
Church Staff Alignment: The Definitive Guide

Life in your church is complicated.

You're continuously coordinating multiple moving parts.

From your weekly worship service, small group ministry, and everything in between, there is a variety of activity taking place in your church.

To make sure everything (and everyone) works well together, here's what you need to know:

Every ministry in your church will naturally drift toward misalignment. In other words, your staff and ministries will eventually pursue their own purposes—not the mission of the church.

Often, misalignment doesn't happen on purpose. The vast majority of ministries or events are rooted in good intentions. However, over time, everything tends to drift away from its original purpose.

Things change.

New ideas emerge.

People pursue different directions.

Then, perhaps without even knowing it, what started as one thing turns out to be something entirely different, and it becomes misaligned with the church.

When people or ministries become misaligned, you'll run into many problems, including:

- Internal conflict
- Confusion
- Lack of clarity
- Fights over money
- Scheduling conflicts
- Lack of volunteers
- Poor morale

Not convinced?

Think about it this way.

Let's say the wheels of your vehicle become misaligned. At first, your vehicle will slightly pull to the left or right. But if you let this problem persist, then you will damage the wheels of your car, and maybe even experience a tire blowout while you're driving, which can quickly lead to an accident.

Thankfully, no one will get physically injured or potentially die when your church staff becomes misaligned. But the problems it causes are real and they can negatively impact your church and thwart your ministry efforts.

To help you assess your ministry, fight for alignment, and achieve greater ministry success, we're going to cover the following topics:

- What is alignment?
- 4 reasons why alignment is important
- 9 warning signs of misalignment
- 6 practical tips for aligning your church staff

Let's get started!

What is alignment?

Alignment isn't a complicated concept to grasp.

It simply means to agree with a person or idea. For example, when it comes to politics, to be in alignment is to be on the same side of a political party or to support a specific cause.

To practically apply this definition to your church, [Carey Nieuwhof](#) writes: "Alignment happens when you have a team of people—from the top leadership right through to the newest volunteer—pulling in the same direction not only around the same goals but using the same strategy."

For your church to be in alignment, you and your staff need to be on the same side in three core areas:

- Beliefs
- Mission
- Philosophy

Regarding your **beliefs**, I'm not suggesting that everyone on your staff needs to agree with you on every single point of doctrine. But I am suggesting that your team needs to agree with your church's essential beliefs.

For your church, there are many Christian creeds, confessions, and statements of faith you may or may not adhere to. That's okay. Whatever creed or passages of the Bible inform your beliefs, it's essential for your staff to be in agreement with them, too.

One last point about your beliefs:

Provide your staff with the opportunity to share their disagreements.

For example, many creeds contain a variety of essential, secondary, and even tertiary doctrinal issues. Whether it's during the interview process or a pastoral transition, provide interviewees and members of your staff an opportunity to discuss where they diverge.

This simple act will not only help your entire church staff to become aligned. But it will also help to create an environment for your team to feel safe in sharing their opinions.

When it comes to creating alignment in your mission, your church staff should be moving toward accomplishing the same goal—to be on the same page. Think about it this way.

If you're on a road trip and there's a disagreement about your final destination, you'll end up nowhere fast. In the same way, if there's disagreement over the direction of your church, then your staff will go in different directions, which will negatively influence the team's productivity and your church's fruitfulness.

If your mission is what you want to accomplish, then your **philosophy of ministry** is *how* you will achieve your mission.

How your church fulfills its mission is just as important to people as the mission itself. For example, you can agree on the same destination (mission), but you can have different opinions on how you should reach your destination (philosophy of ministry).

From your style of worship music to your dress code, your philosophy of ministry will have a variety of practical implications.

In sum, it's important to remember there are a few things alignment doesn't mean:

- Everyone has to be in 100 percent agreement
- Staff members have to forfeit their perspective

- No one can voice an opinion

This isn't the case at all.

In general, your staff needs to be on the same side as you in your beliefs, mission, and philosophy of ministry. But you can allow your staff to share concerns, voice opinions, and even adhere to secondary or tertiary differences of opinion.

4 Reasons Alignment is Essential

Misalignment among your staff will inevitably lead your church to veer off course or crash.

No one may get physically injured in the process, but the consequences are no less severe. Many churches have been negatively impacted by misalignment, and many others have even closed their doors.

But there's more to alignment than avoiding pain and problems.

There are several benefits your church can experience when everyone is on the same page. Let's take a look at four reasons why alignment is essential.

#1. Alignment minimizes conflict

When your staff is aligned in your beliefs, mission, and philosophy of ministry, you will significantly reduce the number of conflicts in your team. At times, you'll still experience healthy disagreements, and that's okay and to be expected. But when your staff is on the same page, you'll see a reduction in any significant conflicts that may be detrimental to the team.

#2. Alignment means better focus

Alignment will also lead your team to better focus on what you're striving to achieve together.

When this happens, your staff will:

- Be less concerned about pet projects
- Not make excuses
- Disregard non-mission-critical problems

Most important of all, your staff will work together as a team toward accomplishing a common goal.

#3. Alignment leads to accomplishing more

By minimizing conflict and improving focus, your staff will be able to accomplish more together.

As you focus on fulfilling the church's mission, your staff will be in a better position to accomplish goals.

#4. Alignment leads to momentum

Being aligned will also help your staff to build and maintain momentum.

Think about it like this:

When you have everyone pulling together instead of going in different directions, you'll create more traction and pick up speed since you won't have competing forces moving in opposite directions.

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As you minimize conflict, focus on what's ahead, and accomplish more together, you'll build a wave of momentum you can ride together.

Let's be honest:

No one wants their staff to become misaligned.

It's not like church leaders are standing around dreaming up new ways they can discourage their team.

Misalignment among your staff is something that can happen because of a mistake (we'll get into that below) or because your team has just drifted along for a period of time.

Here's what you need to know about misalignment:

It's not if your staff will become misaligned—it's when it does.

For your staff to become misaligned, the problems usually begin small.

It can be a variety of things, such as:

- Disagreements
- Jealousy
- Insubordination
- Gossip
- Poor communication
- Misunderstandings
- Challenges at work
- Unforgiveness

There are times when something significant will lead to big problems. But, for the most part, it's the little things that can creep into the life of your team that will sow seeds of discord.

Like a small misalignment in your vehicle, in time, if the problem is not addressed, it will continue to get worse.

As a church leader, you need to be able to identify the common causes of misalignment. By keeping your fingers on the pulse of your team, you'll be in a better position to lead them well.

This brings us to the next point.

9 Warning Signs of Misalignment

There are several ways your staff can become misaligned.

Knowing how your team can get out of alignment will help you to make a course correction.

Here are 9 common causes that lead to a misaligned team.

#1. Inherited staff

As the new pastor of a church, you'll face many challenges. But one area you'll need to be aware of is how to lead your existing staff well.

Many times, as a new pastor, you won't need to make sweeping changes with the staff you inherited. In other words, there's a good chance you won't have to "clean house." But you will have to work with the staff you inherited.

If you plan on making changes to the church's mission or philosophy of ministry, then you should expect that it will take your staff time to adopt these changes. Below I'll share several ways you can build trust with your team and encourage them to embrace the new work God is calling your church to pursue.

#2. Bad hiring

The second most significant contributor to a misaligned team is lousy hiring.

If you hire someone who does not align with your church's beliefs, mission, or philosophy of ministry, then there's no level of training or conflict resolution

you can provide that will help. In time, a bad hire who's not on the same page with your church will create tension or cause conflict.

In your church's next hire, look for someone who not only possesses the skills and experience necessary for the job but who also is in alignment with your church.

#3. *Fear*

Fear is another common cause of misalignment.

Let me ask you this about your staff:

- Do they fear sharing their disagreements?
- Do they not ask for help?
- Do they hide their mistakes?
- Do they fear significant blowback?

Did you answer yes to any of these questions?

If so, then there's a good chance fear grips your staff and it's only a matter of time until things go from bad to worse.

#4. *No chemistry*

There's more to creating a high-powered team than hiring individual rockstars. To be effective, your staff will need to be able to work well together—to have team chemistry.

To know whether or not the chemistry of your team is causing misalignment, you need to ask two simple questions:

1. Can my staff easily collaborate on projects?
2. Or is there constant conflict among my staff that hampers results?

Many factors influence team chemistry, but the answers to these two questions will at least get you moving in the right direction.

#5. Disengaged staff

Disengagement in the workforce is an epidemic in business and the Church. According to a report by [Harvard Business Review](#), 70 percent of workers in the U.S. are not engaged in their work. This study may not have been conducted on the Church. But it does paint a good picture of the overall level of workers' engagement.

To know if your staff is disengaged, there are a variety of signs you can observe, including:

- Lack of initiative
- Multiple absences
- Extended breaks
- No passion
- Poor work ethic
- Lack of involvement

There are seasons when your staff will feel disengaged for a variety of reasons. However, if you observe these signs over the long term, then there's reason to believe your staff has become misaligned.

#6. Lack of vision

The ancient proverb, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18), rings true today.

- Do you regularly talk about the mission of your church?
- Is your staff clear on the mission?
- Does your work reflect the mission?

To align your staff, they need to see how their work contributes to the mission of the church, which leads us to the next point.

#7. Lack of goals

In your church, there is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be accomplished. However, if the work your staff is doing is not aligned with the church's mission, then the work they complete will eventually veer off course or feel demotivating.

As you reflect on your staff, you need to look at two key areas:

1. Job descriptions
2. Goals

Do the positions of your staff align with the church's mission and philosophy of ministry? Are their individual goals connected with the church?

At its root, if the work of your staff is not in alignment with your church, then the work they do will lead them to become misaligned. It's that simple.

#8. Lack of leadership

Poor leadership is one way many pastors create misalignment with their team.

Many church leaders lack the training necessary to create a healthy church staff. Regardless if you lead a small team of volunteers or several paid staff members, there's a level of skill needed to lead a team well.

Without proper training, it can be easy to derail a team.

#9. Drifting

In time, without proper care, your staff will naturally drift for a variety of reasons.

Like many of the causes of misalignment, drifting is something that starts small. However, if it's left unchecked, your team will end up way off course from your original destination.

To combat drifting and the other common causes of misalignment, you have to be purposeful.

As I mentioned above, no staff is created equal. There are unique challenges you face together, and there are different ways your team will respond to your leadership.

To help you deal with staff misalignment, here are six practical ways you can cultivate an aligned team.

6 Practical Tips for Aligning Your Church Staff

When your vehicle becomes misaligned, you have to get it repaired.

Similarly, when your staff becomes misaligned, you have to help them get back on track.

Unlike your vehicle, your church staff isn't something you can drop off with your local mechanic for a mechanical repair. It takes time, effort, and a plan to help your team to get back on the same page.

Here are six of the best practices you can use to align your church staff.

#1. Selective hiring

Hiring the right people is the foundation of creating an aligned team.

As I pointed out earlier, if you hire the wrong people, you will not be able to create an aligned team—period.

In your hiring process, as you identify qualified candidates and move into the interview process, make sure you're clear about your beliefs, mission, and philosophy of ministry. At this time, you'll also want to ask potential candidates

if they have any disagreements with what you shared or if they need any clarification.

By clarifying these core areas of your church, interviewees will better understand if they are or are not a good fit for your church.

#2. Build trust

If hiring the right people is the foundation of creating an aligned staff, then building trust is the pillar everything else is built upon.

Building trust isn't a one-time event. It takes more than a new employee orientation or lunch to establish rapport.

To build a healthy church staff, there are several things you'll need to do on an ongoing basis, including:

- Delegate responsibility
- Act patiently
- Tell the truth
- Be approachable
- Show compassion
- Express interest

As you build trust with your staff, you'll be in a better position to lead them well.

#3. Cast vision

The mission of your church is the driving force for everything you do. It's the compass that directs your efforts.

For casting a vision, you'll need to regularly talk about your church's mission. From sharing your mission during church announcements to talking about it during the week, reminding your team why they do what they do will help them

to push through when things get tough. It will help them to see how their work and sacrifice contribute to the mission.

#4. Clarify goals

When you align the goals of your staff with the mission of your church, you will accomplish three important things:

1. Alignment
2. Clarity
3. Participation

For every position in your staff, you'll need to ensure that the work and goals for that position are **aligned** with your church's mission. This simple step is one surefire way to ensure your staff is rowing in the same direction.

What is more, based on the report by [Harvard Business Review](#), when your staff can practically see how their work influences the mission of your church, it will increase results and boost morale.

By aligning staff goals with the mission of your church, you will also create **clarity** among your team.

As you know, there's a tremendous amount of work that goes into helping your church move forward every week. For your staff, when their work and goals are aligned with the mission, they'll be able to confidently prioritize their work, which will help them to focus better.

Finally, your staff will feel like they are **participating** in the mission of your church. When your staff can see how their work contributes to the bottom line, they'll experience a sense of inclusion and motivation to know that their work matters.

#5. *Align with strengths*

As a pastor, if you can, place staff members in positions that are a good fit for their passion, skills, and strengths. Not only will this boost morale and productivity, but this will also help your staff succeed.

Think about it like this.

If you coach a football team, you need to place your players in the right position. For example, you don't want your quarterback to play on the offensive line and vice versa. As a coach, when your players are in the wrong position, your entire team suffers the consequences.

In the same way, if each staff member is placed in a position that's best suited for him or her, then your entire team will perform better overall.

#6. *Clear (and constant) communication*

A lack of communication can create significant challenges in your church. It can cause uncertainty.

It can lead to gossip.

It can cultivate doubt.

In communicating with your staff, strive to provide consistent and clear messages. Don't be afraid to share with them the state of the church or progress toward goals.

As mentioned above, keep an open-door policy, and make sure your staff feels comfortable asking questions, sharing feedback, or input.

Remember, you are called to equip the church—not to be the entire church yourself (Eph. 4:11–13).

Is your team aligned or misaligned?

How's your staff?

Is your team aligned?

Do you think your staff is misaligned?

If your staff is aligned, congratulations! That's a great place to be.

If your staff is misaligned, don't lose all hope. Make a decision today to take one step toward helping your team to get back on the same page.