

1. Don't underestimate the significance of your meetings.

Elders' meetings are the critical nerve center of the local church. They have a profound effect on the spiritual health of the church. Meetings refine Christian character, build group morale, provide pastoral accountability, sharpen leadership skills, ignite the power of prayer, and provide a training ground for future elders.

2. Demonstrate Christlike attitudes and conduct.

Sinful attitudes result in unpleasant meetings; Christlike attitudes result in productive, satisfying meetings. Christ's attitude of humility should permeate every meeting and shape the attitude of every participant. The new commandment of love sets the standard of conduct for meetings, and elders are to interact as fellow servants and brothers in Christ.

3. Take personal responsibility for each meeting.

When each participant takes responsibility for necessary assignments and decisions, meetings run more effectively. Specifically, this means:

- Helping the group stick to the discussion at hand
- Listening well and asking for clarification when needed
- Expressing opinions without being an "over-talker"
- Diligently helping the group reach decisions
- Graciously accepting and following through on assignments

4. Avoid manipulation.

People who manipulate demean their own character, create distrust among their colleagues, damage relationships, encourage others to manipulate, give Satan a foothold, and open themselves up to further deceit. In contrast, when elders speak the truth openly and in love, no energy is wasted on hidden agendas, politicking, or backbiting.

5. Get the facts before making judgments.

When making decisions, dealing with rumors and accusations, or resolving people problems, it is the elders' responsibility to gather all the facts. Determine to give others a fair, honest hearing. Seek by God's grace to be an objective listener and wise decision maker.

6. Practice confidentiality.

To betray a confidence can ruin an elder's reputation and discredit the entire leadership body. Private statements that are made by elders during a meeting must not be shared outside the meeting. An elder must even think carefully before sharing information with his spouse.

7. Communicate effectively.

Be proactive in your communication. Be aware of potential ways you block communication in your meetings. Speak gently, calmly, graciously, and tactfully. Provide adequate instruction when assigning jobs. Communicate your decisions to all individuals and groups affected by them. Remember that people need frequent encouragement.

8. Be concerned about people.

Spend time in your meetings talking about the needs of God's people. Inform one another about newcomers to the church and lost sheep who need to be pursued. Report on recent visits, urgent phone calls, and people who are ill. Periodically invite key leaders of the church to your meetings to exchange information and maintain accountability. Regular direction and encouragement from the elders will help motivate these leaders to persevere and improve their ministries. Returning missionaries also need private time with the elders to share special needs and to seek guidance.

9. Make prayer a priority.

Biblical elders are praying elders. Actively and consistently seek prayer requests from the congregation. Use a meeting prayer guide. Appoint a

prayer facilitator. As soon as two people arrive, begin praying. Avoid long, drawn-out prayers; pray shorter prayers. Divide into groups of two for sharing personal needs and pray together for ten minutes. Be creative, try new ideas, and continually evaluate the prayer time.

10. Focus on God's Word.

Elders need to define, clarify, and continually restate the church's foundational, nonnegotiable beliefs, doctrinal distinctives, ministry priorities, direction, spiritual values, mission, and vision. The elder council thus will need to define, plan, and continually evaluate its own teaching ministry and all major teaching-preaching services. It will also need to assess and approve all those who teach in the church, set the tone for the way Scripture and doctrine are taught, and plan for both local and global evangelism.

11. Appoint an effective facilitator.

The role of the facilitator is crucial to productive meetings. Though not the boss or sole speaker of the meeting, the facilitator takes charge of its process. Having a facilitator does not exclude other members from actively participating or exercising leadership in the meeting. Different people may even facilitate different parts of a meeting. Before jumping to a new topic of discussion, the facilitator should clearly summarize what has been decided, what needs to be done, and by whom.

12. Carefully plan and follow an agenda.

Adequate time spent in preparing an agenda, talking it over with others, thinking it through carefully, prioritizing items, and eliminating needless items guarantees a more productive meeting. Take control of the content of the agenda; ensure that topics crucial to the spiritual health of the church are not ignored. Several times a year, discuss what major topics need to be placed on future agendas. Consider making a special agenda for guiding major discussions, especially complex, hard-to-manage doctrinal discussions. Also, when key ministry leaders meet to consult with the elders, it is usually a good idea to help them prepare an agenda for their discussion.

13. Summarize accomplishments and assignments.

At the end of each meeting, summarize what has been decided and accomplished. Restate all assignments and who is responsible for them. Three questions that should always be answered are: ■ What specifically needs to be done? ■ Who is responsible for doing it? ■ When will it be completed?

14. Keep good records.

The reading of good minutes provides a regular, formal means of checking on assignments and holding each other accountable. The minutes should include the meeting date, names of persons present, key points of discussion, decisions, action items, and the names of those responsible for carrying out each assignment. In addition, a notebook should be kept detailing all major policy decisions made through the years. This notebook should be at every meeting for reference.

15. Delegate, delegate, delegate.

Avoid getting sidetracked on secondary issues and neglecting the responsibilities the New Testament specifically assigns to elders. Delegate as much as possible to others. The work of the local church is to be shared by all its members. The work of the elders is to teach, organize, and equip the people to do the work of the ministry.

16. Practice self-evaluation.

Good meetings can get better, and good leaders can become better leaders. Create an atmosphere in which self-evaluation is a welcomed, expected, and normal part of the work.