

20 Things You Should Know About Your Candidates BEFORE You Interview Them



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Every church in America is looking for the same thing in their next church staff hire: a healthy, long-term fit. Unfortunately, the average tenure of a church staff member is only about three years. That's barely enough time to unpack boxes, much less develop a foundation from which to minister to a congregation. Thom Rain-er, the President of LifeWay suggests that a pastor enters their most productive ministry season during their fifth year in a church. So, how do we help ensure that pastors make it to the beginning of their most fruitful years? By rethinking the hiring process.

The typical church hiring process brings a group of people together to collect resumes, conduct interviews, and make the hire. This routine process is great for filling an open slot on your team, but not so great at effectively finding a healthy, long-term fit. The process falls short in a few areas:

Resumes are awesome, but you can only tell so much from looking at what someone has written about themselves.

Interviews are helpful, but... only if you ask the right questions (and the answers are authentic).

Leadership and personality assessments are insightful, but are usually given too late in the process (if at all) to pro-actively determine a candidate's true chemistry and fit for the position.

While each of these steps is important, they are incomplete... giving your team a limited understanding of a candidate and whether they are a good long-term match for your church. The key to finding a healthy, long-term fit for your church staff is asking lots of questions. A ton of questions. The right questions.

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You see, knowledge is power. The more you know about each candidate (and the more the candidate knows about your individual church), the more able you are to understand their potential to be a long-term fit for your church. The challenge most churches face is asking the right questions, at the right time.

The mistake most churches make is asking compatibility questions too late in the process. Knowing whether a candidate is a good fit theologically, culturally, and personality-wise early in the process saves time, energy, money, and protects your team from the frustration and heartache of developing an emotional connection with someone who is just not a good fit.

So, where should your church start? Here's a list of twenty things you should know about a candidate before you pick up the phone or schedule an interview. These are just a sampling of the 100 data points that make up our precision matching system, and they are a great place for your search to start.

Theology

Most churches assess initial theological alignment by looking at a candidate's individual resume. After all, you can tell quite a bit from a candidate by looking at their past education and the churches they've served. (Oral Roberts University graduates usually have a different theological bent than a Bob Jones University grad.) But more and more, theological views are hard to pinpoint... so we suggest digging deeper with candidates, even before the first phone call or interview.

Theology is important. And disagreement on some big-ticket theological issues is a recipe for future conflict and disharmony. It is important to find out as much about your candidates theologically BEFORE you even extend an offer to talk about your open position as misalignment in this area will be a quick deal killer.

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Each church will have a different list of things that are important to them theologically, but these questions are a good start in determining whether a candidate is someone to have a further conversation with:

1. Does the candidate share your views on scripture inerrancy, inspiration, and infallibility?
2. Do their beliefs on salvation match your understanding of scripture?
3. Are your candidates from more of a Reformed or Arminian theological background?
4. Would they consider themselves to be Egalitarian or Complementarian in their approach to leadership and church government?
5. What are their views on spiritual gifts, including sign gifts like prophecy, tongues, and healing?

Culture/DNA

Your church is unique. From the city you live in, to the buildings in which you worship, to your individual history, traditions, and quirks, your church has a distinct DNA and culture. Not everyone will thrive in your individual church culture, so you need to find out as much about potential candidates as you can.

{ ...Not everyone will thrive in your individual church culture... }

6. Does your candidate fit your church's leadership style? Would their past experience and future expectations thrive in your culture?
7. Does your candidate agree with you on the fundamental question of "What is the purpose of the church?"

8. Does the person you're wanting to interview hold the same convictions on today's social issues as your church does? (Things like gay marriage, LGBT issues, marijuana, etc.)
9. Does this person feel comfortable with the way you worship? Would they fit right in, or would the way you worship make them slightly uncomfortable?
10. Would your candidate feel comfortable living in your community? Consider the location, size of your community, and your economic and racial diversity. Do they fit?

Personality

Every church is looking for a certain ‘type’ of person. Some are looking for a scholar, others for a visionary. Some churches are looking for a shepherd, others for a skilled expository preacher with great stage presence. There is no right or wrong... but you need to know what kind of person you’re courting before your first date to see if there is any chemistry there. Here are some important areas to consider:

11. Is your candidate an introvert or an extrovert?
12. What is your prospective staff member’s style? Brash and sassy? Low-key and caring?
13. Are they a visionary or a sustainer?
14. What is their conflict management style?
15. How do they process and make big ministry decisions?

Experience / Skill / Proficiency

Finally, your position will require specific skills, background, and education. You can many times get a 30,000 foot view of these needs from a candidate’s resume, but you should really dig deeper before your interview to see if your candidate has what it takes to make it in the position you’re hiring.

16. Does your candidate have past experience that would tell you they could do the job well? (Remember, the best way to predict future success is past success).

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17. Does this candidate have the specific skills that the job requirement demands?

18. Do you need someone to totally change your ministry, or simply tweak it and make it better? Each scenario requires a different type of person.



19. Does your candidate have the required education and training that will help them be successful in this role?

20. How will this candidate fit into your church's ecosystem? How will they manage relationships and relate with others (including your governing board?)

The goal in answering these questions is simple: identify areas of agreement that can lead to a healthy, long-term fit. But the goal is also to identify areas of divergence that may (or may not) cause serious conflict down the road. A healthy long-term fit requires the church and candidate to have a clear understanding of one another's foundations in order to ensure that the relationship will last into the productive years. This requires a willingness to ask a lot of questions and understand what a church's 'deal breakers' are.

{ ...Chemistry helps churches identify and focus on the right candidates for their search..." }

The twenty questions above are part of Chemistry Staffing's one hundred question pre-screening process which helps churches understand who might be a great fit before reading a resume, scheduling an interview, or checking their social media profiles. These questions serve as a starting point, identifying which candidates a church should investigate further and those that a church should not. In other words, Chemistry helps churches identify and focus on the right candidates for their search.

Here's how it works:

When a candidate submits their resume for your opening, we ask them to take a series of short assessments as part of the application process. These short, 25 yes/no assessments tell you what you need to know to identify the top potential fits for your church in four key areas: Theology, Culture/DNA of your church, Personality, and Ministry Proficiency for your specific opening.

We then analyze all of these questions and compare them with how your church has answered the same questions and then interview the most-likely matches. This screening process allows us to match you with those candidates with the best chance of being a long-term fit in your church.

We'd love to find out more about your church and tell you more about how our exclusive process can help you save time and money during your search. Our process takes pressure off of you and your team and at the same time, helps you find what you're really looking for: a healthy, long-term fit!

Let's talk. [Click this link to schedule a free thirty minute online video](#) call to tell us more about what you're searching for and how we might be able to help you find better candidates, faster.

Or, if you have questions or thoughts on anything presented here, please contact Matt Steen, VP of Candidate Relations at Matt.Steen@ChemistryStaffing.com or visit ChemistryStaffing.com.



Chemistry Staffing helps churches and potential staff members make healthy connections. Our process has one goal: a long-term, healthy fit for both the church and the staff member. Great things happen when the right leadership is in place in a local church... lives are changed and churches thrive.