

7 Important Lessons Every Church Leader Can Learn from Their Critics

They are in every church. They are critics. They are naysayers. If your church has regular business meetings, they will be the negatively outspoken people.

They often begin sentences with “I love you pastor, but . . .” And the moment you hear “but,” you cringe. You wait for the verbal assault.

Critics and naysayers are in every church. They are CAVE (Consistently Against Virtually Everything) Dwellers (This phrase originated with Curt Coffman in his work on disengaged employees.). They can make your life miserable . . . unless you learn to deal with them.

I am not the best role model for dealing with CAVE dwellers. When I was a pastor, I struggled with critics and naysayers. I still do. So I asked some church leaders who, in my opinion, have a very healthy approach to these people. Here are seven things I learned from them.

1. **Accept the reality that every church and organization will have CAVE dwellers.** You will deal with them in a more healthy fashion if you are not blindsided by them. And you will realize that the green grass of other churches may be a bit brown.
2. **Pray for your own attitude.** I am glad Jesus did not hold my sins against me through his death on the cross. My attitude should be like His, and I should seek prayerfully to have the right attitude toward CAVE dwellers.
3. **Pray for the CAVE dwellers.** Even if you consider them your enemy, we are supposed to pray for our enemies. Sometimes I have to ask God to give me the grace to pray for these people because they have hurt me so much.
4. **Stay above reproach.** Don't stoop to the negative, gossiping, bickering, and deceitful level of CAVE dwellers. Pray that God will give you the strength, wisdom, and grace to live above such attitudes and actions.
5. **Spend more time with positive church members.** CAVE dwellers can be the squeaky wheels that demand constant oiling. If you spend too much time with these members, you will become emotionally and spiritually drained. Be intentional about spending time with church members who energize and encourage you.
6. **Spend more time with church leaders in other churches.** You will develop invaluable friendships and camaraderie. And you will soon discover you are not alone with these issues.
7. **Ask other members to help you deal with CAVE dwellers.** I recently heard from a pastor who did just that. He was shocked to find more than one encouraging church leader willing and ready to help him deal with these people. The comment from one of these positive members hit home: “Pastor, we did not know you were having to deal with these issues. We wish you had told us sooner.”

Yes, you will always have people in your church who seem to be consistently against virtually everything. They are emotionally draining. They are discouraging. And they never really go away.

Our challenge, in God's power, is to deal with CAVE dwellers in the most positive and God-honoring way we can. So, how do you deal with CAVE dwellers? What would you add to the seven ways I noted above?

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