

Embracing Ministry *Together*




unity[®]
Worldwide Ministries

Embracing Ministry Together

A Member Services guidebook for:

1. Cultivating interdependence,
2. Creating a feedback-rich environment, thereby
3. Collaboratively unleashing a ministry's potential.

Member Services Purpose Statement:

Member Services cultivates relationships and a feedback-rich environment with Unity ministries and leaders. Through leading-edge services and resources, we collectively prosper and evolve in spiritual community.

Introduction

This manual is about breathing into the places in spiritual community in which we might feel uneasy, defensive and vulnerable. It is about making our spiritual principles and ideals come alive in our midst. It is meant to support us in being fully present with one another, and working consciously and interdependently with one another in all aspects of community life, including: sensitive interactions, negotiating a contract, strategic planning and evaluation. It is meant to assist ministries in staying conscious and intentional about how they show up and in remaining mindful of the greater purpose of the ministry in the midst of busyness, in the midst of challenges, and in the midst of differences and disagreement. Its intention is to assist you in giving life to the kingdom of God that is in your midst in a very tangible and very powerful way—so that your ministry can be part of creating “a world powerfully transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening.”

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Cultivating a Feedback-Rich Environment	4
Unity of _____ Declaration of Interdependence	6
A New Paradigm of Leadership	8
Evolving Paradigms of Ministry	11
Create a <i>Buena Casa</i>	12
Negotiating the Contract	14
Discernment, Visioning and Planning	16
Feedback and Accountability	18
Some Thoughts on Evaluation in Ministry	21
Embrace Ministry Together	23
Suggested Resources	24

Cultivating a Feedback-Rich Environment

Biological organisms die when they fail to receive feedback from their environment. Consider this statement for a moment. Consider it in the context of the current crises we face as a human species.

Biological organisms die when they fail to receive feedback from their environment:

- Humanity has hungrily been using up the vast resources of the planet. Until recently, we have remained fairly ignorant of the consequences of our behavior. The ecological crisis is an invitation to intentionally listen to the feedback from our environment.
- Human beings have often been self-centered, and self-absorbed. All too often we have remained unconscious of the injustices and inequalities of the way we live and the tremendous suffering this causes for others. The many social justice issues faced by our species are an invitation to intentionally listen to the feedback from our fellow human beings.
- As human beings have remained focused mostly on their own needs, or the needs of those closest to them, they have embraced a competitiveness that pits them against those who are distant from them. Violence and war have been the result. Once again, there is an invitation to intentionally listen to the feedback all around us.

All the crises we face are calling us to pay better attention. They are inviting us to listen more deeply and act more consciously. It is time for us to cultivate feedback-rich environments in which we stay attentive to one another and the world around us. It is time to adopt a more receptive way of being with one another, and a more conscientious way of working with one another.

This need to cultivate feedback-rich environments is also essential to living in spiritual community. The ideals of spiritual community include: compassion, connection, healing and support—to name a few. The purpose in coming together in spiritual community is about creating a space which evokes spiritual growth, and the discovery and expression of our spiritual essence. These ideals and purposes require feedback-rich environments, fertile ground in which we can sow the seeds of our spiritual essence and blossom and grow into the beings we were created to be.

As we come together in spiritual community, something more is also born: **a collective understanding and experience of wholeness.** In deep authentic spiritual community, we realize that we are truly never alone, that we are interconnected: with Spirit, with one another and with all of creation. In this space of interconnectedness, there is also an awakening to a greater purpose, a purpose Jesus referred to as the kingdom of God.

That kingdom of God has an inner reality in which we live in sacred communion with the Infinite, cognizant that “there is only One Presence and One Power.” It has a collective reality in authentic spiritual community. There is also a yearning in the human heart to make it a global reality in which we all live together as members of a sacred whole. That yearning is expressed in Unity’s vision statement: “a world powerfully transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening.”

Unity communities have a responsibility to that vision, a responsibility to be conscious and intentional about giving life to that vision. They have a responsibility to cultivate feedback-rich environments in

which this vision has fertile ground to take root and grow. The following Declaration of Interdependence can be a recommended first step for this process. Ministries are invited to adopt it as an intentional commitment to living our Unity principles.

Unity of _____

Declaration of Interdependence

For Ministers, LUTs, Board of Directors and Members

As a Unity ministry, Unity of _____ exists to share Unity’s message and to support the vision of “a world powerfully transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening.” As members of this spiritual community, we are committed to that vision, and to ensuring that our center fulfills its mission to “_____.” We understand that our primary responsibility is to fulfill this vision and mission which have been spiritually discerned by this community. We also recognize that the fulfillment of these ideals is dependent upon our ability to work collaboratively together and to ground everything we do in principle. In that awareness, and with that intention, we commit to living Unity’s basic principles in all our work together.

Principle #1: There Is Only One Presence and One Power.

This principle calls us to ground all our conversations, deliberations, and decisions in our Oneness of Spirit. We recognize and affirm our interdependence knowing that we are all parts of a sacred whole. We remember that we come together with the shared intention of supporting and enhancing Unity of _____’s health and vitality, and ongoing evolution. We embrace co-creative collaboration, understanding that we all serve a higher purpose, and that purpose transcends our personal preferences, needs, and desires.

Principle #2: Each of Us Is an Individualized Expression of God.

This principle calls us to honor the diverse ideas and opinions of one another—as well as the unique roles we play in service to _____. As ministers, licensed teachers, board members, ministry members, team leaders and team members, we serve different functions in this organization. We honor those unique functions, and commit to supporting one another in serving those functions with excellence; for in this way we enhance this center’s potential for living its vision and mission. We also honor the unique gifts, talents and passions that each individual brings to the table, and endeavor to support one another in utilizing those gifts, talents and passions in service to Unity of _____.

This principle also calls us to honor the many different paths of divine inspiration, while remaining faithful to Unity’s unique contributions to humanity’s spiritual evolution. As a Unity community, we exist to share Unity’s path with the world. We support the exploration of many different spiritual ideas, but recognize and commit to the teachings of Unity as our primary focus and intention.

Principle #3: We Create Our Experiences through the Activity of Our Consciousness (our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, perceptions ...).

This principle calls us to be attentive and responsible for the content of our consciousness, and for the experiences that are created from that consciousness. When differences arise, and conflict or disharmony surfaces, we recognize this as feedback to our co-creative process and commit to joint stewardship of the space between us. We commit to our personal shadow work to uncover and take ownership of our discomfort and our reactions. We also commit to open, direct, authentic dialogue with one another in which we seek to understand one another and to restore harmony.

Principle #4: Affirmative Prayer and Meditation Awaken Us to Our Connection with the Infinite.

Unity of _____'s health, vitality and success is dependent on ongoing discernment through prayer, meditation and contemplation. We commit to holding one another, this organization, and the Unity movement in prayer, and trust the movement of Spirit to reveal to us what is ours to do in awakening human consciousness. We open ourselves to the activity of Spirit, trusting It to work through us and all our experiences to create harmony, wholeness and abundance. We also commit to shared awakening through collective prayer and meditation.

Principle #5: Knowing the Truth Is Not Enough. We Must Integrate Action with Insight to Evolve, Transform and Create Positive, Sustainable Change in Our World.

This principle calls us to boldly and courageously step forward into the future we are called to express as Unity of _____. We honor our past, yet lovingly and willingly release it so that we can move forward unhindered by past ideas, experiences and conditions. We stay present and engaged in this now moment, paying careful and conscious attention to what is arising, and what we are being called to do or be. And, we joyously embrace and are attracted by the future Spirit is calling us to, working together to live into that future as a mature and healthy Unity community. In this way, we release our full spiritual potential and become a vital force in the creation of "a world powerfully transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening."

A New Paradigm of Leadership

At times we may face financial constraints in our ministries. Such constraints are also being experienced in business. David Allen has summarized the current challenge in business as: “new demands, insufficient resources.” Human beings tend to view constraints as bad things, but as Unity students, we know that every limitation has a blessing, that every challenge contains a possibility for learning and growth. The “new demands, insufficient resources” situation is causing businesses to look at things differently, and it is moving them into a new, more creative, more empowering paradigm in leadership.

In today’s world, leadership is more and more about organizational health and creating environments that call forth the best in everyone. In the older paradigm of leadership, leaders tended to be the smartest people in the room who had all the answers and directed the actions of others. In today’s world, the best leaders are those who see the talent and potential in others and actually make them smarter! Liz Wiseman calls these leaders Multipliers. She says: “Multipliers are genius makers. Everyone around them gets smarter and more capable. People may not become geniuses in a traditional sense, but Multipliers invoke each person’s unique intelligence and create an atmosphere of genius—innovation, productive effort, and collective intelligence.” (*Multipliers*, by Liz Wiseman with Greg McKeown)

Multipliers understand the power and potential in teamwork and are intentional about creating an environment that calls out the best in each team member. One of the leading experts of teambuilding is Patrick Lencioni. He identifies 5 components of effective teams (for more information see Lencioni’s book *The Advantage*):



The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™ Model

Building Trust

Trust is the foundation on which good teamwork is built. For a team to excel, its members must trust one another enough to be vulnerably open with one another. They must be comfortable enough to speak openly with one another about their fears, their weaknesses and their failures.

Exercise to build trust. Your team gathers and each member answers the following questions:

- How many siblings do you have?
- Where are you in the birth order?
- What was one of the most interesting or difficult challenges you faced as a child?
- How does that experience impact you as a leader today?

Mastering Conflict

When trust is high, teams have the ability to step into the arena of conflict. Yes, that's right—they become willing to be present, engaged and open with each other in the midst of disagreement. Members of effective teams are passionate about the work they are doing. They share that passion openly with one another, and are willing to disagree passionately with one another. They appreciate the value of exploring these passions together, knowing that everyone's perspective is important to the whole. They know that such exploration is essential to making the best possible decisions for the whole.

Exercise to master conflict: Encourage debate by asking open-ended questions, and inviting team to explore decisions from different perspectives. Ask individuals to choose an opposing viewpoint, and to debate from that viewpoint. For example, your team might be considering some changes to the worship service. Some feel that the current service is working well, and feel really inspired by it. Others want to try something new and different. Allow the team to express their views, encouraging them to share their opinions and their passions. Then, have those in favor of the way things are argue for newer ideas; and have those in favor of trying something new argue for keeping the worship service as it is.

Achieving Commitment

Teams that are able to engage in healthy conflict around questions/decisions of importance to their organization are able to make meaningful commitments to support the purpose of the organization. Without authentic dialogue in which people are able to openly voice opinions and share differences of opinion, agreements tend to be shallow, passive or false. People may say they agree to a decision, but have no investment in standing by that agreement. Consequently, the agreement is easily broken.

Exercise to achieve commitment: Before ending a meeting, review decisions, and go around the room getting each person to verbalize agreement to that decision.

Embracing Accountability

This is a difficult practice for teams to master. **It takes courage and vulnerability to embrace accountability.** We must be willing to give and receive feedback, and sometimes feedback entails pain. Feedback is also essential to individual learning and growth and to organizational success.

Exercise to embrace accountability:

- Have each team member write down one thing each of the other members does that improves the performance of the team. This is not about skills, but behaviors.
- Do the same thing, this time have each person focus on one thing that hurts the team.
- Starting with the leader, go around the room having each team member share with the leader the positive feedback they have for the leader. When everyone is complete, the leader can give a one sentence response.
- Again starting with the leader, go around the room having each person share the one thing the leader could improve. When complete, the leader can give a one sentence response—not a rebuttal.
- Do the same thing for each member of the team.

Focusing on Results

Great organizations achieve what they set out to do. They do this through the **development of a team consciousness in which all members of the team/organization are focused on the same goals/priorities** and are continuously measuring their progress towards these goals/priorities.

Exercise to focus on results: Select one priority—the item which is most important for the ministry right now. Create 3 goals oriented to that priority. Goals need to be **measurable** and individual responsibilities to each goal need to be **clearly articulated**. As a team, regularly assess progress against these goals, giving feedback to one another on how each person is fulfilling his/her responsibilities.

Evolving Paradigms of Ministry

Let's take this conversation about the new paradigm of leadership and place it into the context of ministry; by so doing, we can see an evolutionary journey for our spiritual communities.

Traditional Paradigm

The traditional paradigm of ministry is what we call a *minister-centric* paradigm. This paradigm was highly effective during the middle of the twentieth century, and most Unity ministries arose from this paradigm. We use the term minister-centric because the **ministry is organized around the minister**; the minister imparts the vision and mission for the ministry and executes the plan for carrying it forward. Congregants in this phase of ministry tend to look to the minister as a parental figure, as the primary caregiver who cares for the flock. There can be a child-like quality in the relationship reflecting the positive attributes of youth: trust, willingness, innocence, humility.... This focus can also lead to dependency on the minister.

Community-Centric Paradigm

Our culture has changed. People are less comfortable with such an imbalanced relationship, and we see a rebellion against such dependent leadership models across all fields of human endeavor. In ministry this evolution shows up in the *community-centric* paradigm. This could be viewed as the adolescent phase of ministry evolution. People are wanting to be independent and more involved; they have lots of ideas and energy to share. Like adolescents, congregations at this stage of development have a tendency to think they can do it all themselves; some believe they no longer need a minister. People want community, a space of belonging, and the **community becomes the focus of the ministry**. It is also common for power struggles to emerge in this paradigm, as people become focused on ensuring their ideas are accepted. While there is lots of energy and creativity in this paradigm of ministry, there is not the focus or discipline that allows for ongoing growth.

Mission-Focused Paradigm

A *mission-focused* paradigm of ministry allows spiritual communities to transcend power struggles. This is because the **focal point of the ministry is about the mission, about the greater purpose** that is the reason for the ministry's existence. This mission is large—global—it derives from an awareness that the ministry exists to positively impact the world, to call into being a more life-affirming way of being on the planet. In this paradigm the ministry endeavors the embodiment of Unity's teaching that there is only One Presence and One Power, that we are all in this together, and each of us is essential to birth of a transformed world. UWM's vision statement calls us to live into this larger purpose for being: "a world powerfully transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening." Recognizing the power of shared consciousness, we invite our ministries to adopt this vision statement and to adopt a mission that compels your spiritual community to move forward in making that vision a reality on the planet. (Please contact Member Services to arrange for a consultant to assist you with this process.)

Create a Buena Casa

Coffee growers in El Salvador are intentional about creating *buenas casas* (good houses) for their coffee plants. These *buenas casas* are created by digging deep holes, filling them with nutrient rich soil and placing young coffee plants in them. Coffee plants will grow in more shallow holes, with soil that is not so rich, but they will not thrive. The same is true for leaders. They require a rich environment to thrive and remain on their growing edge. Consequently, if we want healthy thriving ministries, we need to create *buenas casas* for our leaders—this includes all leaders: clergy, licensed teachers, board members and lay leaders. (The analogy of a *buenas casa* for leadership development comes from *Learning Leadership* by James M Kouzes and Barry Z Posner.)

Board-Created *Buenas Casas*

Most people in ministry understand that the board is the employer of the minister; that the board hires the minister, provides oversight of the minister's work, and has the power to release the minister if necessary. Boards, however, rarely give thought to what their responsibility as the employer means. They rarely consider what it would mean to be a good employer, or what responsibility they have for ensuring the minister is supported in serving with excellence. In creating a *buena casa* for their minister, boards might consider some of the following questions:

- How are we supporting the minister in obtaining ongoing professional development? Are we supporting him/her in going to conferences or attending ongoing trainings?
- Are we ensuring the environment the minister works in is comfortable and conducive to creativity and productivity?
- Do we regularly and consistently recognize the good things being done by our minister?
- Do we work collaboratively with the minister in creating mutually agreed upon goals?
- Are we clear in our expectations?
- Do we provide ongoing specific feedback to the minister?
- How well are we supporting the minister financially? Do we regularly look at compensation? If the ministry is not in a position to make salary increases, do we acknowledge this or do we avoid the issue, leaving the impression that it is unimportant?
- Do we give the minister bonuses?
- Do we support the minister with spiritual renewal time to ensure that he/she has the opportunity to grow and evolve spiritually?
- Do we acknowledge the minister's birthday? His/her anniversaries in service to this ministry?
- Do we take time to get to know our minister as a person, and consciously connect with him/her on a personal level?

Minister-Created *Buenas Casas*

Likewise, ministers have a responsibility to create *buenas casas* for board members and lay leaders to thrive and grow. These are some questions for ministers to consider:

- Do I ensure that there are ongoing opportunities for training and development of board members and lay leaders? Do we bring in a Ministry Skills Consultant on a regular basis to assist us in learning and growing together?
- Do I regularly acknowledge the contributions people make to the success of this spiritual community?
- Do I provide clear expectations for leaders? Do we have job descriptions and training for all service ministry roles?
- Do I give specific feedback to leaders to help them to learn and grow?
- Do I engage collaboratively with leaders in helping our ministry thrive and grow?
- Do I actively seek feedback from people in my ministry, and listen carefully and attentively when feedback is given? When recommendations are made that are not workable at this time, do I communicate that clearly?
- Do I take time to get to know my leaders as people, and consciously connect with them on a personal level?

Negotiating the Contract

Many ministers and board members have no experience in negotiating an employment contract. It is, therefore, common for both parties to approach this interaction with some anxiety. Such anxiety combined with a desire to protect one's rights, or the ministry's assets, can sometimes lead to negotiations that are infused with tension or a feeling of competition. This anxiety and a human desire to avoid conflict can also cause boards and ministers to avoid this process altogether, deciding that they don't really need a contract. Such strategies can lead to confusion, hurt feelings, conflict and damaged relationships down the road. **A more empowering strategy would be to begin with the mindset that this is a collaborative process in which boards and ministers can create shared purpose and mutual commitments of support for one another, for the ministry, and most importantly, for the mission the ministry serves.**

Establish a Relationship Based on Mutual Purpose and Support

As you step into this place of collaboration, you might want to begin with dialogue around questions that allow you to establish a relationship based on mutual purpose and support. Questions such as the following:

- What is our vision for our work together?
- What will it take for each of us to feel well-supported and empowered?
- What are our constraints? How can we use what we have to best support our shared vision and values?
- How can we work together to achieve win/wins?

Work through the Negotiation

Other items to keep in mind as your work through the negotiation include:

- Make this a sacred process. Ground it in prayer. Consider the use of ritual or ceremony.
- Know what your priorities are, what key items are essential for you. Articulate these priorities and revisit these priorities throughout the course of the negotiation.
- Begin your communication verbally, rather than in writing. Dialogue with one another, sharing your passion and excitement about entering into relationship with one another. Follow this up in writing to ensure that you understand one another's perspective. If this written account brings up difference of opinion or intentions, make time to talk these through, always seeking to find common ground.
- In all your communications, take time to listen deeply to one another, really seeking to understand one another's intentions and desires.
- Remain open and flexible, providing options wherever possible.

- Take your time to consider proposed changes. Pray about them, discuss them with a trusted advisor, or sleep on them before making a decision.
- As you come to agreement on terms, be sure that these are all documented and put in writing, then reviewed by all parties.
- Remember that you always have a choice. If you aren't able to reach agreement, perhaps this is not the right fit. If you choose to walk away from agreement, do so gracefully and with mutual respect.

Discernment, Visioning and Planning

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!” Most people have heard some version of this quote by Benjamin Franklin. Nevertheless, we often fail to plan or we make plans and don’t follow through on them. Some may view planning as unspiritual, thinking that in planning we aren’t making room for Spirit. But Spirit can be present in the planning process as well. In spiritual community, our planning is really about collectively listening to the voice of Spirit, getting clear about what Spirit is asking from us, and organizing all our activities and decision-making around this listening.

UWM’s Ministry Skills Team offers a visioning process that is grounded in listening to the voice of Spirit. This process engages members of the community in discovering their vision, mission and core values and lays the groundwork of planning for the future. We encourage you to contact Member Services to schedule this visioning process in your ministry.

Visions and dreams are wonderful and exciting, but as the saying goes, we need to “put feet to our prayers.” In other words, visioning needs to include some planning. It can be daunting to take the ideals expressed in our vision and mission statements and find ways to make them practical—to determine the path to the fulfillment of these ideals. But, without some practical steps, our ideals remain in the clouds; and the dreams for our ministries never materialize.

In his book *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni provides a planning strategy that makes this a little easier. **He invites organizations to make their planning short-term (3 months to a year), placing their main focus on one item at a time, and gradually moving forward on the next step of the journey.** In this book, he invites organizations to look at 6 questions:

1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. What is most important right now?
6. Who must do what?

Discernment

The first 3 questions essentially refer to an organization’s vision, core values and mission, and are covered in UWM’s vision process. One way that ministries might embrace the planning process that follows this is by considering the next 3 questions.

By exploring question 4: “How will we succeed?” spiritual communities can gain insight into what success means, and what it looks like. It is an opportunity to look at some of the things that might show up in a ministry if it were fulfilling its mission. By identifying some of the benchmarks of success, a

ministry then knows when it's on track, and when it may need to make adjustments. It also allows the ministry to take notice of how it's fulfilling its mission and stop and celebrate!

Visioning

The next question: "What is most important right now?" helps a ministry place its attention on the top priority for the ministry (3 months to a year). Steven Covey voiced this question a little differently: "What is wildly important?" The idea here is to focus in on the one thing that is most important—for right now; the one thing that will make the most difference; the one thing that if you fail to do it, nothing else will matter. In Lencioni's material, this question is the linchpin to your strategic plan. The answer to this question provides what Lencioni calls the "thematic objective." The thematic objective is the primary focus for the organization for the next 3 to 12 months (time determined by the board/minister). Steps to reach this goal are identified, and ongoing evaluation is made in relationship to this goal.

Planning

Intertwined with the thematic objective is question 6: "Who will do what?" As the steps to reach the goal are established, a leadership team needs to determine who is responsible for what, and then hold one another accountable to those steps/commitments.

The thematic goal is the area that is given the greatest focus for a specified period of time. While this item gets the greatest attention, the ongoing work of the organization cannot be abandoned. It is still necessary to stay on top of what Lencioni calls "operational objectives." In ministry, the operational objectives would be things like:

- Worship/Celebration
- Spiritual Education & Development (for all ages)
- Sacred Service (within the ministry and to the world around us)
- Organizational Structure (administration, finances, bylaws, policies, procedures ...)

Answering Lencioni's 6 questions provides a simple strategic plan, or as Lencioni calls it: a Playbook that can be used by the ministry to stay focused and move forward together. The Playbook is only a few pages in length that leadership teams can easily refer to, making adjustments as needed.

Having the Playbook, the ministry now needs to hold one another accountable to the plans that have been made and evaluate how they are doing in achieving their objectives.

Feedback and Accountability

Accountability can be an intimidating concept for some. It means we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions, and that is not always easy! But accountability is also extremely powerful. Choosing to be accountable keeps us on our growing edge; it continually calls us to be more than we were the day before, and to stretch and evolve, releasing what Robert Browning calls our “imprisoned splendor.” Cultures of accountability are exciting! They are places in which everyone is engaged and everyone is growing. They are places in which people are willing to support one another in being all that they can be.

Accountability and Blame

It is important to be clear about the difference between accountability and blame. In her book, *Rising Strong*, Brené Brown says:

Accountability is holding ourselves or someone else responsible for specific actions and their specific consequences. Blame, on the other hand, is simply a quick, broad-brush way to off-load anger, fear, shame, or discomfort. We think we’ll feel better after pointing a finger at someone or something, but nothing changes. Instead, blame kills relationships and organizational cultures. It’s toxic. It’s also a go-to reaction for many of us.

Accountability is a prerequisite for strong relationships and cultures. It requires authenticity, action, and the courage to apologize and make amends. Rumbling with accountability is a hard and time-consuming process. It also requires vulnerability. We have to own our feelings and reconcile our behaviors and choices with our values.

Blame occurs far too frequently in today’s world. Pema Chödrön refers to blame as “a very common, ancient, well-perfected device for trying to feel better.” She says, “Blaming is a way to protect our hearts, to try to protect what is soft and open and tender in ourselves. Rather than own that pain, we scramble to find some comfortable ground.” That comfortable ground is to offload our pain on others, but this habit keeps us stuck in a cycle of ongoing hurt, pain and victim consciousness. And it leaves our deepest desires for ourselves and our organizations unfulfilled.

Feedback

If we want to evolve as individuals and as spiritual communities, we must move beyond the culture of blame, and develop cultures of accountability. **Accountability requires ongoing feedback.**

“Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, authors of *Thanks for the Feedback*, report that the feedback process strikes at the tension between two fundamental human needs—the need to learn and grow and the need to be accepted just the way you are. Consequently, even what seems like a mild, gentle, or

relatively harmless suggestion can leave a person feeling angry, anxious, unfairly treated, or profoundly threatened.” (Quoted in *Learning Leadership* by James M Kouzes and Barry Z Posner)

Feedback is crucial for growth, but often difficult to give and difficult to receive. Feedback places both the giver and the receiver in a vulnerable position. Consequently, it is not surprising that many people avoid giving feedback. Research, however, indicates that people are desirous, even hungry for more feedback. A study of more than 3,600 employees found that 51% of employees said they received too little constructive feedback. Of those who did receive feedback, 65% said they didn’t receive enough information to know what to repeat or change. Research also finds that 95% of managers give too little feedback.

Vision and authenticity play vital roles in the feedback process. People are receptive, even eager, for feedback when they believe that you have their best interests at heart. When giving feedback pay attention to the energy within yourself; ensure that your feedback is grounded in a vision of the infinite possibility within the individual rather than focused on what is missing or you think needs to be fixed. It is also important that you speak honestly and authentically—and with kindness and compassion.

The COIN Technique for Feedback offers a simple, effective process for giving feedback:

- **Connect** to an individual as a person and to outcomes/intentions that are meaningful to him/her.
- Share your **Observations** about the person’s behavior (either positive or improvement-oriented). Be specific and factual, and avoid creating stories about why the person behaved this way.
- Share the **Impact** this behavior had on you and/or the organization.
- Discuss potential **Next Steps** to enhance performance. Make this a mutual process that engages the individual his/her growth and learning.

Let’s put this into play. Suppose you are not satisfied with the minister’s Sunday message. You approach him/her and indicate a desire for a conversation. First take time to *Connect*. Make eye contact. You might say something like: “I imagine the Sunday message takes a lot of time to prepare, and that you want it to be meaningful for people.” Next, share your *Observations*. “Recently, I have had difficulty connecting with your messages. They seem very intellectual and theoretical to me.” Then, indicate how this *Impacts* you. “Sometimes I get lost in the theory, and don’t feel the same desire to go home and put these ideas to work in my life that I used to.”

Next Steps

Thus far you have indicated that you care about your minister, want to support him/her, and find that the messages are not helping you live the principles in your life. Notice that there is no interpretation, no labels or judgments about his/her competency. You have placed this in the context of what you would like without making someone else wrong. All this diminishes the potential for defensiveness, and more importantly, provides something specific for the minister to respond to. (Telling him/her that you aren’t feeling fed doesn’t provide information to work from.)

All this puts the conversation in a good place for *Next Steps*, and it is possible your minister will come up with some things himself/herself: “Thank you for sharing this. It is very helpful. I will pay better attention to how much intellectual information I include and attempt to include personal stories and practical steps in my messages. Would that be helpful?” If your answer is “yes,” be sure to notice when she does this and again share the impact this has on you.

Some Thoughts on Evaluation in Ministry

In their book, *Thanks for the Feedback*, Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen identify three different types of feedback: appreciation, coaching and evaluation. All three are essential—for individuals and for organizations. They say: “We need evaluation to know where we stand, to set expectations, to feel reassured or secure. We need coaching to accelerate learning, to focus our time and energy where it really matters, and to keep our relationships healthy and functioning. And we need appreciation if all the sweat and tears we put into our jobs and our relationships are going to feel worthwhile.”

Thus far, on the journey of embracing ministry together, we have been speaking mostly about feedback that is appreciative or coaching oriented. If we have been utilizing these forms of feedback well, the evaluative process should be easier, though discomfort is still likely to arise. **Evaluation tells us about how we are doing and where we stand. It has consequences for our future, and therefore anxiety is a natural part of evaluation.** Often this anxiety causes us to resist an evaluative process or to enter it unconsciously—and this can lead to tension, hurt feelings, polarization.... In other words, the evaluative process backfires, producing the opposite of what it is intended for; it decreases the organization’s capacity to cultivate a feedback-rich environment, keeps individuals and the collective stuck in ineffective patterns, and impedes the organization’s ability to improve, grow and fulfill its mission.

Evaluation can be particularly difficult in ministry due to lack of clarity regarding roles, responsibilities and boundaries. Interestingly, our spiritual principles can also interfere with our ability to embrace an evaluative process. Love is a deeply held spiritual value, something we seek to embody as members of a spiritual community. When our desire to be loving is diluted or distorted by our fears about hurting someone, no one is served, and the organization suffers.

Ineffective Evaluation Practices

There are some evaluation practices in ministry that are particularly problematic:

- Evaluation is conducted as a popularity poll. Members of the congregation anonymously rate minister’s performance on the basis of subjective impressions. This leaves the minister in the position of answering to multiple invisible bosses all who can come up with any variety of concerns/disappointments/issues that may or may not be related to the minister’s performance.
- Evaluation is conducted in response to conflict and a way to express unhappiness. Sometimes this conflict is directly related to minister’s conduct, and sometimes the conflict is more about underlying issues in the ministry. Either way, evaluation is not an effective way to address conflict.
- Evaluation is conducted only of the staff. Ministers are trained professionals—often the only professionals in the ministry they serve. However, ministry is a dynamic organism, an intricate system of interactions. **Success or lack of success in ministry is a team event—with members, lay leaders, board members, staff and ministers all contributing to what is created.** To evaluate only the staff is to discount the creative process of the other players. This unfairly places the staff in the position of being the only people who are held accountable—and fails to consider

the contributions both positive and negative of others in the ministry. This creates stress and burnout for staff, and undermines the effectiveness of the organization.

Effective Evaluation Practices

In *Governance and Ministry*, Dan Hotchkiss outlines 6 criteria for effective evaluation. I quote:

- Scheduled: Evaluation takes place by the calendar, not in response to problems.
- Mutual: Everyone gives and receives feedback.
- Goal-centered: Previously established goals are the basis for evaluation.
- Individual: Evaluation asks, “Am I meeting the expected standard for my job?” “How am I contributing to our goals?”
- Collective: “What progress have we made toward our goals?” “How do we need to adjust course?” “How are we fulfilling our vision for this particular program area?”
- Backward looking: “What did I accomplish?” “How well did we do?”
- Forward looking: “How can I improve?” “What could we do differently next time?”

Performance Planning

The ideal method of evaluation in ministry could be more effectively termed *Performance Planning*, than Performance Appraisal or Evaluation. This is a process of **evaluation that is based on clear expectations and goals that are grounded in the ministry’s mission**. In such a process, a plan is created to assist the ministry in achieving its mission—or at least the next steps in achieving its mission. The plan clearly articulates goals and the part each person plays in achieving that goal. This plan is the playbook by which the ministry operates; it is reviewed at every board meeting, guides decision-making and is adjusted as needed. All leaders in the organization have ownership in the plan, and they provide feedback/coaching to one another and other members of the ministry in terms of the goals/objectives of the plan. Additionally, the board, minister and key leaders meet periodically (at least annually, ideally every quarter) to evaluate performance based on this plan.

Many ministries lack this depth of coherence, and some interim steps may be necessary. It may take some time to have a well-defined plan, and it will likely require the assistance of an outside consultant. In the meantime, ministries are advised to consider how they might work at creating more open feedback loops and a culture that values and encourages open feedback. This could include:

- Regular evaluations of staff and board that contain open-ended questions, allowing all participants to reflect on their work together, to consider the ways in which they are supporting and inhibiting the team, and a safe forum to give feedback to each other.
- Some work with Conscious Conversations (see Unity’s [Future Planning 1 Guide](#))
- Bringing in a consultant to facilitate an evaluation process of the minister and the board. Please contact Member Services to discuss this possibility

Embrace Ministry Together

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase ‘each other’ doesn’t make sense anymore.”

This quote by Rumi speaks to a field of consciousness in which we transcend our differences and enter a space in which we live inside the truth of our oneness. To be present in this way is a deep yearning of the human heart; and to enter the kingdom that Jesus continually invited us into.

The practices in this manual are a means to help you step into this field and lay in the grass together. To enter this field is the underlying purpose of ministry; to enter that field is to share with one another in a spiritual awakening that will powerfully transform our world.

We invite you to enter that field with one another—and with us. We invite you to reach out to your Member Services Department, so that we can collaborate with you in making that field a living reality in how we live on the planet.

We hold you in prayer and see you and your spiritual community thriving and growing together.

Suggested Resources

Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*

Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*

Dan Hotchkiss, *Governance in Ministry*

James M Kouzes, and Barry Z Posner, *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals to Becoming an Exemplary Leader*

Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*

Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science & Art of Receiving Feedback Well*

Bill Strickland, *Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary*

Liz Wiseman with Greg McKeown, *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*