

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Manage Conflict

The summer after my junior year of high school I worked for a small lumber company in my hometown. My job, along with three other high school friends, was to unload raw lumber from boxcars that were moved onto the property each evening.

Much of the time we had to handle the lumber with our bare hands. Each night, after arriving home, I used tweezers to pull small splinters from the palms of my hands. These small pieces

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-Gary L. McIntosh

of lumber were irritating, but having them in my hands never stopped me from working.

One day the yard manager put me to work building a wood display to hold some grass seed. In my enthusiasm of doing something other than moving lumber all day, I accidentally hit my left thumb while hammering nails into the display. With excruciating pain I dropped the hammer, squeezed my left thumb tightly with my right hand, and muttered some words that a Christian should not say. Regaining my composure, I discovered that I could not continue working. My thumb was so swollen that I couldn't grasp and hold anything with my left hand. The result? I did not work for the rest of the week.

This story illustrates the difference between criticism and conflict. Criticism is similar to the small splinters of wood that I got in my hands each day. Splinters, and criticism, are irritating, but will not stop you from working. Hitting my thumb

is similar to conflict, it creates so much pain that you have to stop working and deal with the issue.

Criticism is critique that causes minor frustrations. All pastors and church leaders are critiqued. Leaders always suffer the pain of public and private evaluation for their ideas and actions.

Conflict is that point in the critique where the frustration is so great that you have to stop what you are doing and deal with the issues before moving on.

Thus, when the pain of critique becomes so great that you can no longer do ministry, you have reached a point of conflict. Something must be done or the ministry will not continue.

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

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Conflict means “to strike together.”

True conflict is rarely solved but it can be managed.

It is helpful to think of the process for managing conflict step-by-step.

First, identify when criticism actually becomes conflict. Remember, criticism is not conflict. It only becomes conflict when the pain reaches the point that ministry can't continue until something is done about it.

Second, identify the type of conflict? Is it substantive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal? If substantive, what is the issue? Focus on the issue and try to not engage intra or interpersonal feelings. If it's interpersonal, ask those involved to meet together to see if they can make amends and reach an acceptable agreement. If it's intrapersonal, talk to God about it in your prayers asking for the grace to change yourself or to forgive others.

Third, identify the norms of the situation? Norms are just the normal way things are done at your church. What is acceptable and not acceptable way of dealing with conflict issues? The wisest approach is to work within your norms as much as reasonable.

Fourth, identify the rules of the situation. Investigate your constitution, by-laws, denominational book of order, and any policy guides that may be in place. Also consider if there are unwritten policies, which are usually followed. Be sure to follow whatever written rules are available when managing conflict.

Fifth, identify the contingencies. What is the price you or your family will have to pay in the management of the conflict? What will you lose? What will you stand to gain? Is it worth it? Remember, all battles are not worth fighting. Choose carefully which battles you fight.

Sixth, identify the potential actions of others. What have you seen others do previously? What are they likely to do now? Know people well enough to predict their actions and be prepared for them.

Seventh, identify the values of the situation. What ought to be done? What is right? What is biblical? At all times seek to manage conflict within the guidelines of scripture.

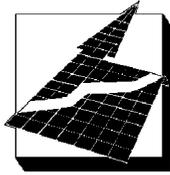
Eighth, identify the assumptions of the situation. What are the foundational beliefs involved? What is believed to be true? What is expected? What is traditional? Knowing the assumptions that undergird other people's understanding provides great insight into how to manage the situation.

At this point, having thought about the eight steps, pause. Take time to think about what the proper approach is and what action to take. What results do you want to see? What is the best way to approach the situation? Remember, there are numerous ways to approach any conflict. Each approach is appropriate depending on the situation and the results you desire to achieve.



Adapted from *There's Hope for Your Church* (Baker Books 2012) by Gary L. McIntosh

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How to Develop a Church Policy Manual

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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How to Develop a Church Policy Manual

Every church operates under a set of rules or guidelines. These guidelines may be identified as formal policies, informal policies, and tacit policies.

Formal policies are easily identified due to the fact that they are written and accepted through formal procedures.

Informal policies are unwritten rules that are used to keep things running smoothly.

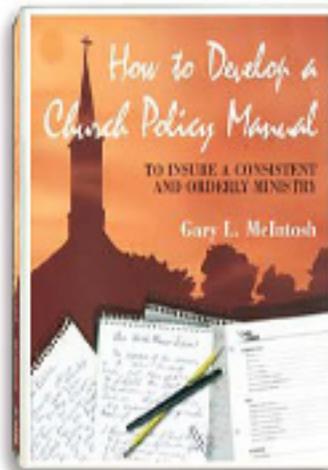
Tacit policies are unwritten and, very often, unspoken rules which are nevertheless used to make decisions in a local church.

Communication problems arise when the formal, informal, and tacit policies intersect. New attendees may be unaware of the informal and tacit policies, while older members use them readily in making decisions and setting ministry direction.

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- Effectively communicate with your congregation and staff; and
- Fulfill part of God's purpose for your church.

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