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# GROWTH POINTS

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With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

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## Check the Bullies: Part 2

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Unfortunately, church bullies are common in churches. It's difficult to know how to handle them, since everyone's expected to be nice at church.

Dealing with church bullies is uncomfortable at the least, and dangerous to one's ministry in the most. It's complicated, but dealing with bullies is a necessary aspect of leading a church. Ignoring bullies leaves the church in serious danger.

Here are some ideas to help guide you as a pastor to challenge and handle bullies you may encounter.

*First, if your church is a light on a hill, you'll attract a few bugs.*

Good churches attract a lot of people, and some of them will be bullies. Expect them to come, and be ready to manage them. Start with prayer. It's powerful. Ask the Lord what to do. Listen to him speak through the Scripture and other godly leaders. Other church members, particularly ones who've been around a while, know the problem. Talk with them. Listen to their concerns, insights, and suggestions.

*Second, think of the bully as a rock in a stream.*

A church is like a stream in which are a lot of rocks—some bigger than others. As the church moves along, some rocks will block the stream, causing it to pool up. If water can't move out of the pool, it'll eventually stagnate. If a particular rock is blocking the stream, you have two options: move it or let the water go around it. Bullies are like larger rocks. Thus, you must either move the rock or go around it.

*Third, deal with bullies directly.*

Confront bullies head-on, that is, move the rock. Avoiding confrontation leads to resentment. Resentment then sours relationships beyond the original person. If you don't confront, the ministry will slow down, perhaps even come to an abrupt halt. In time others in the congregation will get tired of the church bully, but it usually falls to the pastor to "do something about it."

**Put Dr. Gary L. McIntosh on  
your coaching team.**

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for full details.**

*Fourth, attack problems not people.*

Work to separate the bully as a person from the issues. This may not be possible, as bullies merge so closely with some issues that they can't be separated. However, do your best to love the person, while addressing the problem. One way to do this is to maintain respect for the bully as a person. Even if they use cutting words, are boisterous and mean spirited, relate to them with standard courtesy. Resist mirroring their attitude or reactions. Be "shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

*Fifth, hold bullies accountable.*

Hold them accountable by asking direct questions. For example, "How was this decision made? Who specifically are the other people who are concerned? Can you respond to the rumor that you've been spreading lies?" Then wait and let them respond. If this occurs in a board or business meeting, perhaps others will also raise questions. However, if no one speaks up but you, it's okay. It may take several confrontations before others gain the courage to say much. If they try to humiliate you, let the others see what the bully is really like, but respond only with kindness. Point out your concern is for the church and Christ's honor, rather than your own reputation.

*Sixth, if you can't confront head on, go around them.*

As you become aware of the bullies tactics, anticipate their actions and work ahead of time to negate their influence. Be prepared for their anger, attempts at intimidation, or threats. Speak to others about how to handle the bully, and work around them.

*Seventh, if a bully threatens to resign, accept their resignation.*

Church bullies often threaten to resign as another means of control. They likely have used such a threat in the past, but prior pastors have been too scared to call their bluff. If this happens, call their bluff! Immediately accept their resignation. Your response will shock the bully, as no one before was strong enough to deal with their threats. Occasionally, the bully will call the following day (of maybe right away) and try to take back their resignation. Don't allow them to do it. Hold your ground. Refuse to reconsider. They resigned, that's it. Standing up to a bully is always risky, but even if they leave, it's worth the risk.

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How have you dealt with bullies in the past?

Which of these ideas do you need to use in the future?

What other ideas for checking bullies have you seen work?

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