

Appendix D: HR Best Practices 101

There is an old joke told by clergy when talking to one another: “This job would be easy were it not for the people.” Actually, multiple professions have a similar joke pertaining to their work, which is why God created personnel committees. Whether your church calls those who serve Personnel, Administration, or Human Resources, the work is the same and its purpose is,

to ensure all legal and ecclesiastical statutes are complied with,

to establish policies and procedures for fair and equitable employment, and

to guide, support, and facilitate a healthy work environment that leads to effective ministry.

In order to fulfill its purpose, personnel committees craft written documents for Session approval and implement Session established, human resources best practices. Personnel policy guidelines are listed below, or you can contact the presbytery office for sample personnel policy templates your church can adapt for its use. In general, a good personnel policy will outline the following:

Employment

The Personnel policy should outline employment practices for hiring and firing that define exempt vs. non-exempt categories, full vs. part-time, and that comply with all EEO, immigration, ADA, and *Book of Order* provisions. Session is responsible for employment and termination of all lay employees as well as temporary pastoral positions. The congregation, in consultation with the presbytery, is responsible for all permanent pastoral positions.

Benefits

The personnel policy should review the benefits offered by the church, including (1) any medical insurance or retirement savings programs offered, (2) vacation and holidays, (3) how sick leave, personal time off, and family leave are accrued, and (4) how evaluations are conducted and by whom. Additional categories may be added, including conflict of interest, alcohol and drug use, sexual misconduct prevention, weapons in the workplace, allowance of flex-time, and/or sabbaticals.

Job Descriptions

The personnel policy should require job descriptions for all paid positions that specify the job title, position’s purpose, accountability, and responsibilities and that briefly describe how the person is expected to relate to others in the church (i.e. other staff, Session, and congregation) as well as how the person will be evaluated. Emphasis when creating a job description should be on writing clear and concise statements that describe observable actions using active verbs!

Annual Review

An annual review process should be required and include both performance evaluations and adequacy of compensation.

Performance Evaluations

Performance evaluation for staff: Evaluations are for the purpose of guiding professional development and/or realigning staff conduct toward more effective service. Therefore, evaluations should seek to avoid a punitive tone in favor of coaching, guidance, and clarity of what is expected. The staff person should have input into the evaluation so that it is a two-way conversation. Ordinarily, performance evaluations are conducted by the head of staff or the staff person's direct supervisor. Personnel committee members may be asked to participate in the gathering of input for staff evaluations, although this is not a universal practice in churches. All evaluations should be filed with the Clerk of Session for the employee's confidential file.

Performance evaluation for pastor: It is recommended that Session's read Jill Hudson's *When Better Isn't Enough: Evaluation Tools for the 21st Century* (Alban Books, 2004), which suggests pastor-specific model for performance evaluation.

Compensation

Adequacy of compensation for staff: Compensation for all lay staff is approved by the Session and should be commensurate with comparable positions in the local economy.

Adequacy of compensation for ministers: Compensation for permanent pastoral positions is set by the congregation, while compensation for temporary pastoral positions is set by the Session. Presbytery sets the minimum terms of call for effective salary, which is currently set at \$52,000 per year for a full-time position. "Effective salary" is generally defined as the sum of cash salary + housing, though see the next page for a complete definition of a pastor's terms of call and preferred ways to tax-advantage the terms of call.

As part of the terms of call, ministers are allowed a housing allowance that is tax-exempt. The housing allowance includes one's mortgage or rental costs, housing related fees (e.g. title search, HOA, etc.), repairs and upgrades, and the costs of living in the home such as utilities, furnishings, yard costs but excluding food and domestic services. "The responsibility for accurate estimates of the housing allowance and payment of applicable taxes rests solely with the employee" (*Guidelines for Session Personnel Committees*, page 10). All Board of Pension and IRS requirements must be followed.

Complaints / Grievances

Complaints or grievances should be directed to the employee's direct supervisor or the head of staff, as applicable, understanding that "the personnel committee not interfere with the ongoing supervision that the head of staff provides...[working] in a supportive and counseling relationship with the head of staff and with other staff as needed." (*Guidelines, ibid.*, page 1.) Clarity about the role of the personnel committee when there is a complaint is essential to avoid the common occurrence of "triangling" in the church. The personnel committee should avoid allowing itself to be drawn into a triangle between the head of staff and employee as its primary concern is upholding the legal, policy and mission rubrics described below.

When a complaint is about the head of staff or cannot be solved in conversation with the head of staff, the employee has the right to formalize the complaint in writing to the personnel committee. As a first step, the committee should assess the grievance according to the following rubrics:

- Is the grievance a matter whose response is dictated by legal statutes (e.g. an accusation of harassment or bullying)?
- Is the grievance a matter related to Session policies and procedures?
- Is the grievance a matter related to Session defined mission, vision, objectives and goals?

If the answer to any of the above questions is yes, the personnel committee shall respond so that all employees abide by all legal statutes, Session approved policies and procedures, and Session approved mission, vision, objectives, and goals as appropriate. Grievances that allege transgression of legal statutes shall be referred to Session for action, and Session shall appoint an Investigative Committee per *Book of Order* procedures as outlined in the *Rules of Discipline*.

If the answer to all of the above questions is no, the personnel committee shall respond by coaching the employee on possible means to solve their own problem, with an emphasis on direct, open and healthy communication. The personnel committee may also respond by coaching the head of staff on ways to facilitate effective communication and management of the employee, while remaining careful to focus on process over content. (That is, focus attention on proper communication and decision-making rather than taking sides in a debate.)

The Personnel Ministry Team shall communicate their actions to the employee and to the head of staff, both in writing and in-person, and keep record of their action.