



# BUILDING A BUILDING COMMITTEE

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**W**hen a ministry is growing and it's clear more space is needed, most leaders know it's time to assemble a building committee. However, many quickly realize assembling the right team can be significantly more challenging than identifying the need for one. A building committee created in haste using anyone available or only those with specific secular knowledge can quickly lead to frustration and stalemate.

For decades, I have guided churches as they navigate the facility expansion process. I understand the people you choose and the process you use will determine the success or failure of your ministry for years to come.

Over the last 35 years, I have identified 4 critical components when assembling a building committee.

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## CLEAR MINISTRY OBJECTIVES & AUTHORITY

# 1

The best way to empower a building committee is to give them clear ministry objectives and the authority to carry out those objectives. You should empower your building committee with an understanding of the ministry problems that need to be solved, not the presumed solutions. To recruit the right team, you must communicate the vision flowing out of these objectives to create a clear understanding of what needs to be accomplished. The ministry objectives provide the team with clear expectations and boundaries for the journey ahead of them. Clear objectives give your building committee the best opportunity to successfully improve ministry. In my experience, I've seen many leaders neglect to take the time to investigate the roadblocks of their ministry. As a result, facilities have been updated without any significant ministry impact. As leaders, you should not assume answers to problems you haven't identified and send a building committee on a mission without clear objectives.

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However, clear objectives are not enough. The team must be given authority. Position without authority creates discouragement and hinders progress. The building committee must be empowered to create change and implement solutions. With clear direction and authority, those you recruit will be equipped to reach the destination desired by the leadership.

## WHAT DOES CLEAR DIRECTION LOOK LIKE?

A document from church leadership outlining:

1. The responsibilities of the committee
2. The ministry problems which need solved
3. The desired project schedule including the major milestones, deliverables, and approvals required

## SELECTION OF THE RIGHT PEOPLE



Once you know the ministry objectives and have outlined the authority, you can intelligently select a building committee. Ministry objectives and authority should shape who you select. As you might suspect, team selection is a critical aspect of a successful building committee. The best leaders select the building committee members based on leadership experience and ministry understanding, not on construction experience or secular skill. Ministry understanding and leadership qualities are the core characteristics of a great building committee member. Don't substitute secular skill or knowledge of a specific trade for ministry understanding on your team. It's great to have secular skills or trade knowledge but the ability to lead people with a ministry heart should be your top priority. If you don't identify clear ministry objectives, you will be tempted to populate your team with secular construction skills. After working with thousands of building

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committee members over 30 plus years, I can confidently say one bad selection to a building committee can derail an entire project, but I have never seen a ministry focused person derail a building committee. When ministry is the focus the ministry leaders become evident. You will see it in their eyes and feel it in the tone and conviction of their words. Like Nehemiah, God loves to use leaders with conviction and focus.

## WHAT DOES SELECTING THE RIGHT TEAM LOOK LIKE?

- Assess how people work on teams and the teams they have been a part of
- Create a list of questions to unpack ministry and leadership aptitude

## COMMITMENT AND CONTINUITY

A church design, fundraising, and building process can take several years to complete. Turnover within a team slows progress and disrupts momentum. When asking people to serve on a building committee, ask them to commit to serving until the completion of the project. If they are unwilling to finish what they've started, move on to the next qualified candidate.

3 Once you have established the team, don't add new people! One of the most common things to derail a building committee is the introduction of new people in the middle of a project. The time it takes to provide context to the new individual and redevelop consensus in the group can be frustrating to the entire team. The frustration can quickly lead to division and in

severe cases, hostility towards others. Several years ago, I learned a valuable lesson about team continuity. I scheduled a meeting with a church to review their drawings one last time before we finalized them. At the meeting was an interior designer who just started attending the church. I found out she was asked by the Pastor to be part of the building committee because the Pastor wanted to get her involved in the church. As a result, the project drifted for the next few weeks as we began to rehash old design concepts and develop new designs. The building committee was so frustrated, they asked the Pastor to remove the interior designer. Without context of what was previously covered, this trained professional frustrated the group and ultimately had to be removed from the committee. You can avoid this common pitfall by selecting committed members and refraining from additions throughout the life of the building committee.

**“Turnover within a team slows progress and disrupts momentum.”**

## WHAT DOES COMMITMENT AND CONTINUITY LOOK LIKE?

- A unified group of people committed to completion of their objectives
- An understanding of the power continuity has to streamline and accelerate progress

## THE RIGHT NUMBER OF MEMBERS

4

There is not a universal perfect number of individuals on a building committee, but there are some general principals. The ideal building committee has enough members to effectively connect to most segments of the congregation, but does not have more than 8-9 people in total. For smaller congregations, 4-5 may be a sufficient number. A common error results when a church offers to have “anyone interested” on the building committee. Groups larger than 8-9 struggle to reach consensus, find times to meet regularly, and frequently have a different dynamic at every meeting depending on who is able to attend. We strongly suggest you do not put more than 9 people on your building committee. In practice we’ve seen committees with 6-7 members seem to work best. With 6-7 of the right influential leaders, their variety of opinions and perspectives can effectively shape the ministry solution and communicate the path forward to the entire congregation.

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Several years ago I was asked to help 3 churches come together and build one facility. The process taught me a lot about leading groups and selecting people to lead people. My first task was to establish some clear ministry objectives. From those objectives, we selected 6 leaders who understood the ministry objectives well enough to represent each of those 3 churches. It was amazing to me that when ministry became the focus 6 people to represent 3 churches was sufficient to accomplish the ministry objectives.

## WHAT DOES THE RIGHT NUMBER OF PEOPLE LOOK LIKE?

- A team of influencers large enough to bring hundreds of people together in pursuit of a common goal
- A team small enough to make quick decisions, but large enough to benefit from the collective wisdom found in groups





Building programs are a unique time in the life of a church. The building committee tasked with leading the program influences church programs, culture and relationships throughout the process. The impact of a facility lasts for decades and has a direct impact on how a ministry serves its community. We realize leading a building committee is extremely difficult but it can and should be extremely rewarding. How you

lead as a building committee impacts the product you build and your ability to impact your community with the gospel. It's a high calling and should be seen as an honor.

Many times we've been asked, "What do I do if I've already assembled a team and I've done it all wrong?" Our suggestion would be to start over. Explain to your team you're embarking on a new process and thank them for their service up to this point. Our time tested process advises the creation of what we call an implementation team. The change in terminology provides an easy opportunity to reboot your building program and start off on the right foot. In our process, the implementation team consists of the influential leaders described above who take full responsibility for guiding the church throughout the solution finding process.

# FIND YOUR SOLUTION

*3 simple steps*



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