

Overcoming Obstacles **Church Staff & WM Team**

It is my own personal belief that before we dive into anything from a project to a ministry, we need to go into it eyes wide open. We need to understand and prepare for the obstacles we are going to face. The great thing about obstacles is that they are not permanent, you can always get past them. It may take a leap of faith, patience on the journey around it, or hard work to build a path over it; but obstacles never keep God from working in a ministry. We may be quick to blame obstacles on the devil, trying to stop the ministry. But, we forget that God will give us obstacles too. He may need to detour us from our agenda and back to His, slow us down so that we don't rush pass His blessing, or there may be lessons that we need to work through & grow from first.

When it comes to Women's Ministry, you are going to find obstacles will come at you from many different directions. In the first segment of this topic, we are going to dissect the obstacles that come from the church staff / elders, and from within the women's ministry team. What is the obstacle, what is at the root of that obstacle, and how do we overcome it?

This past year, I had an opportunity to sit in on several workshops related to Women's Ministry. In these workshops we covered everything from formal ministry education, women as full time ministry staff all the way to the obstacles we face in the course of effective ministry leadership. A very common thread, amongst many of the women who asked questions, was related to a lack of support from church staff. There seemed to be two distinct groups. Group 1) Women who wanted a women's ministry program but their church didn't think it was necessary. Group 2) Women who had a women's ministry program in their church but it isn't taken seriously.

We were given an opportunity to ask a panel of women, experienced in women's ministry, for guidance. Interestingly enough, over half the panel were part or full time paid staff members in their church. Their positions while titles varied, can be best described as "Women's Ministry Directors". Yes, there were women who were PAID to lead women's ministry. In these churches having a Women's Ministry was the same as a Youth Ministry or Children's Ministry. Most churches will hire a Children's Pastor or a Youth Pastor to run those ministries, but how many churches do you know of where there is a staff member in charge of Women's Ministry?

So, it's time to face the fact, our first hurdles in Women's Ministry are going to be right at the top, the Staff and Elders. And, it isn't their fault.

Women's Ministry has changed over the years, we loosened our grip on deeper ministry purpose and replaced it with social events and topical speakers. Those are not BAD things. Even the youth and children's ministry have FUN. Women's Ministry, however, lost focus and started leaning more toward the fun and fellowship, and less about deep scriptural study. We did this to ourselves, and then wonder why our ministry is not being taken seriously.

To overcome this first obstacle, we need to begin by owning the past & committing to change in the future. I'm not suggesting that you should walk into you Pastor's office with a 5 year Women's Ministry plan and a salary request, thus landing yourself a full time job. What I am saying is that this COULD happen, one day, down the road. But first, we need to restore Women's Ministry back to it's original purpose.

Obstacle 1: Staff View of Women's Ministry

Root 1: Women's Ministry Focus Shifted to Fellowship

Solution 1: Restore Women's Ministry to Christ Centered, Gospel Advancing Purpose.

The next staff view that we need to address, is whether or not Women's Ministry is biblical, and if it is... should women be leading it?

There are some church leaders, who do believe that women should not be in leadership in the church at all. This isn't always relegated to a particular denomination either, it may be a belief of a particular generation, or even geographical demographic.

It's also probably the easiest of the obstacles to overcome, because the answer is in the scriptures. Titus 2 instructs women to teach other women. And, Paul is clear in 1 Timothy that he doesn't permit women to teach men. But we do see instances where women were influential leaders in their community for God's purposes. For the purpose of this course, we are going to assume that there is no, or little support.

The best way to handle this obstacle, is with a gentle and humble approach. Speak with an Elder or Pastor, share your heart for Women's Ministry and that you believe God is calling you to lead it. Let him know you were reading in the scriptures and saw that there were occasions where women leading other women was not only approved of, but encouraged. You can even point him in the direction of the scriptures you found. Ask him to look into the scriptures himself, speak with the rest of staff, and then pray over it. You may even ask if it would be ok for you to check back with him in two weeks or a month, to discuss it more. Then let him be, and pray about it yourself. If you find yourself in a position where you are not the only woman feeling this way, then gather together and pray over it as a group.

Then, and this is an important lesson I learned the hard way, if you get the green light to proceed, take your next steps slowly. Start small and build toward something greater.

Do NOT barge into your Pastor's office, Bible at the ready, pointing to scripture demanding a Women's Ministry program. As members of the church, we are to submit to the authority of the Pastor over our church. He deserves our respect in how we approach him, and He has an enormous charge upon his shoulders to shepherd the church which requires our patience over matters like this.

Obstacle 2: Staff Resists Women's Ministry

Root 2: Generational, Geographic, or Personal Opinion that Women are not to Lead in Any Capacity

Solution 2: Gently and Humbly Approach Staff to Search the Scriptures & Pray

Why is it important to have the support of the church staff? Couldn't you just start a Women's Ministry outside of the church, in the community?

The best explanation I have ever come across on this, comes from the book *Word-filled Women's Ministry*, Cindy Cochrum states:

"Organized ministry among women in the local church offers church leadership (and entire congregations) a context through which they can affirm how much they value and care for their sisters in Christ. When leadership invests in women's ministry, the church communicates to women that their voices are valued and needed. The purpose and significance of their work is affirmed, and the local

church is strengthened. This strengthening takes place as church leadership actively supports ministry by and among women. Communicating a hands-off attitude, by which women are encouraged to do their own thing, does not help and strengthen women but rather leaves them isolated within the church, perhaps cut off from (and unable to contribute to) the church vision and momentum. Every ministry, including women's ministry, is strengthened as pastors and elders are engaged, interested, and ready to guide when needed, without being over-bearing. This mind set must be what Peter envisioned in his letter: So I exhort the elders among you, as fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:1-3"

When the Staff supports the Women's Ministry program, and invests in it.... it creates a ripple effect, that rolls out into the church body and then into the community. This is why it is imperative that these first potential obstacles, get our greatest attention, prayer and patience. We need the staff support, and I realized just recently, we as women may be ineffective in communicating that to them. We must let staff know that we don't just want their approval for the ministry, we covet their support, prayers and investment into it.

And, for those who are taking this course that are already on church staff, or seeking to be Pastors, embrace your Women's Ministry and encourage it to be more than it ever has been before. Invest in it, and you are investing in your church. The women who are attending women's ministry events, they are your hospitality workers, your Sunday school teachers and nursery volunteers, they are leading bible studies, they are training our children, and have great influence over women in the community. When you invest in their ministry, you help equip them, and when you equip them, the church gets stronger and the message reaches further.

Another obstacle you may (or may not) face with staff is the subject of budget. You may be blessed with a church that allots budget to your Women's Ministry each year. However, most Women's Ministries that I have work with are self funded. What that means is they raise their own money, or they work without a budget at all. This is going to be another area where you are going to have to exercise gentleness, humbleness and patience.

First, you need to look at the big picture. Why are you not getting the funding you need from the church? If your church is currently in a building fund mode, it's probably not the right time to ask for a budget or budget increase. If your church has some debt, and they are actively working to pay it down, again, not the best time to ask. Some churches simply believe that sub-ministries need to be self sufficient. In first two scenarios, these are temporary issues. A little bit of patience is required until funds are freed up, keep in mind though, you may not be the only one asking. In the latter example, self sufficient ministry, you may want to speak with staff about a one time starting budget. Something just to get the ball rolling, and then the ministry is on it's own to replenish those funds.

Outside of these scenarios, another hurdle will be requesting budget for the ministry when the staff doesn't see the value. Maybe it's a new ministry in your church, or you've have a lot fellowship but nothing of real substance. If the staff is uncertain about the viability and impact of the ministry, they may not just hand over the money. Remember the Pastors and staff are accountable to be good stewards with the church's annual budget. This is a time to patiently build up the new ministry, or start making changes into the existing ministry that help prove it's value. Later, you can approach the church leaders about adding the Women's Ministry into the annual budget.

Requests like this should be just that, a request. Not a demand. They require patience, while the leaders decide. If you do get “no” for answer, don't refrain from respectfully asking for an explanation. You may even ask if you can revisit this with the church leaders before the next year's budget meeting, and consider asking what expectations they would have of a ministry in order to fund it.

Additionally, if women's ministry is not going to be included in the budget, clarify with the church leadership if your ministry is allowed to use fundraisers and if so, what restrictions may apply.

Until there is a budget line for the Women's Ministry, accept the fact that this is a volunteer position & determine the best way to fund the ministry. Later, we will go over several ways you can fund the women's ministry without the church budget. This is another important area to pray over, to ensure the ministry can move forward.

Obstacle 3: Budget Restrictions or Droughts

Root 3: The Church is Accountable to Steward God's Money Appropriately.

Solution 3: Discuss Options with Church, Ask to Revisit Annually, Pray for Provision

The final obstacle that may present itself, when it comes to staff, is the Church Calendar. There will be multiple ministries that want to use the church building or plug their events on the church calendar. You may find your Pastors, Elders, and Staff want balance. They may desire that one ministry doesn't overtake the calendar or monopolize the building. Or, you may be in a church that encourages as many activities as it can provide for.

Communication is going to help overcome this obstacle. Ask from the beginning what kind of restrictions or guidelines are in place for the church calendar, or number of events per month. And define what that looks like, don't assume everyone is thinking the same way. The church may be ok with 25 small groups, but they don't want everyone of them listed on the weekly calendar, this may cause important church events to be overlooked. You may have total approval for weekly fellowship meet ups, but reserve promoting those on Facebook, email or with small group leaders. The church may give you a restriction of one or two events per month, but the staff defines these events as ones that require rearranging the church, or for staff to be at the church to assist with.

I generally find that once you can talk through the expectations, there will be a lot of compromise. And, just with budget, a ministry that is just starting out (or transitioning) may need some proving time. Remember, every time you use the church and it's resources, that does have an expense cost (utilities, materials, etc). Part of the church leaders stewardship with finances, includes the use of the building.

Obstacle 4: Church Calendar Conflicts

Root 4: Many Ministries, One Building

Solution 4: Communicate Needs, Availability, and be Open to Compromise

The good news is that once you have the green light from the church, understand the expectations of the ministry, and have come to terms with the budget plan & calendar for the ministry... you have overcome the most common staff related obstacles. Situational conflicts may occur, but I find them to be quite rare with staff members.

Situational conflicts are more prevalent within the actual Women's Ministry team. Here are a few reasons why:

1. **Leadership Struggles** – these can show up for various reasons. When we create a team, especially in Women's Ministry, we tend to have a group of leaders. Perhaps one woman is designated to coordinate the bible studies, while another one plans social events. Instead of a single leader delegating work to a team, we find a team of leaders with their own responsibilities. This can create competition for time and resources, not just in the leadership meetings but in the ministry itself. Or, if pride gets in the way, we could have power struggles for position within leadership. Even the disciples wanted to know who Jesus favored, it's a human flaw. The head of the ministry, will need to be on the watch out for these struggles when they arise, and handle them quickly. However, they can be prevented by structured, organized meetings. We will discuss this more in future segments.
2. **Personality Conflicts** – When a Women's Ministry team is first put together, it is often made up of women who were already acquainted with each other, they had an established relationship. But, over time, the group dynamic changes. People step down to work in other ministries, move out of town, schedules change, etc. As we begin to plug new women into the team, during this time of transition, personality conflicts may arise. A great way to help ease this transition is by making sure to schedule in team building and bonding activities, particularly when there is a shift in the group members. Spend some time getting to know each other on a personal level. But, if there are unresolved conflicts, as the leader you may need to counsel the women to put aside their difference, or elect to leave the team. I always suggest speaking with a church elder or Pastor, before you do so. They may have important insight into personal struggles or past conflicts you are not privy to. Your church leaders will advise you in how to handle it, will support your decision, or you may find they wish to deal with it directly.
3. **Agenda Conflicts** – As the face of Women's Ministry changes, agenda conflicts are going to be on the rise. Women who have been engaged in the older fellowship ministry model, they may not be interested in change. New members might be looking for a strong discipleship program and deeper bible studies. This is something bigger than a personality conflict or even leadership struggle, because it often is accompanied by the words “God really laid it on my heart that we should....” or “I really feel that God is pulling this ministry in the direction of...”. How do we argue with GOD???? The best way to combat agenda conflicts is to make sure that your Women's Ministry is first and foremost supporting the overall ministry of the Church. In other words, God had given your Pastor a specific vision for the church, and all ministries within the church should support that vision through their programs and activities. The Women's Ministry (or any sub-ministry) should not have it's own vision, independent of the church's. So, when someone starts trying to move the vision with their own personal agendas, beliefs and opinions; as the leader you can reign it in by asking the person how it fits within the church vision.
4. **The Pedestal** – As the head of any ministry, we can forget that this ministry doesn't belong to us personally, it doesn't belong to the team, it belongs to God. If we do forget this, we can end up putting ourselves (or allow others) to place us on a pedestal. When this happens we become an obstacle to the ministry, we are now getting in our own way. This can be a double edged conflict, if the previous ministry leader is still serving on the team in another capacity. Team members may be holding her on a pedestal, that new leader can't compare with. Nothing you do will every be good enough. It doesn't really matter who is on the pedestal, it becomes a hindrance to the ministry and needs to be dealt with. It might require a bit of humbling, and stepping down from the position of authority. Or, admitting this to your team and asking them to hold you accountable. If you are in a situation as a new leader, dealing with the previous leader's legacy, you might have to involve your overseeing Pastor or Elder to mediate the situation.

The goal for the team should be unified, working together for the good of the body. If we are allowing

personal conflicts to interfere with the team, it's going to impact the ministry as a whole. Unresolved conflict in a ministry team, can be a valid reason to disassemble the team & start fresh, or even put an end to the ministry. If we are vigilant about putting others first, and getting out of our own way, a strong team will emerge. We'll discuss this more in depth in the future. In our next segment, we are going to explore some of the obstacles you are going to face within the church body and community.