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## **Communicating Facility needs Effectively**

Here's the scenario. Your church has a need. You and possibly many others recognize this but, in order to satisfy the need you must bring the topic to someone else for approval. This need is probably in an area related to your expertise. Just as likely, those with whom you will seek approval will not share this expertise.

This need could be anything from replacing a broken towel dispenser in a restroom to building a new sanctuary. Since I am an audio-guy I will frame the discussion with sound related topics but I believe the basic principles to be universal.

Preparation is the key. To say this alone would be practically meaningless so here are the details. Also, I should point out early on that much of this has to do with enabling people to receive the information you need to present. You may in fact need to act as a teacher as well as simply be a presenter to help others understand the topic at hand. Many people are inclined towards doubt when presented with something new or simply use a tactic of heavy questioning to weed out the ill prepared. You need to be prepared for this your first time out. It's the old first impressions adage.

First and foremost **you need a second opinion**. No matter how certain you are or how much of an expert you are on the topic, nothing brings credibility like an outside second opinion. An outside opinion simply means outside our immediate circle. You do not necessarily need to go outside the congregation. This may be necessary for larger decisions but often it simply means that the other opinions should not be in your department, one of your staff members or anyone that could be viewed to be with in your sphere of influence.

With small to medium projects your local second opinion may be all that is required but it is also not that uncommon for this to be a two-step process. With large projects, you may not be able to directly go to final approval. You, and your second opinion may seek approval and possibly funding to get a third professional opinion. You would say "I see this problem and would like suggest a solution as well as ask for some funds to have a professional make a few recommendations." With this third opinion you may be able to enact a solution.

Next you need to **collect data**. Is a piece of equipment failing? If so, how many times last month did this piece of gear leave you hanging and what were the repercussions. How old is this equipment? Have you long since gotten your money's worth out of it and what is the replacement cost and time frame? If people complain that they could not understand the sermon, keep track of how many people per service complain, where they were sitting and their age. Some problems require immediate action. In a small sanctuary a dead power amplifier could leave you with no sound at all. In a case like this, you still need to do some data collection ahead of time so you can present the problem and possible solutions.

**Find relevance for your request**. There are times when things could be repaired, replaced or redesigned but there is just no pressing reason to do so. With limited funds available, your project should relate directly to the congregations ability to receive the word of god. This could take the form of more comfortable seats to allow people to sit longer. It could be better lighting in an overflow area so it is easier for the elderly to read or better seals on doors to keep traffic noise out. In all cases you will have to decide before presenting a request whether these problems represent a minor or major issue. There may be no question that you have a door with a poor acoustic seal around it. But, if it does not present a problem on a regular basis, and funds are tight, it may not be worth pursuing. You want to gain the reputation of someone who doesn't ask for much but when you do it clearly important and relevant.

**Make an appointment** to discuss this matter. Whether you are presenting to one person or a committee; you need to have their attention. With an appointment your topic will not be viewed as an interruption, but as the next topic of business to be addressed and will be taken more seriously.

**Separate your self from the need.** You don't need acoustical panels on the rear wall of the sanctuary, the church does. You are simply the messenger. There is nothing wrong with being passionate, but don't cross the line and make it personal. Unfortunately, if someone thinks that you really want something, they may be inclined to think that you have something to gain from acquiring this new item. You need to be certain that this is not the case before hand and present with a servant's heart.

**Consider a demonstration.** Contact the local sales company that represents the product. They may be able to arrange a demonstration at your premises. This is not always feasible, but it never hurts to check. You would want to schedule a demonstration to immediately follow your presentation. After everyone has been made conceptually aware of the problem they will be more able to see or hear it in actual practice. You don't want them to have to wait a week to see for themselves what you are talking about. Also, it is important that this demonstration is comparative, i.e.: existing verses new.

When it comes time for the presentation you should consider a well established sales and presentation adage. It states, "**People buy from people they like and who are like themselves.**" This is not an overt, conscious act. It is something that happens quietly and unconsciously in the background. What this means for you is, if you are addressing a committee wearing power suits, don't wear your tennis shoes. If the decision makers at your church are (PowerPoint, happy), you may need to learn PowerPoint. If these types of decisions are normally made over lunch at the local burger joint, PowerPoint will be unnecessary. Make an attempt to fit in. One way of showing respect to the decision makers is simply to attempt to conform to the attire and etiquette of their environment. You are on their turf and want them to feel comfortable while you are presenting. Especially in smaller churches where everyone knows each other, your efforts will be noticed.

The presentation should be structured around the concept of bullet points. You should describe the problem, offer your solution and outline the benefits of your approach or suggested product. For small and medium problems a thorough but not too long presentation should be enough to expect a decision to be made on the spot. For larger more complex problems you may want to present in multiple parts. The first presentation would be an overview to introduce everyone to the problem at hand. Future more in depth discussion can then be scheduled.

It is important to not let irrelevant things interfere with your presentation, stick to the facts and keep editorial information to a minimum. The many steps outlined are not intended to deceive anyone, but to help people focus on the topic at hand. Don't allow the church needs to be doubted because you don't look professional, which could be translated to credible. After removing all the distractions, both real and psychological, and thoroughly preparing your presentation, you will find that people will be more able process the information you are presenting and quickly come to a decision.

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