



## **Preliminary Steps for Church Staff Evaluations**

*Help your staff make the grade.*

by Stephen Dees

Many employers, especially churches, consider the topic of staff evaluation a nuisance. Comments often include: “We don’t have time to worry with evaluating our staff,” or “Staff evaluation is a waste of time,” or “Our staff do a great job so we don’t need to evaluate them.”

Staff evaluation doesn’t have to be a nuisance. It can be a necessary tool that assists churches in critical areas of personnel management. Churches that have a good staff evaluation program in place often see the morale and work ethic of their employees improve dramatically.

### **Communicate Effectively**

Here’s a typical church office scenario: It’s 8:00 on a weekday morning. The phones are ringing faster than they can be answered. Church members Maybel Johnson and Francis Smith have just arrived at the office and are asking to see the minister of music. The senior pastor walks through the church office and praises the receptionist for an excellent job on typing his sermon outline for the previous Sunday’s service. Sounds like a normal workday, right? But the problem is, the receptionist was so busy trying to answer the phones and point Maybel and Francis in the right direction that she thought the pastor was criticizing her typing of the sermon notes. Maybel and Francis, on the other hand, felt offended because the pastor didn’t say anything to them.

Cases of communication failure similar to the above scenario happen every day in churches across America and underscore the need for a formal staff evaluation system.

It’s no secret that communication is a two-way process. It requires the attention of both parties involved. Communicating approval or disapproval of an employee’s performance requires a distraction-free setting. Both the employer and the employee involved must be tuned in to what the other is saying.

### **Clarify Job Descriptions**

The first step in creating an evaluation instrument is determining what role each position plays. This is most often called a job description. To be effective, staff evaluation instruments must be directly linked to each employee’s job description. After all, it isn’t fair to evaluate an employee based on criteria other than his or her job description. Unfortunately many job descriptions aren’t kept up to date. As employees are added and responsibilities are divided, job descriptions need to be updated.

In addition, staff members often need clarification regarding the expectations placed on them. People normally try to live up to expectations, so these need to be clear. According to *Church Staff Evaluation: A Tool for Effective Performance* by Joyce Parchman (Nacba Press, 2001), job descriptions help prevent misunderstandings, create a feeling of trust, and make it