

COMMITTEE CHAIR GUIDE

I. INTRODUCTION

As committee chair (or the leader of any other group in), you play an exciting role in the church. It is a role which can give you a lot of personal satisfaction and can enrich the lives of others. You will help carry out part of the mission of the church. Most importantly, you will serve God.

The Manual of Organization for Emmanuel Presbyterian Church (page 1) says that no matter what its specific tasks, that every single group and committee has one common responsibility or outcome. That is to build a team of people to carry out the work of the committee and to help build the overall community of the church. In so doing, your committee can –

1. Involve and retain a larger percent of church members.
2. Provide a meaningful small group experience for more members to support each other as part of the church community.
3. Foster inclusiveness of all members, and
4. Educate more members about our church processes.

This “Committee Chair Guide” will help you be successful. It can reduce what you might otherwise have to learn by trial and error—perhaps learning only shortly before you rotate off the committee. The Guide will suggest:

1. How to organize a committee
2. How to recruit committee members
3. How to plan for and run a meeting
4. How to be a good communicator
5. A few hazards to avoid

II. HOW TO ORGANIZE A COMMITTEE (or other group of church members)

So you have agreed to head up a team of people to carry out some part of the church’s mission. How do you get started?

1. First, you probably should check out the mission and responsibilities of your committee in the Manual of Organization. Talk with the previous committee chair. If your committee was not too active last year, it would be a good idea to talk with your board chair or pastor.

2. Your next step is to build an adequate team of people. This may be the most important task you do as chair. Be sure to study the guidelines in III. below on “How To Recruit Committee Members.”

3. Now that you have a committee, a group of persons who have said yes, plan your first meeting. Bring people together as soon as possible so they will know their job is important and before they have a chance to get “cold feet.”

At the first meeting, spend some time for members to get acquainted. Go beyond merely sharing people’s name, occupation, etc. Plan a mixer to help people find out more about each other. Prepare some get acquainted questions such as –

-- “Of all the church projects, committees, or assignments you have been involved in, what two gave you the most satisfaction?”

-- “From what you know about this committee, what gifts do you think you may bring to the committee?”

Be sure to review the responsibilities of the committee from the Manual of Organization. Then get the group started on a specific project or activity. Be sure everyone has some specific task to work on before the next meeting.

4. Prepare a committee roster of names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.

III. HOW TO RECRUIT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Here are some time-tested guidelines for recruiting laypersons in churches and other non-profit organizations.

1. Start by building a prospect list. Assess the qualities that are most likely to get the job done. Begin to place persons on your prospect list who may have the best qualities for the committee. Identify the persons you think will be right for the committee, not just the ones you think will say yes. Never say “no” for someone, but assume they will say “yes”. Avoid persons who are doing three or four other things in the church or someone simply because they are a buddy.

2. If you need a number of new persons for the group or committee, a great resource is to visit with and brainstorm names with the pastor. Pastors gain a lot of insight about members of the congregation. They know many of the untapped talents in the church and they also know persons who need to be asked to participate.

3. Recruiting Individuals. Now recruit the best choices on your prospect list. Tailor your approach to the interests, abilities, and motivations of the prospect. Think through and mentally rehearse your approach to each prospect. Anticipate questions and possible objections.

Share specific information on what you want the committee and person to do. Remember that different persons may make different contributions to the mission of the total group.

Don’t dump the whole load and scare them away. The prospect doesn’t need every detail about the committee and the church.

4. Make an appointment to see the prospect face to face, perhaps at their home or after Sunday worship. Do not recruit over the phone or let the prospect say “no” over the phone. Indicate you want to discuss a matter related to the church. Try not to give too much information about what it is. If the job you are asking the person to do is especially important, make sure that you take someone with you, preferably a person the prospect knows and respects.

5. Make the sale. Clearly explain what you want the prospect to do and why they are the best person to do the job. Sell the sizzle – give an exciting, enthusiastic, and brief presentation on the committee. Include the things about the committee’s mission that may most interest the prospect. Be specific.

Answer the prospect’s questions briefly and positively. Be prepared to overcome objections. Note that all of us are busy but we can make time to do important tasks – and what is more important than fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives through the church’s ministry. Make the job seem fun and important. Don’t undersell the job. Don’t overlook the friendship and fellowship that can evolve.

6. Ask for a commitment. You need this person – say so. Be patient – wait for an answer. After the person says “yes”:

--Acknowledge the commitment with a note or letter.

--Invite the person to the next meeting.

--Follow up with specific orientation and/or task to perform within two weeks or at the next meeting.

7. Don’t feel personally rejected when a person says no. God only expects you to do your best.

8. Group Recruiting. Group recruiting is a special and exciting approach for a church. It involves bringing three or more persons together to hear about the church and then asking them to serve collectively in some capacity. The previous guidelines are written for a one-by-one recruiting approach. But every step, with a word change or two, applies to group recruiting as well. The principles of good recruiting are the same: You determine the tasks which need to be done; you still identify the best persons for the committee; you still set up the best time and place to make the sale; etc.

Group recruiting has several advantages:

--This approach can bring your group or committee up to strength quickly.

--If 5 or 10 (or more) people are asked to accept a challenge that can be handled by 5 or 10 people, each person figures that if others will accept, he or she will, too. No one sees themselves being saddled with an overwhelming task.

--Many people seek association with others. If the group includes the right people, their reaction is positive. In many group recruiting situations, nearly 100 percent agree to serve.

--When a whole committee is recruited together, they can be oriented/trained together. As a complete team, they can build team spirit and promptly begin to function effectively.

IV. HOW TO PLAN AND RUN A MEETING

Committees do lots of things other than meet, but the quality of your meetings will largely determine the success of your committee or group. The fun and tone of your meetings will help determine the fellowship of your committee members.

1. Be sure that the time and place is announced well in advance and at a time most convenient for the group. Last minute reminders may be helpful.
2. Prepare an agenda as your blueprint for a successful meeting
 - --Always have someone open with prayer. It reminds us that God is always a guiding, all powerful presence in our lives.
 - --Include names to show good participation — who is doing what.
 - --Always follow up on previous assignments
 - --List all forthcoming assignments which need discussion
 - --Include some kind of meeting feature to increase group morale, harmony, inspiration or just pure fun.
 - --Before adjournment, be sure the date and time for the next meeting are set.
3. Arrive early at your meeting place to set up the room and be on hand to greet people as they arrive, Only set up chairs for the number of persons you expect to be present. Empty chairs can be a downer, sending a silent message that the meeting is a failure. Set up in advance any props needed for the meeting (flipchart, video, coffee, etc). Be sure the room is comfortable (AC setting, lighting, room setup).
4. In larger committees or those with a number of details to keep track of, it will be helpful to name a secretary and distribute minutes of plans and decisions taking place at meetings and other information important to the committee. Minutes should not include reference to personal opinions voiced at the meeting.
5. As chair or group leader, you will want to intentionally affirm, encourage, and recognize all of your people for their role in the committee and overall church.
6. Help new committee members feel at home. Welcome them and help them feel that they have a place and a significant role in the church. Be sure they have the support and tools to do their job. Let them know what help is available, how to get it, and who to call.

Know your people's interests. What people like to do and what they do most effectively are closely related.

7. Prompt recognition has an important impact on people's tenure and quality of service. Provide recognition which is sincere, timely, and personalized. Also be sure your praise is specific, telling exactly what they did that was good. Just telling people they are doing a good job doesn't say much.

V. GOOD COMMITTEE CHAIR COMMUNICATION

1. Listen. Failure to listen to others may be the single greatest communication error in the world today. Group leaders must listen to everyone in their group, expressing appreciation for their opinions, ideas, and the unique individuals that they are. You do not always have to agree with everything they say or do what they want, but your genuine respect for their right of expression will strengthen your relationship with them.

2. Stay in close communication with your pastor to help build a mutually supportive relationship.

3. Stay in close communication with your board chairperson

4. Consider what form of communication will be most appropriate for a given message or a given individual:

- face-to-face visit
- phone call
- personal note
- memo
- e-mail

5. Stay in touch with others in the church whose responsibilities may affect or be affected by your committee.

6. Know how to communicate with the entire congregation (church bulletin, newsletter, worship announcements, posters, mailings, etc.)

7. Keep God in the communication loop – No! – place God at the top of your committee operation. Seek His guidance and remember that it is God's purpose for your committee which really counts.

VI. HAZARDS TO AVOID

1. "It's easier to do it myself." No, this is seldom the case. Remember, it is easier to get 10 people to do the work of one, than to have one person do the work of 10. And don't forget, every task, every project, every responsibility is an opportunity to build the fellowship of the church community.

2. "It's just easier to ask friends or other officers to do the task." See No 1. above.

3. "They don't have enough experience." Sometimes that's true. However, most of us on a regular basis are successful at trying new things. Help your people succeed at new tasks.

4. Don't rely on asking for volunteers. "Volunteer" is often a misnomer. Many people don't volunteer; they must be asked to help. Sometimes they must be asked more than once.

GOOD LUCK IN LEADING YOUR GROUP OR COMMITTEE!

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