Relational Investment:
The Key to Improving Communication

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Are you worn out by refereeing staff disputes over things that were simply mis-communicated? Is your valuable time spent dissolving communication roadblocks instead of focusing on future projects? Have you spent lots of dollars on the latest and greatest communication technology, but yet it doesn't seem to help? These are common problems in today's organizations. Fortunately, there is a simple solution.

Christian Faith Center (CFC) is a growing mega-church. And, like many other organizations, they have made large expenditures on networked computers, faxes, email, Internet and cellular phones to increase communication. In addition, face-to-face interaction, meetings, and printed materials have been also used to facilitate good communication. With so many modes of communication, how could so much conflict occur in the organization? Perhaps it's the method of communication rather than the mode of communication.

CFC is currently using several programs developed by Interpersonal Communication, Inc. CFC's desire is to build stronger communication skills and relationships among their staff and thus create a higher level of efficiency. Roy Anderson, a licensed marriage and family therapist, professor, church elder, and certified instructor of Interpersonal Communication Inc., began teaching *Core Communications* five years ago at CFC's college (Dominion). The course was so successful that recently Pastor Casey Treat recruited Anderson to train the CFC staff as part of an initiative to instill a process focus and increase efficiency. The Interpersonal Communication program involves three courses: *Core Communications, Team Collaboration,* and *Couple's Communication*. CFC staff members are welcoming this organizational initiative because of a history filled with conflict.

CFC, with its 6000 member congregation, is a fast -paced, changing, growing, vision-driven ministry. Unrest, low morale, and staff turnover are words that described the staff environment four years ago. A major challenge in the environment was to create an atmosphere conducive to relational process for the staff. Without strong communication skills, many people avoided dealing with issues, which caused conflict, bitterness, and relational breakdowns. Over the last several years interpersonal communication training methods have resulted in greater staff relations.

This present state of unity and peace prompted Treat to take a proactive stance by authorizing the communication training to avoid future problems. Supportive relationships and interconnectedness are essential for leadership in the 21st century and foundations "must be laid for covenant relationships to emerge" (Allen, Bordas, Hickman, Matusak, Sorenson, Whitmire. 1998). These relationships allow people to set and obtain common direction and mutual goals. *Core Communications* is a skill-based curriculum that can be used to build those relational foundations. Anderson is presently teaching the 9-week Phase I, *Core Communication* class for all staff members. The purpose is to raise the communication skill level, satisfaction,

and efficiency of all employees. The program's goal is to provide knowledge and skill training in conflict resolution, issue analysis, decision making, listening and talking, self-esteem, mediating, and negotiating.

According to Bowers and Franklin, "a successful change effort begins with rigorous measurement of the way in which the organization presently is functioning." Employees at CFC complete a pre and post assessment to measure present communication practices. After finishing the pre-assessment, each staff member sets personal communication learning goals. Communication mats, cards, and mouse pads are given to each employee to reinforce and practice the learned processes. The post-assessment will be taken following the class to measure personal changes. Phase II, *Team Collaboration* will be taught next year.

Edgar Schein (1990) suggests that "leaders may create new…rituals and develop new symbols and artifacts around the new assumptions to be embraced." This program introduces a new norm for communication. Part of CFC's commitment, in addition to communication development of their own staff, is to assist other churches by training and providing instructors who will administer these programs.

Although this initiative is in its infancy stage, CFC managers are already seeing the effects of increased communication skills. A manager heard one employee tell another, "let's get out the mat and discuss this issue." For now using the mat is a first step toward resolving issues and increasing efficiency. The proof will come later as the assessments are evaluated and the organization grows. However, it is the organization's investment in people and relationships that is the key to strengthening communication and building

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