
GROWTH POINTS

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

A Secret Partner for Church Growth

Church growth is rarely the result of one gifted leader working alone. Behind every effective pastor or ministry leader stands a capable, trusted secretary or administrative assistant. How you work with that person will either multiply your effectiveness or limit it.

Healthy leader–secretary relationships are not accidental. Here are several growth points for working well with your secretary.

1. Your Secretary is a Ministry Partner, Not Just Support Staff

Administration is ministry. Your secretary often serves as the first voice people hear and the first face they see. They shape impressions, manage information flow, and protect your time.

When you treat your secretary as a partner in ministry rather than simply someone who “does tasks,” you elevate morale and performance.

Key to Success: Communicate that their work matters to the mission. Say it out loud. When people know their role contributes to eternal outcomes, they work with greater commitment and discernment.

2. Be Clear About Expectations

Many tensions arise not from incompetence but from unclear expectations. Spell out priorities. Explain how you want phone calls handled, emails filtered, visitors received, and schedules protected. Never assume your secretary knows what you prefer. Tell them.

Key to Success: Don’t say, “Just use your judgment,” and then criticize the result. Clarity reduces anxiety, saves time, and builds trust. When expectations change, as they will do, communicate those changes promptly.

3. Protect Your Secretary from Impossible Pressures

Your secretary often lives at the intersection of competing demands: staff members, volunteers, church members, outside callers, and they all want immediate access to you. If you undermine your secretary by bypassing their systems or reversing their decisions publicly, you weaken their authority and increase stress.

Key to Success: Stand behind them. If you give them guidelines for protecting your time, honor those guidelines yourself. When people learn that your secretary’s “no” really means “no,” order replaces chaos.

4. Communicate Regularly

Healthy working relationships are built on ongoing communication. Brief daily check-ins or weekly planning conversations can prevent misunderstandings and bottlenecks. Ask

questions like: *What's coming up this week? What needs my attention? What obstacles are you seeing?*

Key to Success: Listening communicates respect. Often your secretary sees patterns and problems before you do. Leaders who listen grow faster than those who only give instructions.

5. Show Appreciation

Administrative work is often invisible when done well. Phones are answered, details are handled, crises are deflected. Done well, no one notices. That's why appreciation matters. Say thank you. Write notes. Acknowledge excellence in public when appropriate.

Key to Success: Be specific about what you appreciate. Appreciation fuels motivation and loyalty far more than salary adjustments alone.

6. Respect Boundaries

Nothing communicates disregard faster than last-minute demands that could have been handled earlier. Respect office hours. Plan ahead. Ask before assuming availability. When emergencies arise acknowledge the disruption.

Key to Success: Healthy leaders recognize that burned-out secretaries eventually become ineffective secretaries. Honor their need for rest, balance, and clear boundaries.

7. Invest in Development

Secretaries are not static resources; they are developing leaders. Encourage training, conferences, or skill upgrades that enhance effectiveness. When your secretary grows, your church grows.

Key to Success: As trust deepens, allow your secretary to take on greater responsibility. Empowerment multiplies capacity.

8. Address Problems

When issues arise, address them privately, promptly, and respectfully. Avoid storing up frustrations. Speak directly, not indirectly. Focus on behaviors and systems, not personalities.

Key to Success: Most problems can be resolved when addressed early. When ignored, small issues harden into resentment.

The Growth Principle

Fruitful pastors don't try to do everything themselves. They build teams where each role is valued and aligned with the mission. Your secretary can become one of your greatest assets or one of your greatest frustrations depending on how you lead.

Work with your secretary intentionally. Invest relationally. Communicate clearly. Appreciate generously. When leaders and secretaries function as partners, the entire ministry grows healthier and growth follows.

Which of these ideas will you put into practice this week?

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