

Trustees / Directors: What Should Lead Pastors be Looking For?

Over the last two decades of being a lead pastor, I've had a lot of good and bad board members! So, a lot of young pastors ask me: "What are you looking for?" And more specifically, how do you steward a healthy culture with them? So, to help you out, I listed a few of the FAQs I get about this board.

Why do Some Churches use the term Trustee and others Director for this board?

Some U.S. states allow churches to file as either a church (requiring a trustee board) or a non-profit (requiring a director board). But *directors* and *trustees* are essentially the same role. It is a fiduciary accountability board.

Who are the types of people who make great trustees? Who should a pastor look for?

It depends on whether you believe that Trustees fall under the Biblical definitions and requirements of "Elders or Deacons." Some churches see their trustee boards as merely a federal requirement – not a spiritual requirement. I.e. They have minimal requirements for trustees yet significantly higher requirements for elders.

Personally, I have always treated my Trustee/Director board as a type of elder who specializes in finance and business. Thus, I look for trustee who fit the following **Biblical mandates** like:

- They live a lifestyle that's beyond reproach (it's not easy to accuse them of evil) (1 Tim. 3:2)
- They manage themselves, their doctrine, their marriage, finances, and their family well. (Titus 1:6-7, 9)
- They have a good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7)
- They are not a recent convert (i.e., they have a track-record of choosing God). (1 Tim. 3:6, 10)

Beyond these basics, I like to categorize my Trustee criteria according to I.P.O.D.S. – Imperatives, Preferences, Optionals, Don'ts

IMPERATIVES:

- Look for people who **love you** (the Lead Pastor) and **feel called to your** leadership, not merely the church.
- Look for people with whom you have divine chemistry. (You communicate easily with them).
- Look for people who are willing & available to pursue a relationship with you.
- Look for people who consistently **attend** your church (relationally connected)
- Look for people who are **generous to your church in both time and money** (I.e. ownership).
- Pick trustees who are able to nimbly balance big-faith along with skeptical diligence.
- I never nominate a trustee unless I also trust their spouse. I don't need the spouse to have equal qualifications as they won't be voting. But I also don't want them to have negative qualifications either.

PREFERENCES:

- When possible, look for trustee-oriented *skill-sets*: Eg., lawyers, CEO's, accountants, contractors, real-estate leaders, business owners, human resource or fundraising skills.
- Look for people who can help you develop a *legacy team* (a group whose gift is giving). I.e., They can help you attract and maintain donors, business leaders, and people of influence.
- Look for diversity: A board with diverse ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds can increase your influence, boost church confidence, as well as boost church evangelism (See Acts 6).
- When the church is small and can't afford staff, use this team as a testing ground for potential staff.
- Look for people who would be comfortable talking about executive compensation packages: Studies show, if everyone on your board makes less than a typical pastor, they'll be less likely to approve normal compensation packages, even if it's in line w/national averages. I.e., The goal here isn't to appoint wealthy business people so you can get a more generous salary package; rather, if your church payscales are below average (because your board is uncomfortable making market-based business decisions, then it can mess up your churches pay-scales – which makes it harder for your church to recruit or keep talented staff.

OPTIONALS:

- Feel free to include spouses as much or as little as you feel comfortable. The Bible bids us to consider married couples as “one flesh.” So, in meetings, when you’re primarily sharing vision, pull more people in. In times when a complicated decision is being made, keep the meeting smaller. Always be clear about who is invited where.
- Feel free to break the mold on a few of your trustees. They don’t all need to be successful business people.

DON'TS:

- Don’t pick trustees exclusively based on wealth or skill. Yes, financial success is often a sign of good stewardship; but, this is not a substitute for the Imperatives mentioned above. And Yes, it’s helpful to have lawyers, CEO’s, contractors, and real-estate leaders on your board; but, you can hire these skills.
- Don’t be haphazard about people who’ve served on “other boards.” Previous board experience can be a liability – if their expectations and experiences are out of sync with your style of trustee. Be aware of baggage and preconceived notions about their role on your board.
- Don’t appoint family members: a board member should add credibility — not conflicts of interest. Sometimes family members can either be too harsh or too soft when it comes to big decisions. It’s critical to establish a healthy perception of accountability as well as actual accountability. And family members can add a complicated dynamic.
- Don’t appoint trustees who see themselves as “your mentor.” This may be a great attribute in an Overseer. But, the trustee role is all about carrying out *your* vision – not to mentor a vision *into you*. People who perceive themselves to be mentoring could be tempted to think that the vision of the church flows from them to you. However, trustees don’t dictate vision. They advise you on how to carry it out in a responsible way. Yes, they can push-back on your vision. But, it’s important to maintain relationships that protect the flow of vision.