upon moving to the second and third phases of the hiring process. Having both of these things settled before entering the hiring process ensures less confusion and reduces the chance for oversight for both you and the candidate.

Though not exhaustive, this guide is a good start on how to hire the right staff. Every church is different, and so is every staff. This guide is meant to be adaptable to your specific needs. If you need help generating questions for initial interviews, some examples can be found in the appendix below. Thank you for reading this guide, and may God help you through this process.

APPENDIX

Resources for personality tests:

- [Personality.co](https://www.16personalities.com)
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Sample interview questions to get to know your candidate's experience, personality, faith walk, and interest in the church:

- What did your responsibilities look like at your last job?
- What does your experience with leading [any ministry] look like?
- What are your biggest strengths? Weaknesses?
- How long have you been working in ministry? Tell me about some of your favorite moments.
- What is your approach to leading a team of staff or volunteers?
- Can you share a time when you had to navigate a difficult or sensitive situation in ministry?
- When did you first know you were called to ministry?
- What's something you're passionate about?
- How do you maintain a healthy relationship with the Lord? What does your daily walk with Christ look like?
- What do you believe are your spiritual gifts, and how have you used them in ministry?
- How do you approach teaching and preaching (if applicable)?
- What is your perspective on community outreach and evangelism?
- What excites you most about this opportunity with [name of church]?
- Based on what you know about the community and the congregation, how do you feel you'll fit in here? Do you have any initial concerns or questions?

Key aspects of **Culture** to explain to your candidate:

1: Beliefs and Values

- Confirm AG's Philosophical, and Ethical Beliefs
- Cultural Traditions of the Church (What are some of your moral principles?)
- Views on Family, Community, and Society

2: Customs and Traditions

- Holidays and Celebrations
- Events and Activities

3: Social Structures and Relationships

- Family or Church Dynamics
- Community Organization and Leadership
- Social Norms and Etiquette within the Church

4: Work and Economy

- Types of Positions (What does support for that position look like?)
- Work Ethic of the Church (What are your business practices?)
- Budgeting and Financial Responsibility

5: Education and Knowledge

- Level of Education
- Credential Expectations
- Views on Mentors and the Process of Mentoring

6: Bylaws and Church Governance

- Structures of Leadership within the Church
- Rights, Freedoms, and Responsibilities

7: Technology

- Use of Tools, Equipment, and Digital Advancements
- Church's Technology Usage (Explain the level of your church's understanding of/dependence on technology.)