

Selecting the Church Planting Leader

See Chapter 15 in Global Church Planting – Biblical Principles and Best Practices (Ott and Wilson 2011)

Good selection is based on prayer, spiritual discernment and objective assessment. There is no substitute for spiritual discernment. We must not forget that God chose the first church planters when he told the elders in Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas, and he did this while they were praying (perhaps about the Gentile harvest).

What dangers should be avoided?

The first danger is of course not knowing what kind of church planter is needed: apostolic or pastoral, lay or theologically-trained. Here are some additional questions to develop a profile.

- Does the candidate have a clear call? How is that evident?
- What gifts are needed of the church planting team leader (others may be present in team)?
- What family and character traits are essential?
- What skills or competencies are needed?
- Is the church planter compatible with the sending association or organization?

Another danger is setting standards too low, especially in the areas of character, basic gifts needed, family health, spousal support, doctrinal compatibility, and leadership ability.

Setting unrealistically high or culturally inappropriate standards is equally dangerous. Missionaries have done this and, as a result, failed to pass transfer leadership to local believers. Doctrinal soundness does not mean church planters need a theological degree.

Another danger is using a deficient means of assessment. Most interviews only bring out a candidate's intentions, ideas and goals. They do not measure character or competence. Behavioral interviews bring out previous achievements that forecast areas of strength and weakness. Recommendations address character and family issues. Most church planters are assessed using a combination of these means. However, the Bible says that church leaders should be tested first (1 Tim. 3:6). If a candidate has never started a small group or a new ministry, it would be wise to encourage him to do so in his local church before being sent to start a church in another place.

Most church planter assessment tools are built for pastoral church planters. We have done some preliminary work adapting a profile of competencies to the apostolic church planter. This is in

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the process of testing and there are cultural elements involved so careful discernment must be used applying it to another context. It is offered only as an example:

1. Clear Sense of God's Call
2. Strong Marriage and Spousal Support
3. Godly Character
4. Movement Compatibility (The candidate "fits" the association he will be working with).
5. Visionary Leadership Skills
6. Starting and Gathering Skills
7. Cross-Cultural Communication Skills
8. Evangelistic Skills
9. Discipling Skills
10. Equipping Skills
11. Team Building Skills
12. Empowering and releasing skills
13. Group and Leader Multiplication Skills
14. Knowledge of Cross-Cultural Church Planting
15. Emotional Intelligence
16. Cultural sensitivity and adaptability

Do you have questions about the relevance of any of these qualities to church planting in your context?

(For other aid in church planter selection and assessment see the first part of Ch. 15 and the end of Ch 17 in Ott and Wilson 2011.)

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A Selection Process

Selection processes are very cultural. Western societies tend to value individualism, entrepreneurial spirit and youth. They rely primarily on education, personal accomplishments and interviews. Collective societies rely more heavily on the wisdom of the elders, position in the group, and family ties. A combination of tools and approaches should be used to see the candidate from several perspectives:

Perspective to Consider	Tools	Strengths of this approach	Weakness of this approach
Self-presentation of candidate	Written questionnaire; personal interview	Part of church planting is projecting leadership and vision	This is overused in the USA. We rely too heavily on vision and image.
Candidate seen through eyes of spouse	Spousal interview; if couple is interviewed together, the same questions can be asked of both spouses and comparisons made.	This is a window in the spousal relationship – an essential component of success. Also it tests the candidate’s self-perception.	Spouses can coordinate their answers and some spouses will not be candid in public.
Candidate seen through the eyes of church leaders	Ask for the recommendation of the pastor and board of elders. Including the elders will make it more official.	Since the church will be asked to prayer and support the church planter, they should shall any serious reservations.	Usually these references are very general and don’t help much with “ministry fit.”
Candidate seen through the eyes of people he/she works with.	360-degree references. Talk by phone to someone over the candidate, under the candidate and two peers who work with the candidate.	This gives a broad and balances perspective. Ask pointed questions seeking weaknesses as well as strengths.	The names must be given by the candidate. If he/she is unable or unwilling to do so that is a sign to hold back.
Candidate’s track record. “You will know them by their fruit.”	Resumé and Behavioral Interview. Two to five people interview the candidate comparing needed competencies with past accomplishments.	This is the most telling approach in most cases. Competencies are evaluated based on prior behavior rather than good intentions.	Several people are required to minimize subjectivity and increase discernment. Hard to pull off. Training needed.

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What steps could be used?

Selection is a biblical principle. It is recognizing God's call and preparation of the worker. The process of selection is cultural. We have included approaches from several contexts. It is important for trainers to develop a process that draws out an accurate reflection of the candidate's call, strengths, weaknesses and preparation for the task.

Gather information

Gather as much information as possible in writing before interviewing the candidate. Recommendations should come from a pastor as well as other people with a good reputation.

The most ancient and tested means of assessment is real life experience. The leader of one of the fastest growing church movements in Latin America explained how they select their church planters. Potential planters are asked to gather a team and develop a home group through personal evangelism. Some never succeed; others take a while and finally make it; still others thrive and come back for help because the group has outgrown its meeting place. Those are the leaders that are tapped and helped to start other small groups and gather them in a bigger rental facility.

We recommend that the candidate assess himself and that his spouse or best friend does the same. Their perspective will be valuable.

A written questionnaire can be sent to the candidate. If married, both partners should respond without consulting with each other. In the appendix you will see some questions that could be used.

Conduct an interview

Build a team to conduct the interview. Find a group of mature and discerning believers who understand church planting. They will ask questions about the candidate's past experiences and achievements to discern his strengths and weaknesses (behavioral interview). Use several counselors who are able to ask questions about past behavior rather than ideas and intentions.

Use the profile you have adapted to the kind of church planter you will be training. Obviously if you are looking for a pastoral church planter you would include preaching and pastoral gifts. If the church planter will be bi-vocational you may want to include the competency of designing and implementing a business plan.

Each member of the assessment team writes down a score from 1 to 10 for each of the competencies during the interview. Under 5 would be a weakness and 7 and more would be a strength. If the level of ability is average (between 5 and 7) more questions should be asked to see if this is a disguised weakness or an undeveloped strength.

Seek agreement

The lead assessor asks the candidate (and spouse if one is present) to step aside at the end of the interview and compiles the scores given by the members of the team. They discuss any discrepancies and come to agreement on a score in that area. Afterwards they discuss the candidate's aptitude to

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engage in church planting **at this time**. Differentiate between essential competencies and helpful one. Some skills and experience can come on-the-job. Emphasize character, marriage, gifting and calling. Sometimes one character or family issue is enough to disqualify a person until it is dealt with convincingly. Other competencies (like church planting knowledge) can be developed as the candidate prepares for ministry.

Make a recommendation

If the candidate has some major weaknesses for church planting, those should become evident during the interview. The candidate and interviewers should come to the same conclusion. However, the results of the interview are not only *pass or fail*. Sometimes a recommendation is made that the candidate gain more experience in a certain area before starting a new church planting effort. The recommendation can also be that the candidate can be placed under the care of an experienced church planter for one to two years. The mature pastor or church planter must be able and willing to coach the novice and create learning experiences through an internship.

Reflection and Review:

What competencies are needed for church planting in your part of the world?

Using the list below develop your own church planter profile. Consider the list we have included above and the discussion in (For other aid in church planter selection and assessment see the first part of Ch. 15 and the end of Ch 17 in Ott and Wilson 2011.)

What knowledge is needed?

What spiritual qualities are necessary?

What personal qualifications are essential (personality, marriage, family)?

What gifts are absolutely essential?

What skills or abilities are important?

What else will help a church planter be successful?

How would you recognize God's call on someone's life?

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Other Resources

Elliot, Steve. 2003. *EFCA Church Planter Assessment Training*. Minneapolis: EFCA.

Elliot, Steve and Gene Wilson. 2007. *EFCA Cross-Cultural Church Planter Assessment Profile*. Minneapolis: EFCA.

Grady, Dick and Glenn Kendall. 1992. Seven keys to effective church planting. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28:364-370 (Study based on 100 effective cross-cultural church planters).

Ridley, Charles, R. 1998 *Facilitator's manual of training for selection interview*.

_____. 1998. *How to select church planters*. Pasadena, Fuller Evangelistic Association.

Appendix:

Here are some questions that could be used (from EFCA preliminary interview).

1. Over the last six months, describe two ways your call to church planting has been confirmed by others.
2. How have you processed your plans with your current church and/or recent church and with the team you will be working with?
3. Are you and your wife in agreement about being a church planting leadership family? If yes, how did you come to that conclusion? If not, what are the areas of concern that either of you have?
4. Think about a time in the last year when you worked together as a couple on a ministry project. What roles did each of you play and what were the results? Mention any conflict that may have resulted.
5. Describe your practice of personal spiritual disciplines within the last seven days including prayer, Bible reading and study, fasting, journaling, etc.
6. Write out your personal mission statement. Add a sentence or two that describe examples of how you have personally lived out this statement within the last 1-3 years.
7. What qualities/abilities do you have that will make you successful as a church planter?
8. What is it about you that will provide the biggest challenges to you as a church planter?

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9. Describe the five most interesting and compelling characteristics of the church you would like to plant after it has been in existence for 3-5 years.
10. Think about a time when you were able to translate a personal vision for ministry into reality. Outline the process you followed and describe the team that you built to accomplish your vision.
11. List all the businesses, ministries or other endeavors you have started from scratch.
12. Give an example of a need in your community outside of the church context where you mobilized people to help meet that need. What steps did you take to meet that need?
13. List the first names of people you have personally introduced to faith in Christ within the last three years.
14. Tell about a group effort you spearheaded in which the goal was to help pre-Christians come to a better understanding of who Jesus is.
15. Give an example of someone you were able to help progress from one level of spiritual maturity to the next. Describe what you did in coaching or mentoring that person to help him/her grow.
16. Describe a time from within the last two years when you recruited others for a job, task or ministry including how you helped equip them to be successful.
19. Describe your most successful team-building experience. What have been the results?
20. Describe a time when you were able to lead a group of people through a multiplication process so that two or more groups were produced.
21. What have you done to develop ministry skills that will enhance your church planting ministry?
22. What specific experience, relationship or failure has resulted in your biggest disappointment in ministry? Describe how you have dealt with that disappointment.
23. Describe a time when you prepared someone to take over a work or ministry responsibility and then supported them as moved forward with it.
24. Give an example of how you adapted your approach or ministry so that it would be better received by people from a different culture. How difficult was that for you?