

Reason to consider a
Policy of Not Hiring Church Members.

The following is my opinion and recommendation for your consideration.

Many churches have a long history of hiring church members or paying church members for their services. Churches can often share examples when doing so was effective for both the employee and church. As a Transitional Pastor and Consultant I have encountered far more problems than benefits with this practice. It is my recommendation that churches adopt a policy to not hire or pay church members. Here is why.

1. Churches tend to lack the mechanisms to effectively supervise employees. This problem is then amplified when a church member is an employee.
 - a. It is hard for church members charged with supervision to critique a friend.
 - b. If the job changes, or the employee's skills decline, it is difficult to make adjustments.
2. The Pastoral relationship can be compromised, as the lines between supervising an employee and pastoring become complicated and indistinct.
3. The lines between paid time and volunteer time are often blurred, leading the employee to have feelings of entitlement.
4. Member-Employee can have unrealistic expectations of the church and become disillusioned when the church fails to meet these expectations.
5. In those cases when a Member-Employee needs to be removed from their position they often lose their faith community. Additionally this can create rifts in the congregation around those who agree and disagree with the removal,
6. Often the church Member-Employee struggles with the change in how other church members view them and their time. Their identity as a church member is replaced with the identity as a church employee even when they are not acting in their paid role. The Member-Employee loses their ability to be a member.
 - a. The Member-Employee can experience discrimination in that they only were able to secure the position because of their status as a member.
 - b. As pay is part of the annual budget approved by the congregation some congregants may feel resentment towards the Member-Employee who in their estimation is overpaid.

Reason to consider a
Policy of Not Hiring Church Members.

The following is my opinion and recommendation for your consideration.

7. To avoid conflicts of interest, the abuse of authority, or the perception of either, the Member-Employee should lose the ability to have any significant leadership role.
8. Hiring an outside person often brings a new skill set and point of view to the congregation they would have been absent otherwise.

It is my recommendation that as a congregation you should institute clear language within the bylaws or Policy and Procedure stating that Church Members are not eligible for employment or to receive compensation for services. You may consider a Grandfather clause for current employees who are members.

Counter Arguments:

Here are 4 counter arguments against the above recommendation:

1. Excluding Members from employment shrinks the pool of candidates and may exclude the most qualified person from the job.
2. There may be positions where the numbers of hours needed to do the job exceed what is a reasonable expectation for a volunteer.
3. Officers (like the treasure) have a greater risk and liability as they may face individual legal consequences for their actions on behalf of the organization; based on this risk and liability, compensation is then appropriate, fair, and ethical.
4. Members who have been inactive may become active once employed by the church, and create a greater sense of belonging that are more closely tied to the mission of the church.

Thanks for taking the time to consider my opinion.

Pastor Chris Hart