
Inspecting What You Expect for Greater Church Health

It's common knowledge that [men are far less likely to go to the doctor than women](#). While that may not be very shocking, one of the justifications for their reluctance to schedule a check-up is intriguing. Many men don't go to the doctor because they don't want to find out something is wrong. This idea of "what I don't know can't hurt me," is part of the reason women's life expectancy has long outpaced men. The average US woman lives to be 81.3, while a man's average life span is 76.2 years.

One of the most fascinating pieces of information from that study, however, is that [men are closing the gap](#). From 1989 to 2009, the gulf shrank from seven years to just over five. The reason? Males were living healthier lifestyles and had become more vigilant in with cardiovascular concerns. Instead of ignoring problems, men began to actively and intentionally evaluate and assess their physical health, which resulted in a 4.6 year predicted lifespan growth.

This perfectly **illustrates the need for a culture of assessment in churches**, since the Bible refers to the church as the body of Christ. That's not a metaphor, but a description. Paul doesn't say the church is *like* a body, but the church *is* a body. Just like with our bodies, **it is important that we evaluate and assess the overall health of the church**. Undiscovered problems under the surface can be deadly.

Some may point out that you can't measure everything. That is obviously true. You can't really measure enthusiasm. Clearly, you can't analytically measure the supernatural and providential move of God. You can, however, measure effects.

When we studied transformational churches, we found commonalities between them that stretched across cultural and ecclesiological differences. For example, some had over 80% of their people in small groups and over 70% ministering to one another in, through and beyond church. **These were churches that were seeing conversions and were filled with vibrancy and life.**

Knowing what has actually led to making disciples can help you and your church know what steps you need to take to improve your health, which some in your church may already know. Often times when the assessment culture has been developed and implemented, it will confirm the thoughts of your involved members.

Right before I turned 40, I sent out an evaluation form to 15 people with whom I had a work relationship. I wanted them to evaluate my ministry, my leadership, and let me know what they saw as my strengths and weaknesses. I made it anonymous so they could be completely honest. Two things came back consistently (and, to me, surprisingly). They said I was too sarcastic and I didn't listen well. When I asked my wife about those areas, she looked at me puzzled and expressed surprise that I wasn't aware of those issues. She knew me best and knew those were areas where I could improve.

That allowed me to open a conversation about how I could work on those. The same is true for your church. We want you to have the knowledge about potential health problems that can encourage the extension of your church's lifespan. This is not always easy to face or use as a means for improvement. **Growing from an assessment requires a certain level of awareness, transparency and courage.** Unfortunately, churches and denominations often have a current of denial propping up ineffective traditions and ecclesiological structures.

Several years ago, I did consulting work for a national retailer. They set up a phone survey to determine from employees how they felt about their job, coworkers and supervisors. When all of this data was compiled, we saw issues that were recurring at the bottom 10% of stores. I helped to train a team that would go to those locations and work to correct the problems.

Secular businesses put significant effort into evaluating their effectiveness, while churches frequently do nothing. I happen to think that the work of the church is much more important than any retail store. Having happier employees and increasing sales is beneficial to those businesses, but making disciples is of eternal consequence to the kingdom.

Like American men have done more in the past few years, churches need to start taking their health more seriously. You can only expect what you inspect. **Churches that value and welcome assessments can expect health and growth.** The facts you discover may not be friendly, but they will enable your church to become better at making disciples.

To accomplish this we need to do things right. In a future post, I'll outline some wrong ways to implement an assessment culture. It all comes down to the measuring sticks we choose.

Part Two of a four-part series; read [Part 3 here](#).

Read more from Ed [here](#).