

Creating a Strong Culture in Your Church Staff with Life.Church Directional Leader Jerry Hurley

We sat down live on Facebook with Jerry Hurley—Jerry has served on the Life.Church Directional Leadership Team (a team of three who help guide the church and serve our pastor, Craig Groeschel) for almost twenty years. He's lead everything "staff development" on our team and has been a pioneer in creating a strong, healthy culture for Life.Church staff.

Below find show notes from our time with Jerry and links to further resources that will help you build up the culture in your church.

What is a strong culture and why is it important?

- Culture is the expression of the values that are really important to us, expressed day-to-day in how we interact with each other and focused toward the mission God's called us to.
- One way to think of culture is to think of fish in an aquarium. Culture is the water that we're swimming in; it's all around us and determines the overall atmosphere of our mission, attitude, and health.
- Every church, business, and family has a culture whether we like it or not. Even if you haven't intentionally created a specific culture, every organization has one. Do you like the culture you currently have?

How is a healthy culture different from a happy culture?

- Happy cultures prioritize comfort over the mission.
- Happiness should be the by-product of a healthy culture, not the purpose of culture.
- Culture should create fulfilled team members over happy ones.

What are "aligning values" and which ones have been the most beneficial to creating the unique culture at Life.Church?

- Aligning values are beliefs that help staff members calibrate their lives to the mission the church.
- They help keep the passion and energy of staff in sync with Life.Church, and they help staff know what behaviors to pursue.
- Some of these values are more important than others.

- The most important aligning value is “We will honor Christ and His Church with integrity”—if we don’t have integrity, nothing else we do matters.
- Second most important aligning value is “We will do anything short of sin to reach people who don’t know Christ.”

How do you keep aligning values in front of the staff?

- Know that every decision we make is going to reinforce our culture or detract from it.
- A healthy culture gives us permission to make the right decision.
- Use physical and digital signage to keep values in front of the team every day.
- Make values part of every team meeting, one-on-one, and all-staff talk.
- Make values part of your performance review. Modeling cultural values is part of being a great team member.

What is [Develop.me](#) and how do we use it at Life.Church?

- [Develop.me](#) is our performance review and goal-tracking tool, and we offer it for free to other churches.
- The app measure two kinds of goals to help team members grow: the objective measures of our ministry and the values that are important to Life.Church.
- We understand that we need to get things done but *how we get things done* is equally important.

How do I start intentionally shaping my church’s culture?

- First step is to understand who you are and what the vision for your ministry is.
- Next, find the values that uniquely matter to your ministry.
- Author Patrick Lencioni identifies four kinds of values:
 - Core values: essential values that we will fight to keep
 - Behavioral values: values that guide how team members act
 - Aspirational values: values that we hope to embody
 - Accidental values: aspects of our culture that creep in without us noticing
- Look at your best leaders and volunteers, and write down the attributes they all share.

Which of Life.Church’s aligning values is Jerry’s favorite?

- “We will do anything short of sin to reach people who don’t know Christ”
- Allows our team to use innovation and creativity to share the gospel.

What is a book that Jerry recommends on building a strong culture?

- The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business by Patrick Lencioni

How often should leaders talk about culture and values?

- Every conversation and decision needs to be conducted through the lens of your aligning values. Even if you don't explicitly say "We are now going to talk about a core value," they can inform every conversation.
- A healthy culture comes from diligence.
- We can't let our cultures be distracted by the latest fads. Plan out a solid system and stick with it.

Listener Questions:

How do you change the current culture from what it is to what it should be?

- First, clearly articulate where you are and where you want to go.
- Understand that leaders cannot change culture on their own.
- Realize that not everybody on your team will want to follow on this new path.
- Not every great person is meant to be a part of your team, and not every great person is meant to be a part of your team forever. Be willing to potentially lose people who aren't passionately sold-out to your new values as you create them.

What's an effective way to create culture for a mostly volunteer staff?

- Help them understand the values that drive us—talk about values and share stories that reinforce them every chance you get. A huddle before a service is a great time to reinforce culture.
- Develop leadership-oriented volunteers in the same way as paid staff.

- **What's the very first thing someone should do to establish great culture?**
- Understand what is important to those in leadership above you and what their vision is.
- Make sure that everything you do aligns with that vision.

How do you differentiate between staff development and leadership development?

- There is no real distinction between staff development and leadership development at Life.Church. We see everyone as a ‘leader’ even if they don’t have any direct reports, so they are able to access all the same growth opportunities.
- Spiritual and business sides of churches should not be distinct entities.
- All growth is spiritual growth.
- The better we understand ourselves, the better we can carry out what Christ has called us to do.
- People grow the most “in the game,” by jumping in and doing what they do every day.

What are some key words or phrases that one would hear in a healthy culture?

- Laughter and fun
- Words of gratitude and affirmation
- Healthy conflict
- Team members giving and receiving feedback

How do we measure our cultural health?

- Feedback helps Life.Church stay on track culturally.
- You need to know the condition of your team, so do anything you can to get an accurate pulse—send surveys, ask for feedback, take assessments that gauge organizational health.
- Ask questions to understand what’s going on.
- Be willing to confront and accept the hard truth without getting offended, then work to correct it.