

Everything But Preaching
Dick Hardy
Podcast Transcript
Randy Valimont: How a Pastor Builds a Board and Its Leadership
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Dick Hardy: Great to have you with me today, Randy.

Randy Valimont: It's great to be back with you again, Dick.

Dick Hardy: You and I have talked about this whole business of the importance of a pastor building and developing a board and its leadership. I know this is a real hot button for you. Give us a jumpstart on that whole subject.

Randy Valimont: Well, in my mind, other than the pastor's relationship with Jesus and his relationship with his family, there is no other more vital relationship for the pastor in his life than the pastor/board relationship. If that is not done well, the pastor will not stay long nor will his ministry be very fruitful.

Dick Hardy: Well then, give me an overview of what that looks like. I am thinking of the pastor listening to this podcast, and he says, "Okay, I agree with that statement, Randy, but what does that look like in terms of actually developing a board and bringing it along in leadership.

Randy Valimont: Well, one of the things that we've always tried to do is realize that the best friends in my church... I've only pastored two churches in 26 years of senior pastor ministry, and each time, the best friends I have had in the churches have come out of that official board because I have felt the need to not only spend time with them, but every time we have a board meeting, there were always 20 to 30 minutes in each and every board meeting that has been carved out for me to do a leadership teaching or leadership development with them, whether it be from the Scripture or some book I was reading.

Many, many times, we would read books together. We would go through it chapter by chapter. Sometimes it would take us two years to go through a book. But we were tracking on the same page. We were together thinking leadership. We were together thinking the thoughts of God for that particular ministry at that particular time.

If that leadership is not on the same page, then two things will happen. Number one, there will be great frustration in the pastor's life, and secondly, there will be great distrust in the board.

Dick Hardy: Right. Wow. So a pastor, then, making this kind of investment...this really raises the stakes of what this whole church leadership thing is all about.

Randy Valimont: I believe it does, in my own thinking, Dick. I think that a pastor who ignores his board is equivalent to a pastor who has a new convert but never follows up on it.

Dick Hardy: Wow.

Randy Valimont: Why would God send you people if you are not going to follow up on them? Some pastors say, "Well, I don't have a good board." Well, my question is...have you taken time to develop them, to love them.

Now, each board member has a different personality, and you have to find out what those personalities like and dislike. There are some of my board members who love to play golf. Well, that is an instant connection with me. Others of them, like to do different things, so I've learned that some of them, I'm going to take out to dinner. Some of them, I'm going to do different things with, but there has to be not only the spiritual relationship, not only the professional relationship, but there has to be the social relationship with a board. You can't expect to have them fight your battles if they don't really know who you are.

Dick Hardy: Well it seems to me, when you're doing this kind of thing in February or March or April of 2009, you're making an investment in things that are going to happen in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Wouldn't that really be true?

Randy Valimont: Absolutely. I can tell you that in what has gone on here in our campus and what God has been able to do at Griffin First, I really attribute it to the board being willing to do the things because they have always felt a part of it.

Another thing you do with a board is you enact deferred praise. Whenever I am up in front of the people, and I'm talking about what God is doing in our church and how God is blessing the church, I'll say, "It is because you have blessed us with godly men to sit on this board and women and people who are an asset to me as your pastor, and I build them up continuously.

So what we have done is create that atmosphere of deferred praise. It goes a long way.

Dick Hardy: Give me a snapshot on the balance (if that's even the right word) that a pastor would have to use in the development of the board versus the development of the staff. This is probably a subject in itself, but how do you weigh that? How do you keep that in order and balance?

Randy Valimont: With the board, I try to balance them and try to take them under an understanding of fiduciary responsibility along with protocol. Those two things can be mutually exclusive in some people's minds, but they connect on a lot of different arenas too. So what I try to do is bring them to a point where they understand what their role is, what their role is in regards to me, and what my role is in regards to them.

The other thing that we do is that I never...I *never*...say anything negative to my staff about anything the board may or may not do that I don't particularly like. It is kind of like a good marriage. A good marriage, when it is a *good* marriage, and you have a disagreement with your spouse, you never go running home and tell your parents about that disagreement because you're going to get over it in a couple of days, but the parents won't.

It is the same way with the pastor/board relationship. It needs to be very private, very confidential; it never needs to flow into that staff relationship.

Dick Hardy: Man, that is great. That is great advice. That is worth listening to this podcast right there. How does the developed board contribute to the overall effectiveness of the pastor's ministry? Because in a day-to-day sense, you're working with the staff or you're crunching out the work and the ministry, but if you take the 30,000-foot view looking, how does that developed board over the months and years contribute to the effectiveness of your ministry?

Randy Valimont: Well, there are several ways. Number one, in the services, they are always involved. Whenever we call for people to come pray, the board members and their wives do that. So they feel a spiritual connection.

Secondly, they have the monthly oversight of the finances as we present it to them. Then they give us wisdom and insight. I like board members, personally, who will challenge things. They're not disagreeable, but they are thinkers. I don't like rubber-stamp people. I want people who can think, who can process, who can add to the discussion and give us things to ponder and think about that perhaps we hadn't discussed or even thought about.

Dick Hardy: Wow. Good. Well, give me a parting shot on this subject. I mean, you know, you and I have been around this thing long enough to know that there are some pastors who have horror stories about their relationships with their board, so give a parting shot here to a pastor who really does want to do it right. What should he be doing as a step when he gets off this podcast to start moving the right direction?

Randy Valimont: Always understand the difference between manipulation and ministry. Let me give you just a quick testimony to that. When I first came to this church, the previous five pastors had all been asked to leave, and they didn't trust pastors. This church's board was known as the "preacher-killing" church, and that wasn't a good thing for a preacher to walk into.

I remember the church was growing, and we had gone from 400 to about 700, and we wanted to hire a missions pastor, and the individual we were going to hire was a multi-millionaire. Some of the guys on the board, there were 12 guys, two of them felt like he should do it for free because he was a multi-millionaire.

My response to that was a workman is worthy of his hire. If God chose to bless him that way, that is none of our business; we just need to do the right thing. So rather than push it through, and I had 10 votes, I tabled it. Right then and there, I tabled it.

Well, they didn't know this, but I had felt impressed of the Lord that I needed to wash their feet, so I had scheduled a foot washing to wash the board's feet that night. They didn't know it. They had never had it done. So I washed their feet after the board meeting, after those two guys said they didn't want to do it, because I didn't want to push them. I wanted them to know that I would lead...we wanted to lead in unanimity.

Afterwards, those two men came to me and said, "No, we want to go ahead and change our vote. We want to go ahead and bring this guy on." My response to that was, "No, we said we would wait 30 days, and we're going to wait 30 days."

The reason I did that, Dick, was that I wanted them to sit under the conviction of the Holy Spirit for 30 days because they held the plan of God up for 30 days.

Dick Hardy: Yeah, right.

Randy Valimont: But after that, four of the really sharp guys on that board came to me and said, "Pastor, you'll never know how much we love you, because we know that if you had washed our feet beforehand, you would have gotten everything you wanted in that meeting. Nobody would have said no to you, but you had the meeting and then you washed our feet, and that showed us that you were more interested in the relationship with us than you were in getting your own way."

I think that is the key the board has to know...that the pastor is more interested in the relationship with them than he is in getting his own way.

Dick Hardy: Wow. Worth its weight in gold. Randy, man, thank you very much for taking time to talk with us today on that subject...the whole business of board development and board leadership. I really appreciate that.

Again, Randy Valimont is the senior pastor of Griffin First Assembly in Griffin, GA. If you want to contact Randy or Griffin First, go to their website, www.griffinfirst.org.

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On behalf of Randy and me, thanks for listening.