

### The Ministry Leader's Support Network

As the DOM of a Southern Baptist Association, I could go to several meetings a month outside of the association if I so desired. I do NOT so desire, therefore I miss most of them. But one meeting that I try not to miss is the gathering of the South Texas DOMs. I look forward to meeting with these guys for several reasons.

1. I get to step out of my normal ministry environment for a while.
2. I get to spend time with peers who know what my work is like.
3. I get to learn from peers who are more experienced than I am.
4. I get to pray with men who love the Lord and His church.
5. I get to have frank discussions with men I trust and who are not trying to sell me something.
6. I get to have a good meal and some good laughs.

In addition to this group, there are a couple of individuals who are my "go-to" guys when I need advice and wisdom. There are a number of other ministry and lay leaders with whom I talk periodically and have a relationship of mutual encouragement. There are also those I call on when I need prayer. All of these folks comprise my support network.

What I am coming to appreciate, later in life than I should have, is that this support network is crucial to my well-being as a ministry leader. Though I did not design the network myself – it just sort of happened by God's grace over the last 25 years - I find that *I have to discipline myself to maintain it* and not allow it to get crowded out of my schedule.

In my research for the Tenure Project, a *mindset to stay* was the number one factor affecting long pastoral tenure in a church. A close second was the existence of a *support network outside of the church*. In other words, to stay *in* a church over the long haul a pastor needs a support network *beyond* the church. The work is too hard to go it alone. The dangers of isolation are great. All of us need models, mentors, peers, coaches, encouragers, and prayer partners to stay healthy, productive and...sane!

Consider God's word regarding support networks.

*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.* Proverbs 27:17

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.* Matthew 18:20

*Woe to him who is alone when he falls, and has not another to lift him up!* Ecclesiastes 4:10

Do you have a support network and are you disciplining yourself to maintain it? Your network does not have to look like anyone else's. In the Tenure Project I learned that what the network looked

like and how it was used differed greatly among pastors according to their personalities and situations. Some preferred one-on-one. Some enjoyed participating in informal peer groups. Some found the most value in structured formats. Whatever the configuration, the common benefits were overcoming loneliness and isolation, the chance to be transparent with others who know what you deal with, and a sense of fellowship and camaraderie. It's amazing what a few laughs and a few prayers with a few brothers can do for you. It's fuel for the long haul.

Pastor, don't let your tank run dry.