

THE DISCERNING LEADER:

EIGHT KEYS TO DISCERN THE RIGHT NEXT STEP

STEPHEN BLANDINO

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Truth From Falsehood

Assess: Can you share a time when you had to discern truth from a lie?

Insights and Ideas

Leadership comes with varying layers of complexity. The one thing those complexities have in common is the need to discern right from wrong, good from bad, and truth from falsehood.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul expounded on the gifts of the Spirit. He writes, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another *distinguishing between spirits*, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:7–11, emphasis added).

Discernment (or distinguishing between spirits) is the God-given ability to see and judge issues — and their source — through the lens of spiritual truth. The gift of discernment not only recognizes truth from lies, but it also recognizes the spiritual forces at work behind the issue.

You will encounter people and situations where discernment is essential. Leaders with the spiritual gift of discernment might handle these moments intuitively. For others, discernment will require more intentionality. The good news is, any leader can become more discerning in three ways:

1. **Study Scripture.** The best way to discern truth from falsehood is not to become more familiar with the lies, but to become more saturated with the truth. It has often been said that people who are trained to identify fake currency do not handle counterfeit bills. Instead, they work with the real thing. As a result, when they do handle a counterfeit bill, they immediately recognize it as a fake. The same principle applies when distinguishing truth from falsehood. The more you immerse yourself in the truth of Scripture, the more easily you’ll recognize a lie when it surfaces.
2. **Pray for *discernment*.** You may not have the spiritual gift of discernment, but that doesn’t mean you can’t ask God to make you a more discerning leader. Make discernment (and wisdom) a regular part of your prayer life.
3. **Welcome the *Holy Spirit*.** Even if the gift of discernment isn’t in you, the Spirit of discernment is. Ask the Holy Spirit to cultivate within you a greater discernment so you can recognize truth from lies and the spirit and motive at work behind leadership issues.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Do you feel like you have the spiritual gift of discernment? Why or why not?
2. When has the Lord given you clear discernment on an issue in leadership?
3. What would most help you become a more discerning leader?

Apply

Think about a leadership issue you are facing right now that requires discernment. Take some time to study the truth of Scripture, pray for discernment, and welcome the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life. Then come back to the leadership issue and determine what to do next.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Truth From Falsehood

Assess: Can you share a time when you had to discern truth from a lie?

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another *distinguishing between spirits*, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:7–11, emphasis added).

Discernment (or distinguishing between spirits) is the God-given ability to see and judge issues — and their _____ — through the lens of spiritual _____. The gift of discernment not only recognizes truth from lies, but it also recognizes the spiritual forces at work behind the issue.

Three ways to become more discerning:

1. *Study* _____. The more you immerse yourself in the truth of Scripture, the more easily you’ll recognize a lie.
2. *Pray for* _____. Ask God to make you a more discerning leader.
3. *Welcome the* _____. Even if the gift of discernment isn’t in you, the Spirit of discernment is.

Apply

Think about a leadership issue you are facing right now that requires discernment. Take some time to study the truth of Scripture, pray for discernment, and welcome the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life. Then come back to the leadership issue and determine what to do next.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning God's Voice

Team Review: What have you done since our last meeting to better discern truth from falsehood?

Assess: When was a time you knew you heard the voice of God?

Insights and Ideas

Spiritual leaders can glean insight from a wide variety of resources, whether it's books, mentors, classes, conferences, podcasts or any other number of helpful tools. However, spiritual leaders are first and foremost sensitive to the voice and direction of the Holy Spirit. The question is, how do you discern God's voice? A closer look at Scripture reveals three common ways God speaks:

1. *The truth of His Word.* Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

The word translated "dwell" means "to be at home in." In other words, God's Word should be a welcome member of our lives. In the same way family members speak freely to one another, God's Word, as a welcome member of your life, should be allowed to speak freely into your life.

2. The confirmation of circumstances. The Old Testament account of Gideon provides one of the most well-known stories of confirmation in Scripture. The Israelites were suffering oppression from the Midianites, and they cried out for relief from the Lord. God heard their prayers, and then He appeared to Gideon and told him to deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Midianites. Gideon hesitated, and before long, his hesitations turned into excuses. So, Gideon asked God for confirmation three times, and three times God used circumstances to confirm his call to Gideon (Judges 6:36–40).

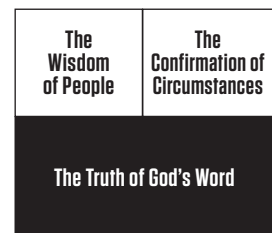
There's nothing wrong with asking God for confirmation. However, confirmation does not mean faith is no longer necessary. God confirms what you should do, but He doesn't remove the step of faith required to do it. God's confirmation proves to you what you should do. Your step of faith proves to God your willingness to do it.

3. The wisdom of His people. Proverbs 11:14 says, "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers."

We like to keep asking people for advice until we come across somebody who agrees with us, but the only place to find wise counsel is from wise people. God will speak to you, but He does so through people who walk with Him, and who walk in wisdom.

These three keys to hearing God's voice often work together, but they will never violate God's Word. In fact, God's Word is the foundation for discerning God's voice. The diagram at right illustrates it best.

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE



Reflect and Discuss

1. What is a passage of Scripture God has used to speak to you in a meaningful way?
2. What qualities do you look for in people from whom you seek wisdom?
3. How has God used circumstances in your life to confirm His voice?

Apply

In what area of your life or leadership do you need discernment? Which of the three keys above is missing in your discerning process? How can you seek them out in your life?

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning God's Voice

Assess: When was a time you knew you heard the voice of God?

Spiritual leaders are first and foremost sensitive to the voice and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Three common ways God speaks:

1. *The _____ of His _____.*

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Colossians 3:16).

2. *The _____ of _____.* See the story of Gideon (Judges 6:36–40).

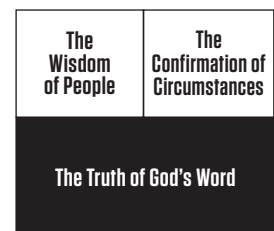
There’s nothing wrong with asking God for confirmation. However, confirmation does not mean faith is no longer necessary. God confirms what you should do, but He doesn’t remove the step of faith required to do it. God’s _____ proves to you what you should do. Your step of _____ proves to God your willingness to do it.

3. *The _____ of His _____.*

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers” (Proverbs 11:14).

These three keys to hearing God’s voice often work together, but they will never violate God’s Word. In fact, God’s Word is the foundation for discerning God’s voice. The diagram at right illustrates it best.

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE



Apply

In what area of your life or leadership do you need discernment? Which of the three keys above is missing in your discerning process? How can you seek them out in your life?

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Your Vocation

Team Review: What steps have you taken to better discern the voice of God?

Assess: When you've made transitions in your vocation, what process did you use to choose a new path?

Insights and Ideas

Making changes in your career can be stressful. Nobody wants to make a bad choice. Yet very few people have developed a good filter for discerning a good job from the right job. One reason for this confusion is because we usually focus on the job we want, rather than the person God designed us to be.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Notice, we are God's handiwork. He deposited within us certain gifts, passions and traits. Those resources are the tools we use to "do good works." And God, in His wisdom, designed us to do those good works, which He prepared for us before we were even born. The question each of us must answer is this: What are *my* good works?

The following 10 questions will help you discern your good works so you can choose the right vocation:

1. What pain in my past might God want to redeem for a greater purpose?
2. Where have I experienced the greatest success and the greatest failure?
3. What seeds or destiny markers has God planted in my life that might give clues to His purpose for my life?
4. With what kind of personality did God wire me?
5. In what areas do I have the greatest amount of knowledge?
6. What are my natural abilities and skills?
7. What are my spiritual gifts?
8. What am I most passionate about?
9. What are my deepest core values?
10. What do I sense God has called me to do?

These 10 questions will yield wonderful insights into who God made you to be and what God has prepared you to do. Once you've answered each question, look for two or three common threads woven throughout your responses. Those common threads will give you clues about what God has most likely equipped you to do.

After identifying those common threads, ask yourself, *What kind of role would best allow me to do what God has called and equipped me to do?* The more your role matches your unique design, the greater fulfillment and impact you (and your church or organization) will experience.

Reflect and Discuss

1. In which of the 10 questions do you have the greatest amount of clarity, and in which do you have the least?
2. What else does God use to help us discern the right vocation?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how well does your current role match how God equipped you?

Apply

Take time to answer each of the 10 questions and uncover common threads. What kind of role would best match how God has uniquely equipped you? What steps do you need to take to begin moving toward that role? Understand, these steps may take an extended period of time, and that's OK. God often cultivates character and other qualities before moving us into the primary role where we will make our greatest contribution.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Your Vocation

Assess: When you've made transitions in your vocation, what process did you use to choose a new path?

We usually focus on the job we want, rather than the person God has designed us to be.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Ten questions to discern your vocation:

1. What _____ in my past might God want to redeem for a greater purpose?
2. Where have I experienced the greatest _____ and the greatest _____?
3. What seeds or _____ has God planted in my life that might give clues to His purpose for my life?
4. With what kind of _____ did God wire me?
5. In what areas do I have the greatest amount of _____?
6. What are my natural _____ and _____?
7. What are my spiritual _____?
8. What am I most _____ about?
9. What are my deepest core _____?
10. What do I sense God has _____ me to do?

Look for common threads woven throughout your responses. Then ask yourself, *What kind of role would best allow me to do what God has called and equipped me to do?*

Apply

Take time to answer each of the 10 questions and uncover common threads. What kind of role would best match how God has uniquely equipped you? What steps do you need to take to begin moving toward that role? Understand, these steps may take an extended period of time, and that's OK. God often cultivates character and other qualities before moving us into the primary role where we will make our greatest contribution.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning the Best Decision

Team Review: What did you learn about yourself as you reflected on the 10 questions from the last session?

Assess: What is the most important strategy for you when it comes to making good decisions?

Insights and Ideas

Leadership and decision making go hand in hand. If you don't like making decisions, you'll paralyze whatever you've been entrusted to lead. The question is, how do you discern the *best* decision? Discernment in decision making begins with four keys:

1. God. The leadership of the Holy Spirit is essential in decision making. James said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5). Too often, we make God the ending place of decision making when, in fact, He has the discernment you desperately need. To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *Have I sought the Lord regarding this decision?*
2. DNA. Every church and organization has a specific DNA made up of vision, mission, values, strategy and culture. The key is to ensure your decisions support that DNA so you don't create sideways energy in your organization. To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *Is this decision aligned with our DNA, and will it create momentum in the right direction?*
3. Research. The greater the decision, the greater the amount of homework you likely need to do. Jesus said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30).

Research focuses on three things: diagnosis, data, and discovery. First, research helps you *diagnose* the issue and gain understanding of the variables at play in the situation. Second, research embraces external *data* (such as demographic or psychographic information) and internal metrics (such as performance, trends and statistics) to help you understand your environment and the current results you are getting. Finally, research has a *discovery* component that helps you search for the best practices to move forward. To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *What specific research do I need to do to diagnose my situation, secure the right data and discover the best steps forward?*

4. Perspective. A fourth key to discernment is to glean fresh perspective from other people. Those people might include members of the congregation, leaders, customers, coaches or consultants. Outside perspective helps you discover your blind spots and see your situation through fresh eyes. To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *To whom do I need to listen so that I can make a better decision?*

Reflect and Discuss

1. What's the hardest part of decision making for you?
2. Which of the four decision-making ingredients is your strength? Your weakness?
3. What other insights can a leader embrace to discern the best decision?

Apply

Consider a decision you are facing right now, applying the four decision-making ingredients to it: God, DNA, research and perspective. After applying this filter to the process, what would be the best decision for your specific situation?

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning the Best Decision

Assess: What is the most important strategy for you when it comes to making good decisions?

Leadership and decision making go hand in hand. The question is, how do you discern the *best* decision?

Four keys to discerning the best decision:

1. _____.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *Have I sought the Lord regarding this decision?*

2. _____.

To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *Is this decision aligned with our DNA, and will it create momentum in the right direction?*

3. _____.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish’” (Luke 14:28–30).

Research focuses on three things: _____,
_____, and _____.

To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *What specific research do I need to do to diagnose my situation, secure the right data and discover the best steps forward?*

4. _____.

To discern the best decision, ask yourself, *To whom do I need to listen so that I can make a better decision?*

Apply

Consider a decision you are facing right now, applying the four decision-making ingredients to it: God, DNA, research and perspective. After applying this filter to the process, what would be the best decision for your specific situation?

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning When to Move Forward

Team Review: How did the four ingredients to better decision making help you process a decision you are facing right now?

Assess: When have you made a leadership decision that proved to be the right decision but the wrong time?

Insights and Ideas

Leaders are rarely short on ideas. They see opportunity and possibility, and they're often ready to jump at a moment's notice. The problem we usually face is timing. When do we act, and when do we wait?

Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." The careful consideration of timing is actually an expression of wise leadership. The wrong timing will introduce you to a series of unanticipated outcomes and unintended consequences. The right timing will increase your credibility as well as buy-in from others. There are four tests that will help you increase your discernment about the right time to move forward:

1. *The resource test.* When you want to move forward with an idea or a strategy, it will require resources to pull it off. Money, time and energy are necessary to gain traction. You might have all of these resources, but the larger question is whether these resources are already tapped out by other initiatives. Even though your idea might be golden, you may need to wait a few weeks or months so that your budget, staff, volunteers and schedules are not unnecessarily taxed. A loss of margin rarely creates momentum.
2. *The sleep test.* Ideas are always exciting the moment they are born. It's when you bring those ideas home that you start to lose sleep. So, before you jump prematurely, sleep on the idea *first*. If the idea continues to increase in energy after multiple nights of sleep, pay attention to it. Premature action tends to lead to regret, but thoughtful consideration helps you make wiser decisions.
3. *The impact test.* Take into consideration the kind of impact you can have now versus later. Our excitement makes us want to launch a new idea now (and sometimes we should). But in most cases, a few extra days (or weeks) of planning and preparation will deliver a far better result. In other words, more time usually produces greater impact.
4. *The acceptance test.* Finally, the best way to determine whether the time is right to move forward is to bounce your idea off of a trusted inner circle. If your inner circle raises some red flags, you should probably pause, reflect and reevaluate. Their acceptance of the idea is critical to the long-term success of the idea. The right timing can be the variable that influences their acceptance of the idea more than any other.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How have you used one of the four tests to gain greater discernment on moving forward?
2. Which of the four tests are you most tempted to ignore? Why?
3. What other tests would help you better determine the right time to move forward?

Apply

What is a decision, idea or opportunity you are considering now? Apply the four tests to your situation, and then determine when the best time to move forward might be.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning When to Move Forward

Assess: When have you made a leadership decision that proved to be the right decision but the wrong time?

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Four tests to discern the right time to move forward:

1. *The _____ test.*

When you want to move forward with an idea or a strategy, it will require resources to pull it off. Money, time and energy are necessary to gain traction. You might have all of these resources, but the larger question is whether these resources are already tapped out by other initiatives.

2. *The _____ test.*

Ideas are always exciting the moment they are born. It's when you bring those ideas home that you start to lose sleep. So, before you jump prematurely, sleep on the idea *first*.

3. *The _____ test.*

Our excitement makes us want to launch a new idea now (and sometimes we should). But in most cases, a few extra days (or weeks) of planning and preparation will deliver a far better result.

4. *The _____ test.*

The best way to determine whether the time is right to move forward is to bounce your idea off of a trusted inner circle. If your inner circle raises some red flags, you should probably pause, reflect and reevaluate. Their acceptance of the idea is critical to the long-term success of the idea.

Apply

What is a decision, idea or opportunity you are considering now? Apply the four tests to your situation, and then determine when the best time to move forward might be.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Healthy Relationships

Team Review: How did the four tests help you process the timing of an idea or decision?

Assess: Has there ever been a time in your life when you thought a relationship was good for you, but it ended up negatively impacting your life?

Insights and Ideas

It has often been said that your life is the average of the five people with whom you most closely associate. We love that statement when we're parenting our kids. We're not so fond of it when it comes to our own lives. So, as a leader, how do you discern which relationships are healthy? Begin by asking three important questions:

1. *Can I trust this relationship?* Proverbs 18:24 warns us, "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." When trust is missing in a relationship, you risk going down a path that "comes to ruin." And because leaders have influence that impacts people beyond themselves, it's essential they surround themselves with trustworthy advisors. Trust is a mark of a healthy relationship.
2. *Does this relationship draw out the best in me?* Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that, "Bad company corrupts good character." The opposite is also true — good company reinforces good character. There are some people who have a unique disposition that draws everything ugly out of you. Sometimes this is very intentional, but other times a person's attitude, personality or demeanor sucks the life out of you. If you don't like the person you are becoming when you're with a certain individual, that's probably not a healthy relationship.
3. *Does this relationship make me better?* Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Healthy relationships are a two-way street of adding value to one another. This doesn't mean "make me better" relationships are a never-ending discourse of fun times and encouraging words. Yes, there are plenty of those moments. But "make me better" relationships also challenge us, correct us and sharpen us. We need people in our lives who are coaches, not just cheerleaders, and mentors, not just motivators.

As ministry leaders, we don't have the luxury of spending all our time with life-giving people. We work with hurting people, and hurting people often project their pain and problems our way as they seek counsel and ask for prayer. Discerning healthy relationships doesn't mean forsaking your call to minister to hurting people. However, if unhealthy people consume most of your time, you'll become mentally and emotionally depleted. Make space for relationships that restore you, replenish you and recharge you.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What person in your life consistently draws out the best in you?
2. What are the qualities of a relationship that make you better?
3. What would it look like for you to be more intentional about developing healthy relationships?

Apply

Do a quick audit on your relationships. Are they trustworthy? Do they draw out the best in you? Are they making you better? Based on your responses, do you need to approach any of these relationships differently? Remember, if you don't manage relationships wisely, the unhealthy relationships may become a prophecy of the person you will one day become.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Healthy Relationships

Assess: Has there ever been a time in your life when you thought a relationship was good for you, but it ended up negatively impacting your life?

It has often been said that your life is the average of the five people with whom you most closely associate.

Three questions to discern healthy relationships:

1. *Can I _____ this relationship?*

“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

2. *Does this relationship draw out the _____ in me?*

“Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

3. *Does this relationship make me _____?*

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

Make-me-better relationships challenge us, correct us, and sharpen us. We need people in our lives who are coaches, not just cheerleaders, and mentors, not just motivators.

We don’t have the luxury of spending all our time with life-giving people. We work with hurting people, and hurting people often project their pain and problems our way as they seek counsel and ask for prayer. Discerning healthy relationships doesn’t mean forsaking your call to minister to hurting people. However, if unhealthy people consume most of your time, you’ll become mentally and emotionally depleted. Make space for relationships that restore you, replenish you and recharge you.

Apply

Do a quick audit on your relationships. Are they trustworthy? Do they draw out the best in you? Are they making you better? Based on your responses, do you need to approach any of these relationships differently? Remember, if you don’t manage relationships wisely, the unhealthy relationships may become a prophecy of the person you will one day become.



The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Team-Building Decisions

Team Review: What did your relationship audit reveal about your relationships?

Assess: What's one of the most difficult decisions you've had to make with a team you have led?

Insights and Ideas

Some of the hardest decisions a leader has to make involve building, leading and empowering a team. Discernment is critical in these moments because our team decisions have a ripple effect on team dynamics, direction and productivity.

Unfortunately, we're often so desperate for team members that we make rash team decisions. I think Jesus understood this truth. Luke 6:12–16 says, "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

Prayer is certainly a critical piece to the team-building puzzle. We need the Lord's direction when we're making such important decisions. I would also suggest you consider these six qualities when discerning whether to recruit or promote a team member:

1. *Character*. Character is a non-negotiable. You want to determine whether the person models integrity, the fruit of the Spirit, and a spiritually mature depth of character.
2. *Competence*. Does the person have the abilities and skills to do the job? At the very least, does he or she have the capacity to learn any skills that are lacking?
3. *Chemistry*. This is one of the most important qualities in a team member. Yet it may be the easiest to overlook. Does the person *fit* the team? If there's awkwardness, tension or misaligned values, this issue will disrupt the unity of the team.
4. *Core values*. Do the person's values align with your team's values? Values go to the deepest part of a person's life. If there isn't resonance in values, there will be a constant tug of war with you as the leader.
5. *Calling*. You want people who feel a calling to a place and a mission, not a paycheck. Does this person exhibit a genuine passion for the vision of your church or organization?
6. *Commitment*. Some people are more concerned about titles, perks, benefits and privileges. You're looking for people who have a do-what-it-takes attitude.

Not only are these great qualities for recruiting team members, but they also provide insight on training and promoting team members.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What questions can you ask potential team members to help you discern whether they have the six qualities listed above?
2. What do these six qualities look like with a staff member versus a volunteer?
3. How can we incorporate these six qualities into our recruitment, promotion, and training processes with staff and volunteers?

Apply

Do a quick assessment to determine how your current team members align with the six qualities above, as well as the kind of training you need to provide moving forward. Also, what steps do you need to take to use these six keys in recruiting future team members and promoting existing team members?

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Team-Building Decisions

Assess: What's one of the most difficult decisions you've had to make with a team you have led?

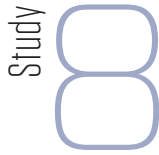
"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor" (Luke 6:12–16).

Discerning the qualities in a potential team member:

1. _____. You want to determine whether the person models integrity, the fruit of the Spirit and a spiritually mature depth of character.
2. _____. Does the person have the abilities and skills to do the job?
3. _____. Does the person *fit* the team?
4. _____. Does the person's values align with your team's values?
5. _____. You want people who feel called to a place and a mission, not a paycheck. Does this person exhibit a genuine passion for the vision of your church or organization?
6. _____. Some people are more concerned about the titles, perks, benefits and privileges. You're looking for people who have a do-what-it-takes attitude.

Apply

Do a quick assessment to determine how your current team members align with the six qualities above, as well as the kind of training you need to provide moving forward. Also, what steps do you need to take to use these six keys in recruiting future team members and promoting existing team members?



The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Opportunity From Distraction

Team Review: What steps have you taken to improve discernment in your team-building process?

Assess: How do you know when a new initiative is an opportunity versus a distraction?

Insights and Ideas

Every church and organization has opportunities knocking at the door. The challenge is knowing whether an opportunity is really a distraction in disguise. Proverbs 4:25–26 reminds us, “Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.”

While this passage certainly has personal application, I believe it can also challenge our thinking on an organizational level. To help you discern between an opportunity and a distraction, consider these seven questions:

1. *Does it align with your core competencies?* An organization’s core competencies (strengths, passions, vision and mission) are the leverage points for opportunity. If there is misalignment, the organization will work twice as hard but deliver only half the results.
2. *Does it present growth or impact potential?* Growth potential might include things like guests, attendance or finances. Impact potential might include life change, community transformation or meeting a need.
3. *Do you have sustainable resource capacity?* Every opportunity comes with two costs: start-up and sustainability. You must determine whether you have the time, money and people to launch *and* sustain the initiative. Sometimes the better question isn’t, “Do we have the resources?” but rather, “What will we do to get the resources?”
4. *Will it put a hole below the waterline?* It’s one thing to take a risk that puts a hole in the side of the boat. It’s an entirely different thing to take a risk that puts a hole below the waterline. Seek counsel. Do your research. Take smaller risks to determine the viability of the opportunity.
5. *Will it compete with existing strategies?* When internal competition arises, it divides the resources mentioned above (time, money and people). Division often leads to distraction. Figure out what you do best, and leverage your resource pool to deliver the greatest growth and impact.
6. *Are you confusing opportunities with partnerships?* Instead of reinventing the wheel, maybe you should create a win-win situation that leverages the strengths of your organization and a partnering organization.
7. *Are you overreaching?* Organizational expert Jim Collins writes, “When an organization grows beyond its ability to fill its key seats with the right people, it has set itself up for a fall. Although complacency and resistance to change remain dangers to any successful enterprise, overreaching better captures how the mighty fall.”

Overreaching happens when organizational success leads us to believe we are invincible. As a result, the focused discipline that brought initial success is exchanged for an uncontrolled appetite for more. Opportunity and focus should coexist.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When was a time an opportunity turned out to be a distraction in disguise?
2. Which of the seven keys to discerning the difference between a distraction and an opportunity is most challenging to you?
3. Do you believe there is a risk of the seven questions squelching every opportunity? Why or why not? If so, how do you mitigate this risk without getting distracted?

Apply

Use the seven questions to help you discern whether an opportunity before you is really a distraction.

The Discerning Leader: Eight Keys to Discern the Right Next Step

Discerning Opportunity From Distraction

Assess: How do you know when a new initiative is an opportunity versus a distraction?

“Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways” (Proverbs 4:25–26).

Discerning between an opportunity and a distraction:

1. *Does it align with your core _____?* An organization’s core competencies are the leverage points for opportunity.
2. *Does it present _____ or _____ potential?* Growth potential might include things like guests, attendance or finances. Impact potential might include life change, community transformation or meeting a need.
3. *Do you have sustainable _____ capacity?* Every opportunity comes with two costs: start-up costs and sustainability costs. Sometimes the better question isn’t, “Do we have the resources?” but rather, “What will we do to get the resources?”
4. *Will it put a _____ below the waterline?* It’s one thing to take a risk that puts a hole in the side of the boat. It’s an entirely different thing to take a risk that puts a hole below the waterline.
5. *Will it _____ with existing strategies?* When internal competition arises, it divides the resources (time, money and people). Division often leads to distraction.
6. *Are you confusing opportunities with _____?* Instead of reinventing the wheel, partner with another organization.
7. *Are you _____?* Overreaching happens when organizational success leads us to believe we are invincible. As a result, the focused discipline that brought initial success is exchanged for an uncontrolled appetite for more.

Apply

Use the seven questions to help you discern whether an opportunity before you is really a distraction.