

7 Leader Care Questions Boards Can Ask

Leading a Christ-centered church or ministry is a high and holy calling. But often it is also lonely, and loneliness can come with a cost. When a ministry CEO or lead pastor feels he or she is trapped in isolation—real or perceived, self-inflicted or not—the risk of burnout, dropout, and even tragic breaches of trust increases with every passing day.

Church and ministry boards are not powerless bystanders. [*Leader care is ministry care.*](#) Just as Aaron and Hur supported the arms of Moses to enable Joshua and the Israelites to carry out their mission at Rephidim (Ex. 17:8-16), so a God-honoring board can lift the arms of its senior leader and be a catalyst for the daily and long-term flourishing of their entire organization.

Below are seven questions that members of a board (or their approved leader care committee) might ask their organization's senior leader in a staggered fashion (to avoid a possibly overwhelming intensity) at appropriate intervals (at least annually):

1. What are your biggest prayers right now, and how can we join in praying for you?

This sounds so basic, but how often is this question asked in a safe setting in anticipation of a real answer? How often is it asked at all? Try it. Know that it may take several attempts. But when a leader feels like the board member is truly interested and intends to follow up in prayer... get ready. This simple question alone can be a game-changer for proactive leader care.

2. What has God been teaching you during your worship or devotional times?

A senior leader needs to take personal responsibility for investing in his or her relationship with Jesus and for guarding his or her heart (Prov. 4:23). If a ministry leader isn't spending consistent time in the Word with prayer and reflection, or if he or she isn't engaging in community worship and fellowship with other believers, then it is only a matter of time before your organization will reap the results of that untended spirit. A governing board is not meant to be a personal accountability group, but the organization needs to ensure its leader is pursuing spiritual nourishment.

3. How can we help you have margin in your schedule for health check-ups?

Senior pastors and CEO's blessed with the wisdom, energy, and gifts to lead your ministry may sometimes seem superhuman. But they are not. They should take appropriate time for their own health. Check-ups with doctors, dentists, and other healthcare practitioners (perhaps including licensed counselors or other wellness providers) will go a long way to supporting the leader's physical and mental health—as well as the long-term health of the ministry

4. How are we doing honoring your time at home? (Bonus question, if applicable: What do your spouse and kids think?)

Our culture prizes busyness. While some leaders may struggle with sloth, more often the scale is tipped the other direction. Senior leaders are particularly prone to working long hours, especially if they wrongly assume (in deed, if not in word) that the weight of a ministry's "success" is on their shoulders. Some leaders may even idolize work. But healthy senior leaders take appropriate time off from work each week. Their work schedules and travel obligations are reasonable, appropriate, and sustainable, particularly in light of the leader's personal and family responsibilities. A board asking this question may relieve some of the pressure a leader could be self-imposing or feeling from the surrounding world. It can move the needle toward a more God-honoring and healthy balance for the leader and the ministry.

5. What did you do with your vacation days this year?

Again, it should not be a badge of honor to work without ceasing. Cared-for senior leaders should know they can schedule regular vacation time each year—with minimal work-related interruptions. Boards set the tone here.

6. What is your favorite "third place"?

A "third place" is a spot for community outside the home and workplace. While governing boards (or leader-care committees) are not personal accountability groups, they should understand that their church or ministry senior leader needs someone with whom he or she can regularly decompress and be accountable. This question can help boards make sure the senior leader is taking the initiative to seek out healthy, supportive personal relationships outside of the organization. It also opens the door to check in and see if the leader needs any help finding a trusted spiritual leader (again, outside the organization) who can serve as a mentor, counselor, or helpful sounding-board. A leader who tries to remain an island will eventually sink.

7. If we were to help make a way for you to experience a spiritual retreat (or similar experience) this year, what would be a few of your top choices?

At appropriate intervals, a board should consider offering the leader specific opportunities for extended personal rest and spiritual growth. This is different from a professional development or networking conference. It could be a retreat, a sabbatical, or a similar experience. A key here is that the leader is not being sent to teach, preach, or administrate! He or she is going to learn, to rest, and to grow.

We have too many examples in our society of what happens when a leader's health erodes. But imagine where Christian leaders could take their ministries if they were leading from positions of holistic strength. Imagine the possibilities for life-transformation in our communities!

The time is now for a [*new standard of care*](#) for leaders, and boards can take a next step by asking thoughtful questions like those above proactively and with intentionality.