



Why Your Pastor Should Outsource His Mind

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The world of church planting can be fast paced and stressful. Pastors have sermons to prepare and preach, worship bands to assemble and practice, community groups to launch and maintain, weddings, funerals, emails, letters, phone calls to return, initiate and ignore, books to order and then find time to read, children's ministry volunteers to rope in, youth activities to manage, and the list goes on and on. With all of these duties, and more, on a pastor's plate, especially a lead planting pastor who may be wearing all of those hats with varying degrees of success, it makes sense to look into outsourcing his mind. An assistant is the perfect way to farm out much of the work and tasks that weighs on his mind at 3am. Yet "How?" seems to be a common question. How can a pastor truly leverage an assistant to maintain peace of mind, remain focused on the macro vision for the church/ministry, and still feel like he is working and deserving of the big bucks his church is paying him? Below are several main areas of outsourcing that will help a pastor maintain sanity and accomplish what God has given him to do (Acts 6).

Energy Drains:

- With an assistant those tasks that you know you have to do, that you hate doing, can be outsourced. Depending on the ministry you oversee, there are always small tasks that - when they come due, the loathing begins.
- Addressing letters in this day of email can be truly frustrating. For a pastor it takes time that extends beyond the simple act of thinking of someone and writing them a letter or sending a gift, or paying a bill. It has now become - locate the recipient's address (which is probably misfiled in his Outlook contacts), finding an envelope that fits the contents then scrounging around the office for a 2 cent stamp because all he could find were 35 cent stamps. What could have been 10 minutes of caring thought has turned into 45 minutes spent crushing several fruits of the Spirit.
- Email, though much more efficient than traditional letters, can also drain a pastor's energy. I have discussed email techniques with several pastoral assistants and the mode for delivery varies. Some gather email correspondence for the pastor they assist and send one large email each day. The pastor can then simply reply below each message and hit send, back to his assistant. The assistant can then sort through and send out the return emails, work on any action items that were created, as well as see some of the larger picture their pastor oversees. I have heard of one faithfully followed author and ministry leader who does not "do" email. Instead he has his assistant fax him all of the day's email and he replies with return messages and action items in pen, and faxes it back to his assistant.
- Communication with entire department personnel can be time intensive. A pastor is calling a meeting and needs each of the major stakeholders present. He knows that as he begins calling each person, what is intended as a quick interaction can easily turn into an impromptu counseling session, an off topic, though important, side meeting, or a general tail chase as schedules seemingly refuse to coincide. An assistant can be given this task and he can begin coordinating schedules, set aside time in his pastor's schedule for the counseling appointment, and gather an agenda for the necessary side meeting;

all while the pastor is focusing on different important tasks. By outsourcing this simple task the pastor can then enter into each appointment and task in the correct frame of mind. Trying to schedule a meeting for himself and being blindsided by an over-the-phone meeting or a counseling conversation can be exhausting. This isn't to say that a counseling appointment as scheduled by his assistant won't be exhausting, just that it will be a set time he is aware of and can prepare appropriately.

Extensions of Ministerial Desires:

- Other tasks a pastor can easily put on an assistant's plate include: mail sorting, filing, and corporate credit card reconciliation. Some of these tasks may seem ridiculous to some of you, but the point isn't that you should hire an assistant so you don't have to lick a stamp again, but that the assistant can do those things that are drains to your energy in whatever shape those may come. Oftentimes pastoral assistants serve as an extra set of eyes for their pastor. They can do a variety of tiny things that are not in themselves urgent, but vitally important and can build systems in place to keep stuff from falling through the cracks as urgent tasks overtake important tasks.
- I asked several of the pastoral assistants at Mars Hill other ways they specifically serve their pastors and here is a quick breakdown:
 - One pastor at Mars Hill regularly rattles off several ideas that he is suddenly hit with and asks his assistant to remind him to "think" about these mental downloads later. As he is heading into a meeting, to keep from either being distracted by the plans forming in his head or completely forgetting altogether, he trusts his assistant to note his thoughts and remind him of them later.
 - Another pastor leans on his assistant to make sure that he is demonstrably thanking the people the LORD has brought into his ministry. He frequently receives reminders from his assistant like "There were over 25 people here last week rebuilding the stage and installing lighting rigs well into the morning hours. If you'd like I can organize a thank you party at your house early next month". He knows that thoughts of thanking people can easily be forgotten or that the planning for a thank you type event, though totally necessary, requires time and skills he may not have himself. By bringing on this assistant he can leverage another person to accomplish the desires for his ministry.

Must-Haves for an Assistant:

- If outsourced properly your assistant should have these two giftings at a minimum, which may be the counter to your weaknesses allowing for a fuller response to the needs of your ministry or they may be enhancements of the collection of talents and gifts the LORD has given you:
 - Adaptability to change: Church plants are static in only one area - CHANGE.

At Mars Hill we have found the only constant in our work here in Seattle to be never ending, always fluctuating change. For assistants, the ability to take the changes that are sure to come and approach them with a correct heart and mind, is a priceless gift. Our job is to build systems to catch as much work from the pastor we serve and carry out the tasks quickly and efficiently. As the work in the ministry

changes those systems are made obsolete. A correct approach to this inevitability is to simply start from scratch and build new systems regardless if the systems that were created from scratch weeks or months ago are now out dated. An incorrect approach is the stubborn holding onto old systems, now defunct, simply because they are how things have been done. God brings new things into our ministries to test and shape us and to respond to the new issues in the same manner as the old is a foolish way of doing His work and will result in frustrated pastors, assistants, and church members.

- Discernment: Knowing who needs to have contact with the pastor served.

A proper understanding and sometimes a Spirit directed knowledge of who is truly in need of the pastor's time is crucial. It is easy for an assistant to read over hundreds of emails and letters and begin filing each request in its appropriate box; he needs to read the website; she needs to take the Membership Class; they need marital counseling and the pastor I serve doesn't have that responsibility; he needs a half hour phone conversation; a simple form email will suffice for these people, this guy is Satan and "delete" will work just fine. The day continues in this vein because, hey, the systems were built to use for efficiency and strength of the ministry so let's use them. In this routine and task completion mode, discernment is indispensable as the Spirit nudges an assistant toward a particular email that could easily be handled personally by the assistant, or directed to another staff person, but is truly meant for the pastor. I have seen this many times at Mars Hill. God has brought many men forward to carry the counseling load for our people and relieve Pastor Mark of this role so he can focus on the pulpit and future of the church. Yet there are emails that come through his inbox that I know could easily and quickly be directed to one of these men, but the Spirit leads me to pass them through to Pastor Mark instead. The fruit that comes from these instances is great and simply confirms discernment is needed.

- "A Message to Garcia" by Elbert Hubbard – a Google search on this title brings up a great example of the type of person each pastor should pursue for his assistant.
- The Job Description is Written by You

This article is general because the tasks that Mars Hill Assistants carry out are specific and tailored to each pastor. For some the qualifications and job description includes budgeting, tech support, scheduling, for others editing, research, proof reading, inventory, and others project management. The point is that for each pastor a specifically tailored assistant was found and is now leveraged to make the ministry more efficient and sane so that the Gospel can go out. If you do not yet have an assistant I would recommend that you squeeze your budget like you haven't before and hire one. The benefits we see at Mars Hill are great. As a member of this church it is good to know that the pastors are working in their giftings and that there are men and women in place to enhance their ministries. These people were hired based on the strengths and weaknesses of each pastor so the resulting assistants vary in skill, experience and gifts. There is no cookie cutter model so trust and pray that the LORD will bring you the help you need in just the right way.

If you have any specific questions about what I or other assistants do at Mars Hill, please feel free to email me. Know that we pray for you and your churches constantly and love being a part of the greater movement God is working out in our country and world.