

7 Practices of Effective Ministry by Glenn Lucas

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Effective - ef•fec•tive /i'fektiv/ - adjective; successful in producing a desired or intended result

How do you measure the effectiveness of your ministry? Is it the number of people in worship? The amount in the offering plate? The number of baptisms each year? The number of children enrolled in your school? Budget performance?

The Oxford Dictionary, above, defines effective as being “successful in producing a desired or intended result.” This definition suggests that to be effective, a ministry must know what it is to accomplish and have measures in place to indicate how it is doing. In a previous Mission Moments (see link below) I wrote about being intentional in your ministry. In this issue I want to share insights on effective ministry from a book I highly recommend, *7 Practices Of Effective Ministry* by Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner and Lane Jones. In this book, the authors elaborate on the seven practices of effective ministry they have discovered through their ministry at North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Practice #1: Clarify the Win

In determining effectiveness, it's important to ask, “Are we measuring the right things?” Clarifying the win means figuring out what is important and how to measure it. While church attendance and giving may be indicators of health, they are only part of the measures of effectiveness in a church. Enrollment in the school and budget performance are important, but they only tell part of the story. The number of contacts a mission planter makes is significant, but if none of those contacts is engaged in the ministry of the mission plant, is he being effective? It is important to figure out what should be measured and the best way to do so.

Clarifying the win helps leaders and members know what is important and what needs to be accomplished. It also keeps them from self-defining a win in a manner which may be counter to your desired or intended outcomes. When you clarify the win, it helps you keep everyone on the same page as the ministry moves forward and avoid ministry drift.

Practice #2: Think Steps, Not Programs

Steps are intended to move a person toward meeting a specific goal while programs are designed to meet needs. When thinking steps, not programs, a ministry pre-determines the goal, i.e. where they want people to end up, and then plans the steps it will take to get them there. Programs approach the ministry from the perspective of needs to be met. A

programs approach asks, “What do people need?” and “How do we meet the need?” In any given ministry, people present many needs. The ministry may be inclined to meet those needs, even if it distracts from the predefined win, thus lessening effectiveness.

Practically, the steps approach to ministry suggests that if you want a ministry that connects individuals to Jesus in a way that continually takes them deeper into their faith walk, you would design a ministry process that helps them grow over time in the complete stewardship of their lives. You might start with a simple Bible study on “Who is Jesus?” You might follow that with a study on “What Does It Mean to Believe in Jesus?” The intent is to move people along a path one step at a time to the desired outcome.

Practice #3: Narrow the Focus

While helping congregations evaluate their ministries, I have found many congregations attempting to do too much. They expanded ministry offerings and the corporate structure to support them, without ending other ministries. Other congregations have grown smaller but are still attempting to deliver the same ministry they did when much larger. Both can result in unfocused ministry with limited or lessened impact.

The emphasis in *Narrow the Focus* is on doing fewer things so that your ministry has greater impact. The easiest thing in the world is to keep adding layers of ministry and programming without ever subtracting them. Given that your ministry, like every other one, has limited time and resources, it is important to be very intentional about what you are seeking to accomplish. Narrowing the focus of your ministry allows you to bring more time and resources to bear in support of your intended results.

Practice #4: Teach Less for More

At Bethlehem, where I attend, I hold the record for preaching the longest sermon. It is not a record of which I am proud. I realize in hindsight that I tried to teach way too much in one sermon. ‘Teach less for more’ suggests that the teaching we do needs to be focused with the desired outcome in mind. Ask yourself, “What essential information must people have so that they will ... ?”

Not all information is equal. It is tempting to give a lot of information but in doing so the speaker often confuses, confounds or loses the listener. Essential information can get lost in the minutiae. In teaching less for more, it is also important to understand that people learn in different ways. Good communication of important information will include several modes of presentation--i.e. visual, auditory, tactile, kinetic, etc. If what you are teaching is complex, break it down into parts and simplify each part. The goal in teaching/communication is to have the greatest impact in the most effective way possible.

Practice #5: Listen to Outsiders

The authors of *7 Practices Of Effective Ministries* say, “Focus on who you’re trying to reach, not who you’re trying to keep.”

Much of what is done in ministry today is driven by and focused on those who are already inside the ministry’s sphere. This ministry drive is understandable, since those people are right in front of the key leaders and they have legitimate ministry needs. But if *the win* has been defined as reaching new people with the gospel, those new people are by definition outside your ministry. To be effective, you need to listen to them, learn from them and design your ministry with them in mind. Practically speaking, effective ministries find or create ways of learning from those outside of the church what interests, influences and engages them, in order to share the gospel with them.

Practice #6: Replace Yourself

Effective ministries encourage the raising up of new leaders and entrusting them with ministries that allow them to use and develop their gifts, talents and skills. In *7 Practices Of Effective Ministries*, the authors share the following insights (pg. 160):

If you fail to develop a strategy to replace yourself, you will:

- force talented individuals to remain in the wings
- cause potential leaders to exit the organization
- stifle needed insight from valuable team members
- hinder your ability to recruit volunteers
- limit the growth of your programs and ministries

Practice #7: Work On It

Evaluating and celebrating the ministry are important factors in effective ministries. Honest and sometimes seemingly ruthless evaluation of the ministry is important in improving effectiveness. Build regular evaluation into your ministry plan. Never settle for what is. If it can be better, make it better. If something else would make the outreach more effective, scrap what you are doing, even if it is doing a good job, and do what would be more effective. Jim Collins, in his book *Good To Great*, observes that good is the enemy of great. Too many organizations settle for good, when with vision and effort they could be great.

Celebrate people and their effective ministry. When people are recognized and have their hard work celebrated, they feel affirmed and are willing to give more of themselves. When others see people affirmed, they are more likely to involve themselves in the ministry, too. Additionally, celebrations provide wonderful opportunities to communicate *the win* again in meaningful ways. ■