

MEN AND WOMEN SERVING TOGETHER ON TEAMS

INTRODUCTION

In order for the church to be as effective as it can and should be, it is vital that it utilize all available resources. One of the most often overlooked resources is women. Dual-gender teams have the capacity to enhance the effectiveness of the church. This paper will discuss various aspects of men and women serving together on teams within the church and how this will benefit the church. The characteristics that will be discussed in this paper are: unique differences, improving communication, emotions, sexuality, challenges, working together to accomplish the mission, and various configurations of teams. Throughout this discussion, it will become apparent that the church will benefit greatly through incorporation of the much neglected leadership of women.

Unique Differences

Men and women have many differences, but both were created uniquely by God. Each gender provides a differing perspective that will enhance the ministry of church greatly. These differences and varying qualities within each gender must to be acknowledged and utilized for the church to benefit. Men and women have different leadership styles, principles, strengths, and viewpoints. Today's workplace acknowledges that these differences increase the scope and effectiveness of the organization. However, the church appears to be slow in recognizing the need for this diversity. Recognizing the value of gender diversity, and incorporating it, will be a defining key in the significance and effectiveness of the church in the future.

In order to initiate gender diversity, it is necessary for each sex to sense emotional and psychological safety within the formation and establishment of the team. Each person must feel they are respected and highly valued team members. This type of atmosphere provides fertile soil for unity to thrive and creativity to blossom. When this happens, each person will perceive they are in a place of safety and the fear of revealing their true inner self will diminish greatly. This mutual respect and worth will also produce assurance of appreciated ministry and provides an outlet for producing the best that lies within each person.

In establishing a safe environment for diverse teams to thrive, we must attempt to squelch our own biases and deal with them biblically. As each one allows the Holy Spirit to expose and examine personal biases and attitudes, each will be more aware of hidden assumptions and challenge the validity of those assumptions with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding psychological differences exist within each gender will supply freedom for all to be what they were created to be rather than pressured to be something other than what God intended. The differences between men and women complement one another and together can merge the characteristics that epitomize God's image. Saucy and TenElshof stated, "As woman and man are beings created in the image of God, they reflect His infinite and perfect beauty. They are able to do so only in the complexity and distinctiveness of both sexes. Both men and women are made in the image of God. Both are necessary to reflect God; one alone is not only incomplete but also inadequate to reflect His glory."¹ Men and women need each other to offer wholeness and completeness to the church and its ministry. This comprehensiveness will reflect God's glory to the world.

¹Saucy, Robert L. and Judith K. TenElshof, eds. *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 232.

The benefits for the church in regards to gender diversity are massive. Creativity will flow out individuals unhampered by prejudices, biases, and societal expectations. Men and women may think differently, approach situations uniquely, and react in distinctive ways; however, this is the way God has created mankind and will benefit the church greatly. When men and women have freedom to operate in their giftedness and exclusive personalities through reliance on the Holy Spirit, God's work will be done with exceptional anointing and His will accomplished with excellence.

Improving Communication

Engaging in dialogue is the first step toward bridging the communication gap. A host of misunderstandings can be alleviated by engaging in respectful open conversation. However, both sides must be willing to engage in this type of conversation.

Men and women must learn the art of gender communication. The basic desire of women is for men to listen to them. Women want to be heard. However, it appears that many times the first thing a man gravitates toward when a woman speaks is the mentality of fixing the problem. This is the wrong way to approach conversation with a woman. A woman just wants to know she has been heard. Additionally, women need to listen to men. When listening to a man, a woman needs to carefully discern not only the words said but also the spirit behind the words. More insight will be gained if willing to listen with the ears and the heart. If each gender makes a determined effort at understanding the other and having open dialogue, many archaic assumptions can be put to rest. Achieving this level of communication strengthens the church and propels the advance of the gospel unhindered.

Due to past prejudices, women are often hesitant to speak up in a group of men. They at times fear coming across too strong and being rejected for doing so because the culture may not

view strong women in a favorable light. However, men do not appear to possess this same obstacle. “These differences in communication style can place women at a disadvantage in workplace settings and can create tension between them and their male counterparts.”² Women need men who are secure in themselves and care about the rights and abilities of women to take a stand and support women’s efforts. This support will encourage women in their desires to be heard.

It is important to remember that men and women communicate differently. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the message and the motive. We must ensure that what we heard is what was said. Misunderstandings happen in the best of situations. However, they can be more pronounced in mixed gender teams due to different ways of thinking and communicating. Clarification is important so the unity of the team is not damaged and the ministry is accomplished successfully.

Emotions

We all have a variety of emotions. However, women are often viewed as being overly emotional. Ultimately, how we handle our emotions is what makes the difference. Emotions are given to us by God and, when used appropriately, are beneficial. However, many people are uncomfortable with expressed emotion. “Because women are typically more in touch with feelings and more comfortable expressing them than men, women may well be the ones to lead the way toward a healthier view of emotions.”³ We must learn to value the differences between men and women. A balanced view of emotions must be pursued and encouraged.

²Ruth Haley Barton., *Equal to the Task: Men & Women in Partnership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), Kindle Edition. Location 1724-33.

³Ruth Haley Barton., *Equal to the Task: Men & Women in Partnership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), Kindle Edition. Location 1743-53.

Our emotional state should never be blamed on another person. Each one must take personal responsibility for our behavior and emotions. Emotions are often hidden in the workplace and not acknowledged. The healthier way to deal with emotions is to acknowledge their existence. Hiding our emotions rather than acknowledging them will only create division and destructive behavior in the future. Recognizing that emotions will surface and preparing for this will help in planning and anticipating our future responses to emotions. As Barton said, “The more we practice recognizing emotions such as anger or disappointment, acknowledge them to ourselves and those with who we are working, give ourselves enough space to analyze them and choose a constructive response, the more confident and effective we will be in our team relationships.”⁴ As we strive to improve and solidify team relationships, acknowledging and understanding emotions will assist us in gaining an understanding of our team members and halt unresolved concerns that may surface and attempt to thwart the work of the team.

Sexuality

Fear of sexual impropriety is a major concern. Women fear harassment and men fear being unfairly accused. Additionally, no man or woman wants to be in a vulnerable situation where temptation may strike. In order to alleviate fears in this area for both genders, mutual respect and honor will provide healthy boundaries. Each gender should behave in a considerate manner toward the other and be swift to maintain a professional demeanor in every situation.

In working together, there should never be a hint of sexual indecency. Neither a man nor woman should ever allow themselves to be placed in a compromising situation where something could be misunderstood by others or the team members themselves. A healthy standard to follow

⁴Ruth Haley Barton., *Equal to the Task: Men & Women in Partnership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), Kindle Edition. Location 1762-72.

would be as Littleton said, “Work together as if your mate (if you are married) is present.”⁵

Following this principle will help to alleviate problems and ensure proper protocol is followed.

Challenges

Challenges are a part of life. Every challenge is an opportunity for growth. If we are willing to view a challenge as an opportunity, rather than a problem, we will glean from it and grow through the process. Every team will experience challenges. The difference in the value of a challenge depends on the type of response and attitude ensued.

A major challenge in creating a diverse team is to utilize the differing strengths present within the team. It is of prime importance when building a team to shape it with the diverse skills required to accomplish the work. Each well positioned team member will bring positive attributes to the team and ensure effectiveness and success. Men and women both provide a variety of complementary skill sets. A well-balanced team with equal representation of both sexes is an ideal group.

Challenges will arise. However, when challenging times surface, things will run smoother if each team member receives proper honor and value for the attributes they contribute to the team. As Khaleel said, “A staff with both men and women allows us to bring different perspectives to issues and to play off of each other’s strengths.”⁶ In merging these strengths, the balance and effectiveness of the team is ensured.

A woman must be secure enough to know that she does not have to be like a man in order to be successful. Additionally, the woman must possess absolute security in her calling from

⁵Mark Littleton. *Male-Female Staff Dynamics*. The Network: A Called Community of Women. http://www.ag.org/wim/resources/interviews/intrv_0703_maleandfemale.cfm (accessed October 8, 2009).

⁶Maria Khaleel. *When the Church Pastoral Team is Male and Female*. The Network: A Called Community of Women. http://www.ag.org/wim/resources/interviews/intrv_0703_maleandfemale.cfm (accessed October 7, 2009).

God. There are times when a woman may be accepted by team members and still struggle with acceptance as a woman in leadership from the people she leads and ministers to. In this case, “[she must] be willing to love people into change.”⁷ It takes time for old mindsets to be broken.

It is imperative that teams are formed in regards to the diversity and skills required to accomplish the job. “... just as the greatest challenges of true teamwork are often related to managing diversity, so is the greatest power and effectiveness.”⁸ A successful and effective team is the goal.

Working Together to Accomplish the Mission

From the very beginning of time, God created men and women to need each other. In the Bible we read, “The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”(Genesis 2:18)⁹ The helper God is speaking about is a woman. A woman is beneficial to a man in a variety of settings, not just marriage. Man and woman both need one another in order to fulfill God’s purpose for their lives in this world.

Since both male and female are created equal in God’s eyes and both have been given dominion over the earth, as seen in the Bible, “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28), it is essential for the church to recognize the asset of women to ministry and leadership. Therefore, within the team setting, Benvenuti states, “[when] the male sacrifices dominance to give equal place to the

⁷Carol E. Becker, *Becoming Colleagues: Women and Men Serving Together in Faith*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 4.

⁸Ruth Haley Barton., *Equal to the Task: Men & Women in Partnership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), Kindle Edition. Location 1428-39.

⁹All scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

female staff member ... this shift is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of true spirituality.”¹⁰ We do not serve on a church team to receive personal glory, but to accomplish the mission for His glory.

A successful team is built one step at a time. The very foundation of a successful team must be that of mutual respect. In a mixed gender team, clear boundaries must be set and valued. Having well-defined boundaries will help determine how ministry will be accomplished effectively and allow for each person’s gifts to be utilized to the fullest extent.

Truthfulness is an essential component for all teams. Misunderstandings will happen, but team members must respect and care enough about one another to communicate with honest and truthful dialogue otherwise disharmony will creep into the team atmosphere and unity will be thwarted. If a disconnection in communication occurs, both parties must agree to continue to pursue dialogue until each are fully heard and a consensus results. This kind of dialogue can eventually lead to a deeper sense of trust among team members.

It is important for team members to demonstrate respect for one another in the presence of others, whether the other team member is nearby or not. This type of unity and support between team members will lead the congregation to view the team as a whole. In this way, the congregants will be encouraged to give equal and deserved authority, honor, and power of each team member.

Pride halts production and creativity in any team environment. As Sumner says, “Humility is essential for mixed gender teams because pride is so destructive. Pride leads us to presume and prejudge one another. This in turn leads to issues of stereotyping, transference, and

¹⁰Sheri Benvenuti, Maximizing Productivity in Mixed Gender Settings. *Enrichment* 12; no. 4 (Fall 2007): 109.

entitlement.”¹¹ Wherever and whenever pride exists, no one wins. We must make a conscious effort to ensure pride is prevented from entering into the team environment.

Various Configurations of Teams

Just like people, teams come in a variety of shapes and sizes: teams of two, all-male teams, all-female teams, teams led by males, teams led by females, mixed-gender teams, large teams, and small teams. Regardless of the size or scope of any team, every team must go through many of the processes discussed in this paper in order to achieve a united and successful team. Which one of these team configurations works best? It depends upon the ministry, individuals involved, giftings of each person, individual personalities, needs of the church, calling of God, and submission to the Holy Spirit.

The ultimate reason any team configuration achieves success is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. If God has anointed a woman as leader of a team, then the anointing of the Holy Spirit will be obvious. Maria Khaleel spoke of a gentleman from Jamaica who had visited her church and was insulted that a woman was the pastor. Out of respect for his friends who had brought him to the church, he did not leave. However, when Rev. Khaleel began to preach, the anointing of the Holy Spirit on her ministry was so evident that any prejudice held by the visiting man melted away. This man continues to attend her church and serves in a variety of leadership positions.¹² Each one of us must desire and operate in the calling and ministry God has appointed to us and respect those God has called to ministry positions and leadership, regardless of gender.

¹¹Sarah Sumner. *The Mixed Gender Team*. Christianity Today Library.com: Leadership. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2006/winter/4.89.html> (accessed October 8, 2009).

¹²Maria Khaleel. *Strength in Diversity: Working with an All-Male Team*. The Network: A Called Community of Women. http://www.womeninministry.ag.org/resources/articles/misc/misc0309_01wimKhaleel.cfm (accessed October 9, 2009).

It was God's idea to create males and females with their own unique set of giftings. Benvenuti observes, "While male and female leaders tend to lead differently, discipleship, relationship, and community still occur in the Kingdom."¹³ There is no one right way to accomplish the work of the ministry, except to do it God's way. If God has called and divinely ordained a woman to be in ministry and leadership, the church must submit to God's will.

CONCLUSION

Issues of mixed gender teams still occur throughout the world. If the church could grasp the impact a mixed gender team would have on our world, surely it would readily embrace it. If the power of these teams could be understood, the impact of the kingdom of God upon the world would be overwhelming. Benvenuti's statement helps us to understand this importance.

I suspect that the enemy fights relationships between men and women so fiercely because if we ever began to function in this manner — submitting to one another and becoming one according to our created and redeemed purpose — the world itself would be forced to admit that the kingdom of God has come."¹⁴

My prayer is that God would help us all to learn the value of mixed gender teams and incorporate them into all of our churches for His glory.

¹³Sheri Benvenuti, Maximizing Productivity in Mixed Gender Settings. *Enrichment* 12; no. 4 (Fall 2007): 110.

¹⁴Sheri Benvenuti, Maximizing Productivity in Mixed Gender Settings. *Enrichment* 12; no. 4 (Fall 2007): 110.

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