

The Executive Pastor: Five Trends

For the past four decades the number of executive pastors has grown across America. Before the second half of the twentieth century, the staff position was rare to non-existent. With that growth has come a commensurate growth in confusion about the position. Whereas traditional programmatic roles such as students, senior adults, music and worship, and children have had clearly defined expectations, the role of executive pastor has been nebulous and changing.

Two Historical Broad Paths

In our informal survey over the past ten years, we have noted two major roles assumed by executive pastors. Some held responsibilities related to staff oversight. In some churches, all staff except the senior pastor were under the organizational responsibility of the executive pastor. In other churches, the primary role was staff oversight, but not inclusive of all staff.

The second major role has been business/administrative. Though I am reticent to compare churches to corporations, this role does have many similarities to a chief financial officer in the corporate world.

On some occasions, the executive pastor holds both staff oversight as well as operational leadership. In those churches, there are typically other staff under the executive pastor who help him carry on the heavy responsibilities.

Five Trends

In recent years we have noticed five clear trends related to the role of the executive pastor. Not all executive pastors, of course, would be included in all of these trends, but many would relate.

1. **More executive pastors in smaller churches.** Ten to fifteen years ago it was rare to find an executive pastor in a church with an average worship attendance less than 3,000. That has certainly changed each subsequent year. Now it is common to see executive pastors in churches with an attendance around 2,000 or even lower. I know of several churches in the 800 to 1,200 attendance range that now have executive pastors, or they are seeking one.
2. **More executive pastors have staff responsibilities.** Senior pastors of larger churches are eagerly seeking leaders who can provide staff oversight. That has now become one of the principal reasons an executive pastor is called to a church.
3. **A growing number of executive pastors are also teaching pastors.** Those who hold this dual role are still in the minority, but the numbers are growing. I hear more senior pastors say that their ideal executive pastor would have good leadership skills to oversee a staff, good business and administrative skills to lead the operations of the church, and good preaching and teaching skills sufficient to be in the pulpit at least once a month. The "Superman executive pastor" is evolving, at least expectations of one.
4. **More executive pastors have oversight of multiple venues.** I have noted in earlier blogposts the growth of churches with multiple venues. It would make sense then that

more executive pastors would be expected to lead the staff and operations of each of these venues or campuses.

5. **More executive pastors have a combination of business training and theological training.** It is becoming more common to see executive pastors who have, for example, one business degree and one or two theological degrees, or vice versa. It makes sense. More executive pastors are expected to be both theologians and well-equipped business leaders.

What is the Future for the Role of the Executive Pastor?

In simplest terms, more will be expected, both in responsibilities and training. The better equipped of these executive pastors will be in high demand and relatively low supply. It is fast becoming a “hot” church staff position.

When I note trends, I am often perceived to be an advocate of those trends. Many times, as in the case of the trends of executive pastor, I am still processing the information. I am a long way away from becoming either an advocate or a detractor. But I would love to hear from you. My readers typically have opinions, and most of them are good.

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