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“Five Things Church Planters Wished Their Supervisors Knew”  
J. D. Payne

Over the past several years, I have worked with church planters in a variety of capacities. After wondering for sometime what were the most critical issues facing North American church planters, I decided to conduct an informal study. I surveyed 190 individuals who were involved in church planting at a variety of levels. Of the nearly forty U. S. states, four Canadian provinces, and thirteen different denominations and parachurch organizations represented, numerous issues were mentioned. This article addresses and responds to the five issues most commonly listed.

After reflecting on these responses, I realized that many church planters would like for their supervisors to be familiar with what is on their hearts, but may be uncomfortable making this revelation. The western concept of superior/inferior interpersonal interactions has taught us that inferiors do not open themselves up too much to their superiors and superiors do not empathize too much with their inferiors. This article reveals what church planters are hesitant to reveal and what supervisors are reluctant to ask.

***“I am very concerned about my personal finances.”***

According to many North American church planters, the most critical issue they are facing is related to finances, both finances related to start-up costs (i.e., rent, sound equipment, fliers) and personal finances. Of these two different areas, the latter was the most addressed area, as well as the most emotionally charged. For example, I heard from a church planter in California who noted: “I am so gracious for the financial support that

I am receiving from [denominational entity], but it is just too little and too short. My net income from [denominational entity], is less than \$1000 per month, and in Northern California where I live you cannot get a one-bedroom apartment with this amount. It is very tough for someone like myself with a family.” Echoing similar thoughts, a church planter from Utah noted: “My personal finances have been a struggle. What I am paid to be a church planter is not enough to survive in the area in which I am to minister. I am full time with the mission board so I cannot get a second job. I cannot afford to live in the area/housing of which I minister, which is a hindrance.”

Some church planters noted that the limited duration of their financial support was a stressor that affected their overall thoughts and practices in the field. A church planter in New York commented that, “we are supported, at this point, far better than the majority of planters in this area. However, the duration of support being three to five years is simply not long enough for most plants.” In a face-to-face conversation with a church planter from Indiana, I was informed that his funding would soon cease, and though he loathed the thought of reaching people with the gospel so that the new church could financially support him; nevertheless, he confessed that the financial reality was always in the back of his mind.

**Suggested options.** Knowing that personal finances are a major concern among church planters, what are some possible ways to deal with the issue? First, church and parachurch leaders must be clear about the present realities regarding finances in church planting. Many of us are visionaries and would make excellent salespeople. We are involved in recruitment, and casting visions that only God can fulfill. In conjunction with our vision casting, many times we fail to remember the Scriptural principles about being

wise about reality. We need to cast the visions, but we need to be honest with our potential church planters. Church planting is not some romantic concept, but rather intensive spiritual warfare. We need to be honest with people to say, “Hey, your funding will expire in X number of years, it is very likely in our context that the planted church will not have enough money to pay you a full-time salary. You need to plan accordingly if this situation becomes a reality for you.”

Second, supervisors should offer help with financial planning. Not only should we assist the church planters and their families in adjusting to a new culture (assuming they are moving to a different place to plant), but also we need to make sure that their overall church planting strategy includes a personal financial plan.

Third, supervisors need to encourage bivocational and tentmaking options. In Acts 18, we see the Apostle Paul supporting himself as a tentmaker in Corinth. In Acts 20, he reminds the Ephesian elders how he worked with his hands to be an example among them, and how he even supported other team members’ needs. We must move away from the unbiblical notion that “secular” work is bad, and that only those who can devote themselves to being a “professional clergyman,” are the individuals who are going to be the most effective and legitimate. Quoting Philip Butler, founder of Intercristo, J. Christy Wilson wrote: “It is just as valid for missionaries to support themselves as it is to have churches supporting them financially.”<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, supervisors should consider developing some creative financial options. John Bailey a director of missions in Southwestern Ohio is part of an association of churches that provides groceries for their church planters. Bob Bailey a director of missions in Southeastern Indiana has recruited several Christian business owners to

provide jobs for church planters. The planters are able to work  $\frac{3}{4}$  time and receive health insurance, as well as the job flexibility to work directly on church planting related issues.

***“I am struggling with the necessary leadership for this church plant to work.”***

Church planters are having a difficult time locating helpful leadership and raising up effective leaders for the church planting work. Responses we received ranged from “How do I raise up indigenous leaders from the harvest?” to “How do I locate staff leadership?” The expectations of the supervisor should be tempered with this current issue. For example, different church planting teams will use different strategies depending on their resources. Church planters who begin with thirty or forty people should be held to a different level of accountability than the church planters who begin with few or no people. Aubrey Malphurs noted that the timeline as well as the immediate results are affected by whether the church planters use a cold start or a hot start in their strategy.<sup>2</sup>

**Suggested options.** This issue is a difficult issue to resolve for at least the reason that there are very few resources available that are related to leadership development and church planting. Again, if the church planters are attempting to raise indigenous leaders from the harvest (which they should be doing), the process will take longer than recruiting a worship or youth minister.

Supervisors can assist their church planters by locating and distributing resources found in many bookstores related to leadership development in the church. However, these works are usually addressed to church leaders working with other believers in an established ministry context. For the church planter who is working with individuals who have been believers for sometime and have some familiarity with church life, these types

of resources can be very helpful. The principles are fairly translatable from established context to a more established mission context.

For church planters who are working to raise church leaders from the harvest field, supervisors may wish to consider the following few excellent resources that begin with reaching lost people with the gospel and seeing them become church leaders. Bob Logan and Neil Cole have written, *Raising Leaders for the Harvest*.<sup>3</sup> This three-ring binder contains several pages of content, worksheets, and six audiocassettes related to leadership development. Dick Scoggins with the Fellowship of Church Planters and Frontiers has written *Building Effective Church Planting Teams: A Handbook for Team Leaders and Mentors* and *Leadership Training Guide*.<sup>4</sup> Also, Charles Brock's well-respected work, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey*, addresses church planting in general; however, many of the principles found in this work are directly related to raising indigenous leaders from the harvest.<sup>5</sup>

***“I am frustrated that so few established churches are involved in church planting.”***

Though there are over 400,000 churches in North America, the fact is that very few are involved in church planting. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination and one known for its emphasis on church planting, has less than five percent of its 42,000+ churches currently involved in this type of mission work. Church planters are in desperate need of partnership with established churches.

There are at least three general reasons as to why few North American churches are involved in church planting: ignorance, turfism, and lack of a Kingdom vision. First, few churches are involved in church planting because they simply lack any knowledge related to church planting and the value of church planting. Second, many churches

interpret church planting as an invasion of their “turf.” It is not uncommon to hear church leaders becoming very frustrated whenever they hear of a church planter in their area. This fear sometimes manifests itself through expressions such as, “We will reach these people here, you need to work elsewhere,” or “This is our ministry region, you will take people away from us.” Third, many churches suffer from a lack of a Kingdom vision. Many specific objections to church planting are linked to this general reason (e.g., it costs too much, the lost can come to our church). It can even be argued that turfism is also derived from this reason. Many churches, for various reasons beyond the topic of this article, find themselves in a maintenance mode, and are more concerned with survival than making disciples. Ironically, though many of these churches began as a result of the missionary advancement of the Church, the advancement has ended with them. A refocusing on the biblical perspective is crucial to overcoming this reason.

**Suggested options.** As a supervisor, if you are able to influence pastors to lead their churches to partner with church planters, please take advantage of this opportunity. Consider making the following suggestions. Churches interested in getting involved in church planting, should begin by examining the Scriptures to see how the Apostolic Church was involved in missionary work. Next, they should educate themselves as much as possible on the topic of church planting.<sup>6</sup> Third, they should get involved in church planting at any level. This involvement could be as simple as offering some building space to a church planting team to actually sending out their own church planting team. Other avenues for involvement include:

- Sending out missionaries (Acts 13:1-2)
- Prayer support
- Offer encouragement
- Serve as the “home church” with whom the church planters can identify

- Provide pastoral mentoring and accountability for the church planters
- Provide on-going training
- Provide resources and financial support
- Constantly recognize the church planting team before the whole congregation
- Allow for much flexibility remembering that missionaries will sometimes do “strange” (non-traditional?) things to reach people with the gospel
- Establish clear expectations for the relationship that exists between the team and the partnering church
- Recognize the legitimate nature of the team and their work

*“Please be patient with me at least until you understand my ministry context.”*

Whenever expectations exceed reality, frustration occurs. In some situations, individuals who were involved in church planting several years ago, or never involved in church planting are supervising church planters. Though I am sure there are many excellent, experienced, and seasoned supervisors working in North America, unfortunately there are still many who want to see their church planters do it the way they did it years ago. There are many who expect the same methodologies to produce the same results that were produced five, ten, and twenty years ago. One church planter responded by writing:

I have found that our . . . leaders desire to see churches like ours started, yet they do not understand the differences in a “postmodern” approach and the more model-driven “boomer” or “seeker” approach, nor do they fully understand emerging cultures or generations. This results in poor communication, suspect expectations, and an overall lack of vision and support for what we are doing. Even those who have made an attempt to understand emerging cultures do not live and work in these cultures, and therefore their understanding is limited to a sterile academic knowledge.

Church planters want their supervisors to know that the cultures have changed and so must the methodologies. There are many North Americans receptive to the gospel, however, the process of those folks coming to faith in Christ seems to be taking longer than the average length of time several years ago. The result is that it appears that

biblical church planting is taking longer than the time experienced by previous generations.<sup>7</sup>

Whenever money is involved in the supervisor/church planter relationships, several additional stressors come into existence. First, church planters feel the pressure of the need to “produce” results (bodies and offerings). Second, supervisors feel the pressure to hold the church planters accountable by requiring such results. After touring a Northwestern city with a denominational leader and hearing him describe the difficulty of reaching the area with the gospel, I asked him how he was able to resolve the tension between holding funded church planters accountable for results while understanding that the context would demand much time and initially slow growth. After a moment of silence, his response was that he was not certain how to do it, but that it had to be done.

He was correct. There is no easy answer to resolving this tension. Church planters and their supervisors need to keep communication lines open as they discuss this issue. It is my fear, however, that many supervisors (and church planters) are more satisfied with a church of large numbers of believers from other churches, than a small church consisting primarily of people who have come from the harvest.

Supervisors and church planters must work out the tension between the need to hold the church planters accountable for the work, and the need to have much understanding, freedom, flexibility, and patience from the supervisor to what the Spirit is doing.

**Suggested options.** One parachurch leader wrote: “The church planting ‘boom’ of the 80s and 90s has waned. We’re waiting for a whole new generation of planters to emerge which may mean whole new paradigms and models of what the church of the



future may look like.” Though books and articles can only increase knowledge, nevertheless, supervisors should read as much as they can regarding the changing cultural dynamics in North America in general, and read as much as they can regarding the people groups of their church planters, in particular. Aside from personal study, supervisors can make the effort once a month to spend a day with the church planters while in the field. This time should be taken to understand the planters, the people to whom they are ministering, and the contextual environment.

Also, care should be taken not to commit the prevalent fallacy of extracting methods from other contexts. For those with intellectual knowledge alone, great is the temptation to approach a church planter and expect the work to be like another church planter who is working among a similar people group on the other side of the city or country.

Again, church planters should be held accountable; however, the expectations of the supervisor should vary from planter to planter at the very least depending on context, resources involved, experience level, and people group. A one-size-fits-all approach to supervision is not wise and definitely not healthy for the church planters, their families, and the ministry in general.

***“My family is under an incredible amount of stress related to this church planting ministry.”***

A church planter in Washington wrote: “Church planting can be the worst thing that could ever happen to a family . . . . It is a shame that planters can be the very ones who turn those closest to him away from God.” Though this critical issue was one of the top five, it is easy to see how the other four issues cause this one to rise to the surface. If

the finances are limited and strained, tensions within the family will be present. Marriage counselors have noted for several years that issues related to finances have resulted in many marriage problems. If the church planters are working with few or no other leaders, family time will be limited. If there are no other churches involved in the work, sometimes the church planting family will begin to think that no one cares. This latter fact is especially true in areas where there are churches with abundant resources, multitudes of lost people, and no desire for church planting. If the expectations of the supervisors are greater than what the Spirit is doing, then the church planters will begin to experience a pressure, which in turn, will be carried over into the home.

Families sometimes struggle with culture shock particularly if they move to a new area. They feel lonely, especially if they come from a highly church area and are now working in an area where few strong Christian relationships exist. Supervisors need to be aware of the fact that the ministry is very stressful on the family. Though all ministry is stressful, church planting is even more stressful than most. Families entering into an established church have a sense of security, order, and certainty. In church planting, however, these three desired qualities of life are usually scarce.

**Suggested options.** Supervisors should accept the privilege of periodically checking in with the church planters' families. Remember the words of a Vineyard church planter: "Burning out for Jesus stinks, especially when it is not just the church planter who burns out but the wife and kids too." Inquire into their personal lives, how they are adjusting to the ministry, how the children are adjusting to a new school, and are the couples scheduling quality time for themselves. Take the church planters out for coffee. Have the families over to your home for a meal once a month. Take the families

out to a restaurant that they normally could not afford with their income. Challenge some of the families in your congregation to “adopt” a church planter’s family and thus assist them in adjusting to life in a new city. Create opportunities for the church planters’ wives to get together for a time of fellowship. Recruit some godly women in your church to befriend the wife. Give copies of Arnell Arn Tessoni’s book *Gentle Plantings: A Personal Journal for Church Planters’ Wives* to your church planters’ wives.<sup>8</sup>

Supervisors should make a commitment to a wholistic approach to church planting supervision. If the health of the families deteriorates, then the church planting ministries will likewise founder. There are numerous practical ways to encourage, strengthen, and assist the families. Rare is the church planter who will take the initiative to ask for personal/family help. Supervisors should be proactive and create an environment that will assist in the multiplication of churches in their areas.

## **Conclusion**

As someone who works with church planters, supervisors have a significant amount of influence in their lives. By taking time to understand their hearts, supervisors can be more effective in their own ministries while assisting church planters to be more effective in the field. In many North American cultures it is not appropriate for inferiors to share personal concerns with one’s superior. Neither is it appropriate for a superior to show empathy toward an inferior. Supervisors should take the initiative to deviate from the norm and make the opportunity to serve their church planters. Church planting is Kingdom business and the laws of corporate America breakdown in the Church. The example of the Savior should guide the work with church planters:

But Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and the men of high position exercise power over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many (Matt 20:25-28 (HCSB)).

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*J. D. Payne is a National Missionary with the North American Mission Board and serves as an Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Church Planting at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He can be contacted at [jpayne@sbts.edu](mailto:jpayne@sbts.edu).*

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<sup>1</sup>J. Christy Wilson, Jr. *Today's Tentmakers: Self-Support: An Alternative Model for Worldwide Witness* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979), 23.

<sup>2</sup>Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 166-70.

<sup>3</sup>Robert E. Logan and Neil Cole, *Raising Leaders for the Harvest* (Alta Loma, CA: Church Smart Resources, 1992-1995). I believe this resource is Logan's best work related to church planting, even surpassing his famous *Church Planter's Toolkit*. This resource can be obtained from Church Smart Resources 1-800-253-4276.

<sup>4</sup>Dick Scoggins, *Building Effective Church Planting Teams: A Handbook for Team Leaders and Mentors* (Middletown, RI: Fellowship of Church Planters, n.d.); and *Leadership Training Guide* (Pawtucket, RI: The Fellowship of Church Planters, n.d.). Both of these resources can be obtained from [www.dickscoggins.com](http://www.dickscoggins.com) or [www.fcpt.org](http://www.fcpt.org).

<sup>5</sup>Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994). This work can be order from [www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com).

<sup>6</sup>Aside from having church planters speak to them, churches can take advantage of three excellent resources: *The Church Planting Starter Kit* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2001), Rodney Harrison, *Seven Steps for Planting Churches: Partnering Church Edition*, Tom Cheyney, J. David Putman, and Van Sanders, eds. (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2004), Paul Becker and Mark Williams, *The Dynamic Daughter Church Planting Handbook*, Jim Carpenter, ed. (n.p.: Dynamic Church Planting International, 1999), and Robert E. Logan and Steven L. Ogne, *Churches Planting Churches: A Comprehensive Guide for Multiplying New Congregations* (Alta Loma, CA: CRM New Church Development, 1995). These resources can be obtained from the North American Mission Board, Customer Service 1-800-448-8032, Dynamic Church Planting International 1-800-255-0431, and Church Smart Resources 1-800-253-4276.

<sup>7</sup>I define biblical church planting as *evangelism* that results in congregationalization. Note the omission of transfer growth from this simple definition.

<sup>8</sup>Can be ordered from the Church Planter's Network, P.O. Box 924, Concordville, PA 19331, or 1-866-447-5268.