

# Effectively Working with Others

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**Interpersonal relationships do not always work out well!** Isn't that sometimes an understatement of the largest proportions? After all, what could be a more interpersonal relationship than what exists between spouses who at one time pledged their lifelong, unfailing love for each other? Yet, husbands and wives face numerous challenges within married life, and sometimes spouses are said to *fall out of love* with each other and even become enemies. The rampant divorce rate overall, which differs little among members of the church, shouts aloud that interpersonal relationships do not always work out well.

In addition, there are numerous other areas in life where interpersonal relationships do not always work out well either. Challenges arise between parents and their children, and sometimes those challenges also include clashes between the parents about the application of childrearing to their children. In-laws provide another ripe area for tests of interpersonal relationships. Then, there are those interpersonal relationships in school, at work and in social organizations.

Of primary significance are the interpersonal relationships that members of the Lord's church entertain with each other. Interpersonal relationships between faithful Christians ought to always work out well, but sometimes they do not work out well at all. Beyond interaction between Christians, Christian characteristics practiced in one's life should improve interpersonal relationships even with those who are not members of the Lord's church. Of course, the more ungodly those coworkers, neighbors or fellow students may be, the less likely it is that those interpersonal relationships will work out well.

Besides consideration of interpersonal relationships between Christians, there needs to be an optimum and effective cooperation between church leaders. Unfortunately, that is not always true either. Elders of a congregation must effectively work together in order for God to be pleased with them and for the church with which they serve to be guided properly. Further, elders need to work effectively with deacons, teachers and preachers. Likewise, deacons should work well among themselves as well as with the elders and other members of the church. A similar prescription of cooperation needs to be characteristic of Bible class teachers and preachers.

**Where should one begin in his or her effort to effectively work with others?** One should begin with himself or herself. We have more control over ourselves than we do over anyone else. Furthermore, we cannot begin to know how to interact successfully with others until we thoroughly know ourselves. We **do not** know ourselves as well as we might think that we do. In this regard, my daughter Rebecca Rushmore has written a book that provides precious insight into oneself, plus a better understanding of the personalities of others, too. I recommend that each Christian obtain a copy of *What Makes Us Tick? A Study of Personality and the Bible*. Only after we truly know ourselves and begin to understand why other people with whom we interact are the way they are will we effectively work with others—in our families, at work, in school, in social organizations and in the church.

On this occasion, our particular focus on *effectively working with others* concerns interpersonal relationships between leaders in the Lord's church. During the ministry of Jesus Christ, His apostles did not effectively work with each other. Observe Mark 9:33-35 NKJV.

Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

In addition, the apostles also failed to interact properly with another active disciple who was outside of the apostolic band. Notice Mark 9:38-40.

Now John answered Him, saying, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.”

But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.”

Another classic biblical example of a clash among church leaders was the dispute between the apostle Paul and Barnabas over whether to take John Mark along with them on a second missionary journey. Acts 16:36-41 reads:

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”

Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Happily, the divided approach to the work at hand then did not permanently separate those Christians. The apostle Paul later noted his approval and favorable assessment of John Mark in 2 Timothy 4:11. Instead of the disruption of the work of the Lord when Paul and Barnabas could not agree, double the work was done. However, most of the time today, disagreement between church leaders or church workers results in the Lord’s work **not** being done—or worse, congregational splits.

Ideally, church leaders or workers who will be cooperating with each other, often closely, should choose for themselves to voluntarily work together. Sometimes this is not completely possible, though. Under a number of circumstances over which one has little or no control, Christians may find themselves sharing responsibilities for some aspect of the Lord’s work. What then? Is it possible to effectively work with others when the team members did not willfully opt to work together? Yes! However, if ever team members (e.g., elders, deacons, ministers, etc.) find themselves unable to cooperate with others in that team, then it may be time for them to gracefully excuse themselves from the role as team members.

Differences of opinion are likely to occur, but **as long as only opinions are stake**, then team members must learn *give-and-take* or compromise as necessary to accomplish the goal. Of course, a faithful Christian can never compromise on “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42)! Remember that the **cause of Christ** must prevail, and that the cause of Christ is more important than any one person’s preferences, opinions or methodology. As long as the *big picture* reassures one that the greater good for the cause of Christ results from his or her participation, one can overlook a lot of things that are not exactly to his or her liking.

It can be particularly stressful sometimes when leaders of the church or of some church program work with other leaders. Everybody is a chief! Everyone is a self-starter and is ambitious for the Lord. At the same time, though, if everyone is a chief, then everyone is a peon or a worker, too. Many *chiefs* may be comparable to having too many *chefs* in a kitchen. Yet, having a lot of expert cooks in a kitchen, if they work harmoniously together, ought to be unparalleled in the exquisite dining afforded to their customers. Likewise, motivated and qualified church leaders working harmoniously together ought to result in great things for the cause of Christ. Just imagine such elderships! Imagine teams of evangelists or other church workers and what good they could accomplish for our Lord if they were to labor diligently and cooperatively.

Effectively working with others seems to be a much needed skillset, given that numerous secular books and similar resources are dedicated to such. No less in the Lord’s church do we need to

effectively work with others. Let's build a *fantasy team*, considering traits and characteristics that would contribute to working with others effectively to promote the cause of Christ.

➤ Since each of us have differing strengths and weaknesses, if each team member utilizes his or her strengths for the common good of the effort, the beneficial result will far exceed what anyone single team member could accomplish alone. Think about the message of 1 Corinthians 12. Verses 1-11 observe that during the time of miracles, the Holy Spirit enabled various individuals to demonstrate differing miraculous abilities that complemented each other. Verses 12-24 compare the various, needed skills of church members to the diverse body parts that comprise a coordinated, fully functioning human body. Verse 25 notes that when everyone realizes his or her respective role that there will be no division among the members. Verse 27 notes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Verses 29-31 conclude, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way." Cooperation with each doing what he or she does best is "a more excellent way." Each team member...

- ...should carry his or her own load (i.e., carry out his or her responsibilities) that are uniquely his or her own and not shared with other team members.
- ...must be a team player, always ready to assist and encourage other team members.
- ...ought to trust and respect other team members as equals.
- ...must accept the fact that God expects him or her to do something, but He does not expect any team member to do everything.
- "While team members will have some skills and knowledge in common, they will each bring something unique and have a different approach or style to participating in the group" (*Community Door*).

➤ Successful workers for the Lord must develop an array of **people skills** (some of the following adapted from *Palgrave Study Skills*).

- Purposely go about to build a good rapport with others, or to the extent permitted in Scripture learn to be "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22).
- Develop good listening skills or become an active listener.

Good listeners are essential for teams to function effectively. Teams need team players who can absorb, understand, and consider ideas and points of view from other people without debating and arguing every point. ...Most important, for effective communication and problem solving, team members need the discipline to listen first and speak second so that meaningful dialogue results. (*For Dummies*)

- Team members need to develop speaking skills that will enable them to converse among themselves effectively as well as to communicate successfully to different audiences.
- Team members need to know how to organize groups or committees as well as how to cooperate as a component of an organized group or committee.
- Leaders need to hone their skills for communicating objections, counterproposals or criticisms in a non-abrasive, non-condescending and tactful way.
- Team members need to be assertive without being overbearing or exhibiting a domineering personality. We must not act like Diotrephes of 3 John 9. Team members must speak directly "in a positive, confident, and respectful manner" (Brounstein).
- Unfortunately, it is necessary to develop the skill of dealing with difficult people that nevertheless is as productive as possible.
- Leaders must learn good negotiation skills. Capitalizing on the strengths of each team member, a negotiated course of action should prove to be the best pathway available to accomplish the team goal.

- Team work requires a certain **shared discipline** among team members.
  - Each team member must share the common vision or goal of the team without any reservations or doubts respecting what the team wants to achieve.
  - Everyone must put the team objective ahead of his or her individual interests.
  - Each team member agrees about the path and priorities leading to the accomplishment of the designated goal.
  - Each person on the team needs to have an equal opportunity to participate in making decisions.
  - Each must exhibit enough humility to permit members with different strengths to make their contributions especially in areas wherein they may excel.
  - Team work “includes all members, everybody counts, efforts are made to ensure that nobody feels left out or undervalued” (*Palgrave*).
  - Team players “respect the time of all members, are punctual for meetings... complete their own targets to deadline so that other people are not kept waiting, respect the opinions of others in the team, take turns, share responsibilities, keep each other informed about developments” (*Palgrave*).
  - Team members must “maintain the consistent approach agreed upon by [the] team, to uphold service standards” (*Community Door*).
- Individual team members must exhibit **personal qualities** that are likely to contribute to the success of the team.
  - Is the prospective team member **reliable**? “You can count on a reliable team member who gets work done and does his fair share to work hard and meet commitments. He or she follows through on assignments. Consistency is key. You can count on him or her to deliver good performance all the time, not just some of the time” (Brounstein).
  - Team members must be active and willing participants. “They’re fully engaged in the work of the team and do not sit passively on the sidelines. Team members who function as active participants take the **initiative** to help make things happen, and they volunteer for assignments. Their whole approach is can-do: ‘What contribution can I make to help the team achieve success?’” (Brounstein emphasis added).
  - There needs to be an open, informal interchange of ideas and information between team members. “...[T]eam members need to feel comfortable talking with one another and passing along important news and information day-to-day. ...They keep other team members in the loop with information and expertise that helps get the job done and prevents surprises” (Brounstein).
  - Concerning fellow team members, nothing internal to the team stands in the way of accomplishing the goal. “Good team players, **despite differences** they may have with other team members concerning style and perspective, figure out ways to work together to solve problems and get work done” (Brounstein emphasis added).
  - Prospective team members ought to be flexible in areas that do not involve biblical compromise. “[T]hey adapt to ever-changing situations. They don’t complain or get stressed out because something new is being tried or some new direction is being set” (Brounstein).
  - Commitment to team is apparent all day, every day.
  - Teams need problem-solvers.

Good team players are willing to **deal with** all kinds of **problems in a solutions-oriented manner**. They’re problem-solvers, not problem-dwellers, problem-blamers, or problem-avoiders. They don’t simply rehash a problem the way problem-dwellers do. They don’t look for others to fault, as the blamers do. And they don’t put off dealing with

issues, the way avoiders do. Team players get problems out in the open for discussion and then collaborate with others to find solutions and form action plans. (Brounstein)

- The ideal team member views himself or herself as an essential part of the team. “Team players with commitment look beyond their own piece of the work and care about the team’s overall work. In the end, their commitment is about winning — not in the sports sense of beating your opponent but about seeing the team succeed and knowing they have contributed to this success” (Brounstein).
- Each individual team member must know how he or she fits into the team and know exactly what is expected of him or her respecting the success of the team goal.
  - A person needs to “identify [one’s] own responsibilities and duties in relation to workgroup members” (highered.mcgraw-hill.com).
  - A team member must evaluate his available resources (e.g., time, talent, experience, etc.) before making a commitment to becoming a team member.

## Conclusion

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In summary, “[b]eing able to work effectively with other people is very important as it is the only way you can achieve your work goals. This skill is very important in work results or in jobs, which can only be done in a team. ...It increases overall productivity in an organization...” (*Ask.Com*). “Working cooperatively with others requires not only the skills and knowledge needed for the task at hand, but skills and knowledge needed for working in a team” (*Community Door*).

There is no team more important or any more necessary than for faithful Christians to cooperate with each other in the ongoing work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This may manifest itself in a local congregation with elders, deacons, teachers and evangelists. Or, it may be that several evangelists (missionaries) voluntarily cooperate to take the Gospel worldwide. In whatever program of the church that one may consider, we need to effectively work with others.

## Works Cited

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