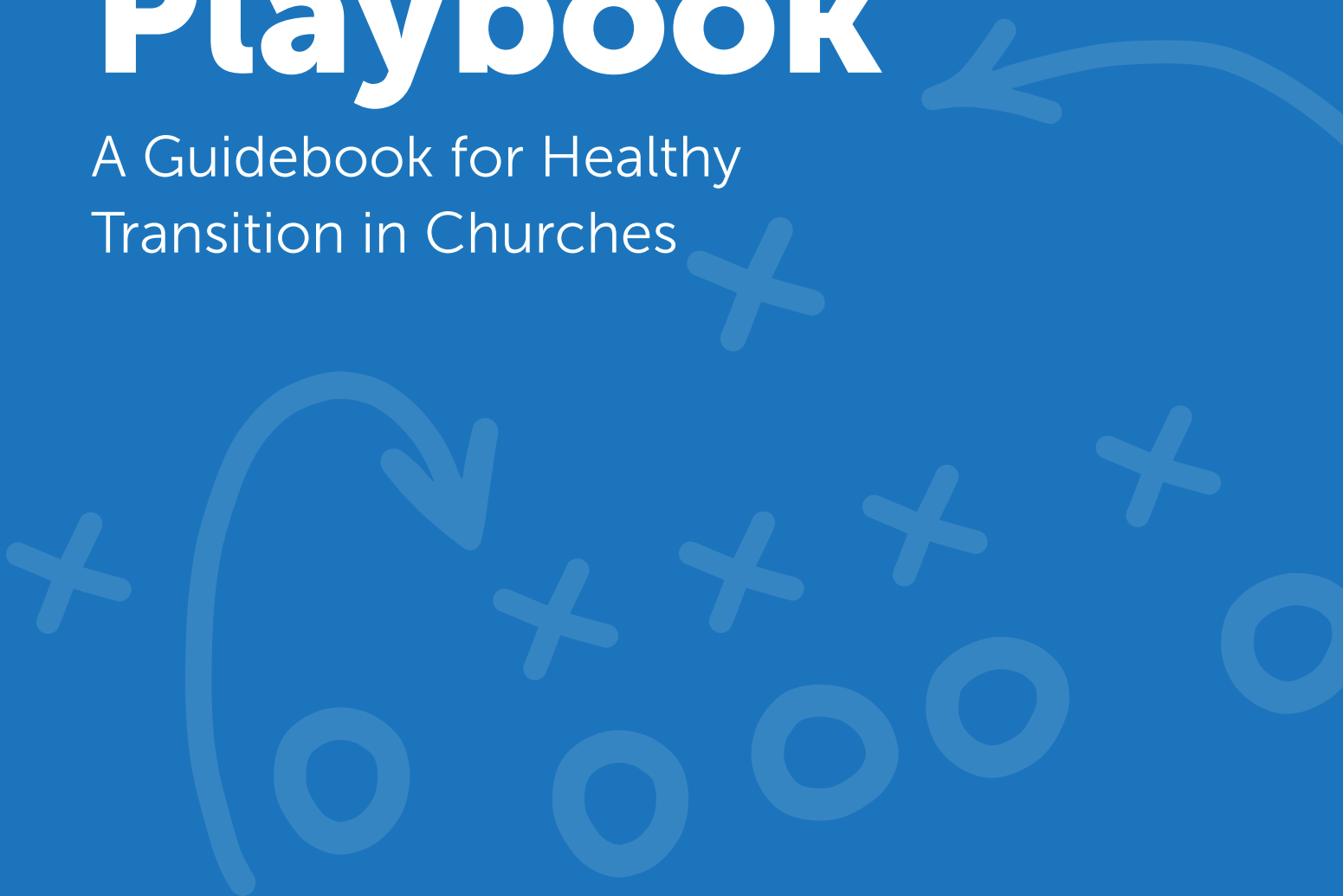


CHEMISTRY STAFFING

Staff Transition Playbook

A Guidebook for Healthy
Transition in Churches



We've all been there. We are sitting in our office, having an incredibly productive day when we get a soft knock on our office door and see a member of our team asking to talk. The look on their face lets you know that this might be a difficult conversation. After a couple awkward attempts to start the conversation, they come right out with it: "I think it is time for me to leave..."

Or maybe the conversation begins with you, knocking on the staff members door asking to talk.

Whether it is sudden or not, difficult or joyous, staff transitions in the church are hard for everyone involved. They are uncomfortable, difficult, and emotionally draining. But they are also necessary.

The way that you respond to times of transition will directly impact the season ahead. Many times a church's first action when learning about a staff transition is to begin advertising a job opening. While this is an understandable step, it is the wrong first step. When we work with churches that are navigating a season of transition, we strongly advocate that the church do this one thing before doing anything else:

Breathe. Before you do anything, stop and breathe. Realize that God is still in control and that this situation is not a surprise to Him. In the awkward, panicked moments after we become aware of a staff transition, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that God is still with us. Our bias for action can cause us to make rash decisions that set us up poorly for the next ministry season, so we advocate that before doing ANYTHING else, take the time to take a deep breath and take comfort in the fact that the God who has brought us this far has not forsaken us and is with us in the next leg of our journey. Once you've taken the time to breathe, we advise churches to focus on their **three biggest challenges** in the transition:

1 Communication. Develop a clear communication plan that lets your staff, volunteers, and congregation know what is going on. This communication needs to be authentic, clear, concise, and consistent. Make sure that you are clear on boundaries about what can and can not be shared and who should and should not be discussing this transition.

2 Continuity. Assess the current state of the ministry areas that are overseen by this staff member and develop a sustainable ministry plan for the transition period. We advise churches to plan for a six-month vacancy. Determine what programs are essential, the essential staffing requirements, and who will be overseeing the ministry during this season.

3 Closure. This is the most difficult challenge that you will face. The relational nature of ministry makes departure difficult and can lead to frustration, awkwardness, and hard feelings. Take the time to intentionally communicate the expectations that you have on the departing staff member and the expectations that they can have of the church. Determine what compensation the church will be providing (severance, benefits, etc), and appropriate boundaries during this season and the one immediately after they leave. It is also wise to decide on the level of care that will be provided for the family of the staff member. The transition will be difficult for both sides, caring well for the family transitioning out will speak volumes to your congregation about how to serve people in stressful situations. Lastly, schedule and conduct an exit interview.

“Realize that **God is still in control** and that this situation is not a surprise to Him.”

An exit interview... but why?

The exit interview is one of the most valuable tools that a church can utilize during a season of transition... but it is often one that is ignored. Why? Because it is awkward. Exit interviews require a willingness to ask and answer difficult questions, and it may result in hearing things that are uncomfortable to talk about. Exit interviews also take time. Sunday always comes. There are services to plan, sermons to write, visits to make, and now you are developing communication, continuity, and closure plans for a staff member who is leaving (we can help with this, but more on that later).

That said, we are convinced that an exit interview is crucial to ensuring that your next staff member starts well and that your current one leaves as positively as possible (these are connected). This conversation can help identify blind spots in leadership, gaps in your ministry, and issues that need to be addressed in your day to day operations. It can also help you determine the type of person your next staff member should be and allow you to make adjustments to your job expectations as necessary.

A few things to keep in mind when scheduling and conducting an exit interview:
Choose a neutral, private setting to conduct the conversation. A safe place where both parties feel comfortable works best. Avoid coffee shops and places that may prevent an open and honest discussion.

When selecting the people who will be conducting the interview, keep in mind that for this to be a productive conversation that the person being interviewed needs to trust those doing the interviewing. At the same time, the interviewer needs to be trusted by church leadership as well. You are looking for a neutral party that everyone will recognize as being fair and honest. This person should be objective, fearless, respected, and possess a non-anxious presence that allows for hard conversations to be conducted. Many times, churches find it helpful to enlist a neutral third party to conduct these conversations. We advise churches to limit your interview team to one or two members.

Speed matters. It can be easy to put off an exit interview, avoid this at all costs. Our tendency to procrastinate and avoid difficult conversations makes it easy to find great reasons why now is not the right time for the conversation. A staff member's ability to end well, feel respected and heard, and your church's next ministry season depend on having this conversation. Leadership requires us to engage in difficult things from time to time... lean into this and do it well.

On the next page is a simple worksheet that we have designed to help guide you through the exit interview process. Keep in mind that this is best done in a conversational format, so do not feel bound to hit every question. We advise taking notes on this document and then writing a separate summary of the conversation that highlights the main points.

“Exit interviews require a willingness to ask and answer **difficult questions**, and it may result in hearing things that are uncomfortable to talk about.”

One last thing.

One of the ways that we serve churches is by conducting exit interviews when a staff member is in transition. We interview the staff member's supervisor and the staff member and develop a report that summarizes our findings. If you are interested in learning more about this service, [click here](#).

DATE

EXIT INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

INTERVIEWER

INTERVIEWEE

This is best conducted as a conversation in a relaxed, comfortable environment by people who are trusted by both the departing staff member and church leadership. We advise no more than two people conduct the interview.

1. Why have you decided to leave?

2. Did the duties and demands of the job match your expectations?

3. Did you have the proper resources and tools to do your job effectively?

4. What did you like most about working here?

5. What did you like least about working here?

6. Is there something that we could have changed that would have resulted in you staying?

7. What else should I know?

8. What do you hope is different for the next person in this role?

INTERVIEW NOTES

Staff transition? Let Chemistry Staffing help.

Chemistry Staffing exists to help churches find a healthy, long-term fit for their ministry positions. We'd love to help you do fewer exit interviews and more ministry. [Click here](#) to see how we can help.