

Steve Shaffer: An Administrator Transitions to Executive Pastor

Northwoods Community Church

A Case Study by Larry G. Hoyle

“Dad was an entrepreneur. He had 18 different businesses he was running at one time. When I was 16 and my brother was 17, dad asked us to run one of the restaurants - hire a staff, everything. Dad said, ‘At the end of the year, whatever is there put toward your educational fund.’ This was my training on the business side.”¹

Steve Shaffer, Executive Pastor of Northwoods Community Church in Peoria, Illinois, learned very early in life how to run a business and handle the administrative side of running a restaurant. He watched his father run several businesses at one time and was allowed to make business decisions along with his brother that would influence his adult life. Years later he would serve as the church administrator for Northwoods Community Church only to move to the position of executive pastor two years later. How would he transition from the position of church administrator to executive pastor? How would Steve’s new role play in Peoria?

A New Church for Peoria

In 1988 Cal Rychener listened to a radio program where Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, explained to James Dobson about the importance of building churches that would attract the “unchurched” instead of a church that moved Christians from one church to another. “Bill speaking about that gave me a picture of what I always thought church ought to be,” Rychener said. “He was the first who articulated a vision that grabbed my heart.”² Bill Hybels vision was an inspiration to Cal Rychener and would ultimately lead to a new church in Peoria.

This vision would grow during 1989 as Cal Rychener would become part of a group at Grace Evangelical Mennonite Church in Morton, Illinois who would pray and strategize about starting a new church in the Peoria, Illinois area. 32,000 phone calls were made to interview people about starting a new church.

¹ Steve Shaffer, interview by Larry G Hoyle, "Topic," May 7, 2008, Telephone.

² *Willow Creek Community Church - Transforming Lives*, (accessed June 6, 2008); available from <http://www.willowcreek.com/transforminglives/detail.asp?storyID=218>.

Peoria was named after the Peoria Indian tribe. The city is the largest on the Illinois River and the county seat of Peoria County.³ “Peoria has become famous as the representation of the average American city because of its demographics and its perceived mainstream Midwestern culture.”⁴ “The question ‘Will it play in Peoria?’ has now become a metaphor for whether something appeals to the American mainstream public, and Peoria is often used as a test market for new products, services, and public policy polling.”⁵

The 2000 United States census revealed a population of 112,936⁶ for the city of Peoria. A 2006 estimate of the population of Peoria demonstrated a small growth of only 171 people in six years with a total estimated population of 113,107.⁷ Northwoods Community Church is located in the northern suburban area of Peoria in zip code zone 61615. Below is the 2000 United States Census data for the City of Peoria and the specific zip code where Northwoods resides.

City of Peoria⁸	Zip Code 61615⁹	
Racial Makeup:		
White	69.3%	82.5%
African American	24.8%	10.3%
Native American	.2%	
Asian	2.3%	3.8%
Hispanic/Latin	2.5%	1.7%
Other	.9%	1.7%
Population	112,936	18,411
Median Income Per Household	\$36,397	\$51,548
Median Age	34	36.6
Population Below Poverty Line	18.8%	6.3%

As the 2000 U.S. census shows the population immediately surrounding the church has less racial diversity than the city of Peoria itself. Median income for zip code 61615 is \$15,000 greater and the population considered below the poverty line is one-third that of the city of Peoria.

³ *Wikipedia - Peoria*, (accessed June 14, 2008); available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peoria,_Illinois.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Peoria, II U.S Census Quickfacts*, (2008, accessed September 6, 2008); available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/17/1759000.html>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Zip Skinny*, (accessed June 2, 2008); available from <http://zipskinny.com/index.php?zip=61615&x=35&y=11>.

A Church is Born

With the knowledge collected from the telephone survey of 32,000 individuals in the Peoria area on March 25, 1990 a new church start began at the Christian Center in North Peoria. The church was called Northwoods Community Church with Cal Rychener serving as the Senior Pastor. Over 300 people attended Northwoods on that first Sunday. Northwoods is part of the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches with its corporate offices in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The Fellowship of Evangelical Churches traces their roots back to Anabaptist, then Amish, and then Mennonite roots. They were formally known as the Evangelical Mennonite Church. “With a rapidly changing constituency the Evangelical Mennonite Church voted on August 2, 2003 to be known as the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches. In so doing, the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FEC) affirmed its core values anchored in Evangelical theology and Anabaptist distinctives, and its mission to help the local church accomplish the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.”¹⁰

The enthusiasm of a church for those who did not currently attend church and a church that desired to accomplish the Great Commission became a reality almost two years after Cal Rychener heard the radio program with Bill Hybels and James Dobson. “At Northwoods, we specifically design our weekend services to meet the needs of "spiritual seekers" - those who are investigating the claims of Christianity, rather than to the already convinced. We work hard to provide seekers with a safe atmosphere from which to carry on their search into biblical truth.”¹¹

After a great start of 300 people on the first Sunday, Northwoods averaged 282 in worship attendance for 1990.¹² A mission statement was crafted in that first year. “To make fully devoted followers of Christ out of unchurched people in the Peoria area.”¹³ In its first year of existence Northwoods Community Church became a member of the Willow Creek Association. “According to Rychener, the Willow Creek Association has provided his church with strategic teaching, connections with other pastors, and inspiration.”¹⁴ Senior Pastor Cal Rychener’s church would now have a strong connection to the association led by the man whose words inspired him two years earlier, Bill Hybels. On September 9, 1990 the first eleven people were baptized and it was just the beginning of growth.

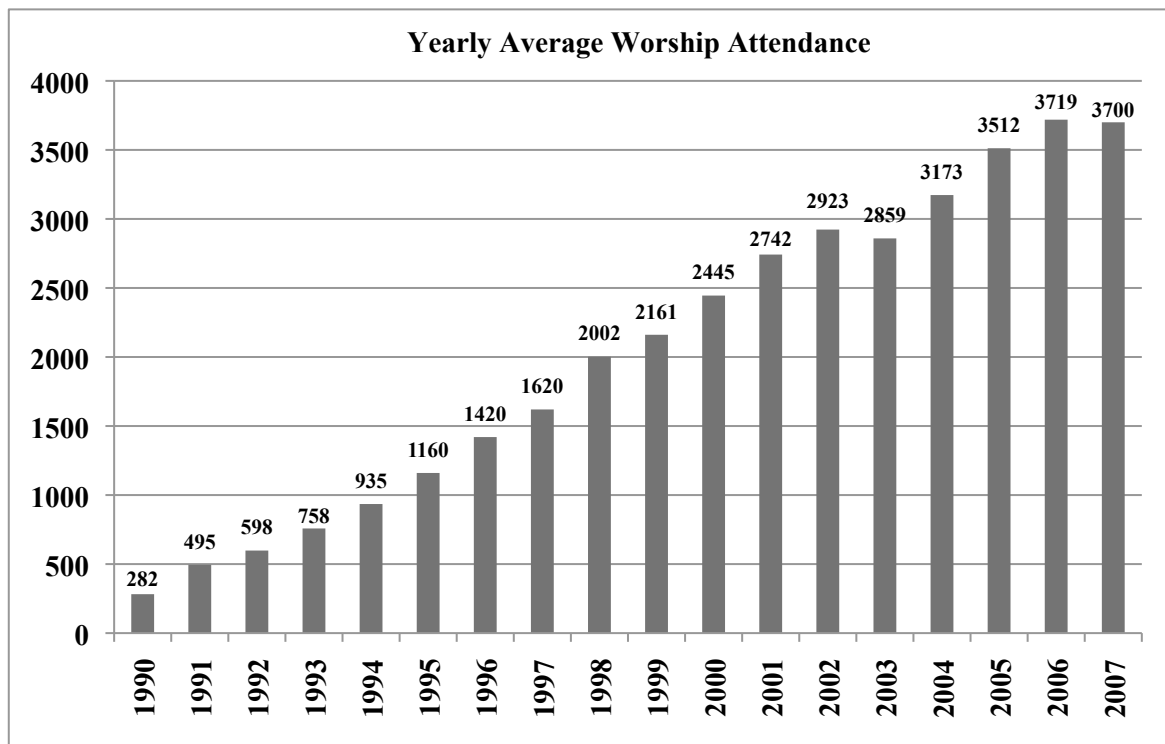
¹⁰ *History of Fellowship of Evangelical Churches*, (accessed September 19, 2008); available from http://fecministries.org/about_fec_files/history.html.

¹¹ “Northwoods Community Church History,” (2007), 1.

¹² *Northwoods History: 1989 - 2007*, (accessed June 6, 2008); available from <http://www.nwoods.org/Story.asp?storyid=30>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Willow Creek Community Church - Transforming Lives*.



Northwoods Community Church average worship attendance¹⁵

Field of Dreams

By 1991 there already existed the felt need for a more permanent home for Northwoods Community Church. Research and study were made on forty acres of land at the corner of Allen and Wilhelm Road. In eight weeks \$135,000 was raised to pay for the land. On December 20, 1991 the church closed on the land that would be known as “The Field of Dreams.”¹⁶

In 1989, actor Kevin Costner starred in the movie entitled, “Field of Dreams” in the role of Ray Kinsella. “Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella hears a voice in his corn field tell him, ‘If you build it, he will come.’ He interprets this message as an instruction to build a baseball field on his farm, upon which appear the ghosts of Shoeless Joe Jackson and the other seven Chicago White Sox players banned from the game for throwing the 1919 World Series.”¹⁷ Ray Kinsella built his “Field of Dreams” as the voice had encouraged him. Soon the banned Chicago White Sox players would appear and play baseball one

¹⁵ *Northwoods History: 1989 - 2007*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Plot Summary for Field of Dreams*, (accessed September 13, 2008); available from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097351/plotsummary>.

more time on the field built in the middle of a cornfield. Two years after the movie Northwood Community Church would call their new land purchase “Field of Dreams.” Just as Kevin Costner’s role of Ray Kinsella built the baseball field so individuals he was looking forward to meeting would come, Northwoods wanted to build on their “Field of Dreams” so they could look forward to meeting new individuals that did not attend church anywhere else.

During 1993 worship attendance continued to climb placing more pressure to build as soon as possible on the “Field of Dreams.” As a temporary solution, the church moved its services to Notre Dame High School and then a short time later the church purchased Jay’s Truck Driving School as the interim home of Northwoods worship services and staff offices until their forty acre site was ready. Renovation of the truck dock began in July 1993 and the services were moved to those temporary facilities on September 19, 1993.

While meeting at Jay’s Truck Driving School, now Northwoods Community Church, construction was underway on the phase one project on their “Field of Dreams.” The dream became a reality the weekend of November 29-30, 1997 when the first services were held at their new home. 2,148 people were in attendance that weekend. But the tremendous growth would not end. It was just the beginning. Almost four years after moving to their “Field of Dreams,” Northwoods would open a new worship center on September 12, 2001. 3,382 were in attendance that day. Attendance growth would also lead to growth in church staff. By 2007 Northwoods had twelve pastors, twenty-nine full time staff and thirty-four part-time staff.

Church Leadership

Two governing bodies assist and guide the staff depending upon the nature of the perceived need. The elders of the church oversee the vision and purpose of the church. They deal with discipline issues and are the sounding board for the senior pastor. There is also a board of directors in place that guide in legal, financial and property issues.

As the church grew, there also grew a diversity of opinions of how the church should be led. The Willow Creek Association website reveals the significant lesson learned by Cal Rychener.

There is no way one can lead a large congregation if the leader is so concerned about gaining every individual’s approval. “I was an extreme people pleaser,” Rychener said. “Any time people were not cheering for me, that one percent would govern what I would do.” One of Rychener’s greatest lessons is playing to the audience of One. “That’s been very liberating for me to realize that I don’t have to beat myself up for who I am not, and I can celebrate who I am, and not feel like I have to apologize for that,” Rychener said.¹⁸

¹⁸ Willow Creek Community Church - Transforming Lives.

Pressures to meet the needs of everyone in the congregation can be overwhelming on a pastor of a church of any size. That feeling of being overwhelmed is magnified in a larger church where there are more people to please. The intensity can be greater for a pastor that is a “people pleaser” as Cal Rychener admitted about himself.

A leader is the steward of an organization, a responsibility not to be handed off to someone else, Rychener said. ‘I would say to leaders out there, step up and lead,’ Rychener said. ‘If God has wired you up to be a leader, yes love your people, serve your people, but take them to where God wants them to go, and don’t apologize for doing that because that’s part of the gift he has given you.’”¹⁹

Ultimate leadership and vision for Cal Rychener falls on the senior pastor. But as a local church grows, the senior pastor must depend upon the leadership skills and gifts of others.

Steve Shaffer’s Early Years

At the age of 16, Steve Shaffer and his 17 year old brother were in charge of running one of their father’s eighteen businesses. It was a restaurant and the two of them would perform all the functions of a restaurant manager. They were responsible for payroll, balancing the books, hiring staff and making necessary orders for the business. At the age of 16 when many of that age would learn how to cook hamburgers as a trainee at McDonalds, Steve was learning the principals of administration for a restaurant. Business and administration were lessons taught early in his life. “He (dad) would watch over our shoulder, but at the end of the day it was our responsibility.”²⁰

Steve’s ability to work with business and administration is a reflection of his childhood. Even though he ran a restaurant at age 16, this ability to deal with the business world goes back to an age earlier than that. “The whole business side really comes from my experience growing up with my dad. I remember at age 10 going around the restaurant Leo Café giving coffee to everybody. Dad had three used car lots. He taught us how to go to the car auctions, buy our cars, make them better, sell them, then go back to the auction and get something nicer.”²¹

But Steve’s early years were not just about business. While growing up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Christian service would also take a priority in his life. Eventually, as Steve explains, his ministry service at a young age led to his call to ministry. “Growing up, I was involved in youth ministry. We didn’t really have a youth pastor so I was asked to serve – I taught Bible studies and I really enjoyed that. From the age of 12 to 19 I would serve about 14 weeks during the summer at our church camp called Miracle Camp. While being involved with those types of things, I felt a nudge from God to go into ministry.”²²

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Shaffer.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Steve attended Fort Wayne Bible College, now called Taylor University. He graduated with a major in Bible and Christian education and a minor in camping, administration, and drama. Upon graduation from college he worked at Fairview Missionary Church in Angola, Indiana as a youth pastor. In the three years (1982-1985) that he served there, attendance grew from 150 to 700.

For the next nine years, Steve served as the associate pastor for Evangelical Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio. Having the responsibility for the entire Christian education program of the church sharpened his teaching skills, but also his people management skills. In the latter part of 1993, Cal Rychener called Steve to see if he would serve as the sub-ministries director at Northwoods Community Church.

Cal and Steve knew each other since they were children. “We knew each other growing up. We were from the same conference and lived 50 miles apart. As kids we were on Bible quiz teams against one another. He worked at the same summer camp where I worked. Even as a young kid he was very energetic, outgoing, so we knew the personalities of one another. I was a doer, a thinker.”²³ From childhood through the teenage years, their paths would cross.

But their paths would cross in other ways as they grew into adulthood. When Steve served as the associate pastor at Evangelical Mennonite Church of Archbold, Ohio, he was working at Cal’s home church. Prior to Cal Rychener’s arrival at Northwoods Community Church, he was the senior pastor of Steve’s home church in Grabill, Indiana. After experiencing many ministry intersections, when asked to serve at Northwoods Steve would accept the position and the two friends from the past would now minister together in the same church. Both men grew up in small church environments, only to find themselves serving together in a fast growing, large church.

Steve Shaffer Joins the Northwood Team

Steve started the position of Sub-Ministries Director in January of 1994 almost four years after Northwoods Community Church had its first worship service. Steve was the sixth minister hired to Northwoods’ staff as attendance averaged 758 in worship the prior year. His task was to bring organization and structure to the volunteer teams. Some of those teams included children ministries, adult ministries, family ministries, and outreach ministries. To bring needed order and direction for this part of the organization, Steve hired directors for children, students, and adults.

In 1996 the board of directors of Northwoods Community Church asked Steve to work on a master plan for a forty acre plot of land purchased by the church in 1991, “the Field of Dreams”. It was located in a growing and expanding suburb of the Peoria area. Because Steve demonstrated his ability to organize and manage, the elders agreed to change Steve’s title. He became the church administrator. Steve acknowledged the reason

²³ Ibid.

for the change when he said, “I come from an administrative background. My spiritual gifts are in administration and organization as well.”²⁴

Steve built a “Field of Dreams Team” to develop and anticipate what the future of the forty acres would look like. This team, led by Steve, visited 30 churches in 5 different states from as far east as New York and as far west as California. The overall goal was to take the current church, at the time running 1420 in worship, and master plan for the day they would average 9000 in worship.

Inclusive of being the lead for the designing of the “Field of Dreams” as the church administrator, Steve oversaw the finances, bookstore, greeters/ushers, special events, baptism, and communion. “The administrative side really had to do with staff development, financial development (can financially we sustain the growth), then facility development. Plus, I still ran the largest group of volunteers (the First Impressions Team). I worked with a lot of volunteers but now I needed to work with a lot of staff.”²⁵ Steve found himself in the administrative world of finances, property, support staff and volunteers.

The Move to Executive Pastor

Northwoods Community Church hired its first executive pastor in October 1992. This first executive pastor also served as the Small Group Director simultaneously. As the church grew the realization occurred that the first executive pastor was good at managing a small group of staff but the larger the staff the more difficulty the executive pastor experienced. In August 1995 he was asked to step down from the executive pastor position and serve as the Small Group Director only. He did this until he departed from Northwoods staff in February 1996.

The second executive pastor in Northwoods history was hired in August 1995. His term was short lived when he departed from staff in August 1996. It was discovered that the second executive pastor desired to be the senior pastor of Northwoods and replace Cal Rychener. The search for the replacement for the second executive pastor did not need to go very far. Steve Shaffer was asked to become the third executive pastor for Northwoods. Cal knew Steve’s organizational skills and his ability to work with staff. But, Cal also knew that Steve did not have a desire to become the senior pastor at Northwoods like Steve’s predecessor. Steve’s ministry performance from 1994 to 1996 at Northwoods and his long term friendship with Cal created the trust relationship needed between an executive pastor and a senior pastor.

“I was not sure if I wanted to jump in myself and wear that title. I have never wanted to be the senior pastor, I wanted to take a vision and make it happen with the gifts God has given to me. Cal said he needed someone as the executive pastor who isn’t interested in taking over his job. I am desirous to run a good

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

organized church in a way to allow the ministry to flourish, the church to grow and to implement the vision that Cal has.”²⁶

Steve accepted the executive pastor position and began his new duties on January 1, 1997. He still held the responsibilities that were administrative in nature. He was responsible for the stewardship campaign to finance construction, ministry development, campus development and budget development. Because he was involved as the lead for the construction of phase one on the “Field of Dreams,” some staff still reported directly to the senior pastor instead of Steve. When phase one construction was complete those staff members reported to Steve. In some ways the transition from church administrator to executive pastor was easy.

“A lot of staff were already coming to me as church administrator for my strategic thinking, processing and solutions. They were going around the executive pastor that was there, so that was a natural move for me. When I was a church administrator, there were three of us working together, the senior pastor, executive pastor and myself. Cal was an evangelist, then a teacher, then leader; as church administrator I was a strong strategic thinker, leader then teacher and the executive pastor at that time was a strong teacher/leader. The combination worked very well together. But from Cal’s perspective, he would rather have one person verses two people reporting to him.”²⁷

The close relationship Cal and Steve had, even during Steve’s role as church administrator, made a natural transition for the working relationship they would have as senior pastor and executive pastor. They already experienced a trust relationship between each other that began during their days working together at summer camp. That trust had grown as they worked together on Northwoods staff.

The relationship with staff members was also strong. This was exemplified by the knowledge that they sought Steve’s advice prior to his latest change in position. Steve’s description of his strengths (strategic thinker, leader, then teacher) verses Cal’s strengths (evangelist, teacher, then leader) shows a snap shot of diverse abilities that could work well together.

But not everything involved with transitions will necessarily prove to be easy, smooth or simple. A few staff members left not too long after Steve moved into the position of executive pastor. Steve had observed that some staff members were not carrying the load required in their positions. Before he took the executive pastor position he explained to the church’s board and the senior pastor how he would handle the ineffective staff members.

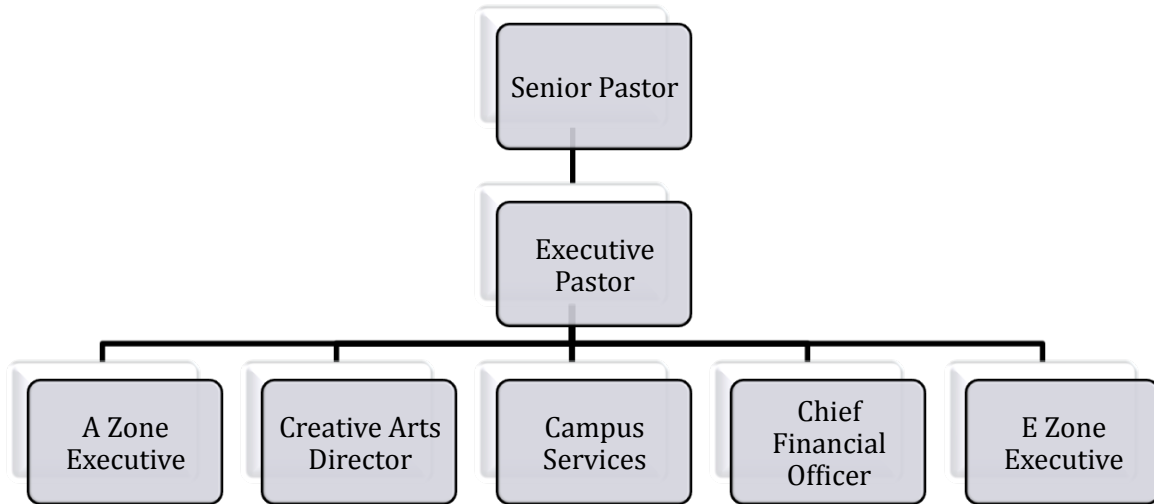
When I transitioned, I said before I take it I want to let you know what I think. There are three or four staff members that I am really wrestling with. We had those staff report to me and I was going to work with them. We put them on a 90-

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

day probation and told them we needed them to do these things and I'm here to help and brainstorm. The question was, were they capable? That was part of that transitional period. Would the staff be able to make it? A few didn't make it.²⁸

Steve's leadership was evident in his willingness to help these staff members become a stronger part of the Northwoods team even if they did not succeed in staying. His openness to their weaknesses and how they could change to become a stronger team member was important to make the transition smooth and fair. The following organizational chart reveals the flow of command for the team Steve was building.

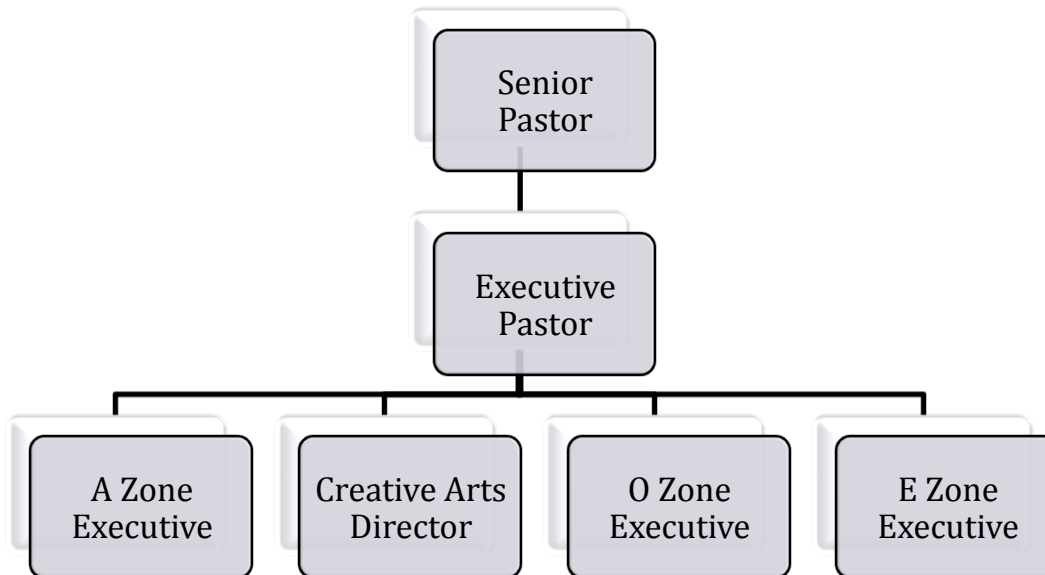


Adapted from the Northwoods Community Church Organization Chart Revised 4/28/08²⁹

The chart demonstrates the flow of responsibility held by Steve as he serves as the extension of the senior pastor to carry out the church's vision, mission, and strategy. The A Zone Executive supervises all age graded ministries (birth to young adult). The E Zone Executive supervises the spiritual formations, assimilation, small groups, and volunteers. Steve presently serves the position of O Zone Executive or Operations Executive. The church is looking to fill that position as a direct report to Steve. As the staff expands and an O Zone Executive is hired the organizational chart for the top layer of direct reports will then look like this:

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Steve Shaffer, "Northwoods Community Church Organization Chart," (2008).



In the new organization chart the Campus Services and Chief Financial Officer will report to the newly hired O Zone Executive no longer reporting directly to Steve.

As Steve stepped into the role of executive pastor, he saw the need to review and rewrite the personnel manual and staff policies. He reorganized the day to day operations. But there was one personnel area Steve needed to initiate. The staff did not have a system of performance evaluations. Within four years, Steve hired a human resource director to handle resumes for new positions, a pay grade system, and compensation and benefits packages.

The ministries of the church were in need of alignment and analysis. Steve led the review of each ministry by assessing them to SWOT. They were analyzed by their Strength or Weakness and their Opportunity or Threat. Since that time of assessing, Steve now concentrates on the new ministries to make sure they move in the right direction to fulfill the vision of the church. Presently Steve is leading a team to reassess the church’s direction with what is called “E4.”

We now have what is called our E4 strategy team; we are starting to realign our church around “Encountering/Establishing/Equip & Engage”. We are taking that and branding that into the church. I am overseeing the E4 strategy team. It will take about 3 years to accomplish this – we are 18 months into it. Once we get that branded in the church at large we will then begin to introduce it into each ministry.³⁰

Steve believes the realignment of the church around E4 will help current and future members to grow in their Christian walk and to give the leadership set points to know

³⁰ Shaffer.

whether their members are growing and the church's ministry is effective in growing disciples.

Different Personalities on the Team

The relationship between Cal and Steve helps to make this a successful duo. They play off of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Steve describes Cal as being "sanguine" and himself as being "choleric." Steve's reference is to the four temperaments that include sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic.

The Sanguine is the popular and talkative "center of attention" at every party. They are warm, caring, and enjoying—it's easy for something to warm their heart and cause an outburst of response. They may speak before they think, but they are sincere and loving. Never at a loss for words, this extrovert is everybody's friend. The Sanguine lives for the moment, and tends to go with the flow too easily.³¹

Even during the days that when Cal and Steve worked at a summer camp together, Steve saw Cal as outgoing and energetic. This definition of a sanguine individual shows why Cal describes himself as a people pleaser

The Choleric is the no-nonsense person. Self-sufficient, active, and hard-working, the Choleric gets it done. The Choleric plans quickly, almost intuitively sizing up what needs to be done, then follows the plan. This dogmatic person is a born leader, very keen, and capable of responsibility.³²

During the days of summer camp Steve described himself as a thinker and a doer. The description of the choleric demonstrates those characteristics Steve made reference. Steve describes their personalities further this way: "He is a more of a people pleaser, wants everyone to be happy, I have no problem when people are upset with me. I have to help keep everyone aligned. Cal wants me to help him keep everyone aligned. He knows where he wants to go but he doesn't want to create ripple effects."³³ If they were part of a company that made sales, Cal could be seen as the salesman. He makes people feel good and desires to close the sale. Steve would be back at the warehouse receiving the sales order, making sure it is in order, recorded and then processed. Cal is the face of the church to the members and the public while Steve keeps the staff moving forward to accomplish the vision of Cal.

Steve identified two events that exemplify the differences in him and Cal. The first was the use of something as simple as a child's glass marble. "It was 1:00pm in the afternoon on a Saturday and Cal would walk into my office and say 'I feel God would really like everyone to walk out tonight after service (at 6:00 pm) with a marble'. I was

³¹ Gretchen Glaser, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*(accessed September 6 2008); available from http://www.ylcf.org/you/spirit-controlled_temperament.htm.

³² Ibid.

³³ Shaffer.

ready to go home, mow the grass, and get back for the service by 5:00 pm. But instead I would make that happen. He would think it was very simple to have that happen.”³⁴ Cal had an idea that was needed to teach the congregation during worship. Steve interrupted his afternoon at home to make Cal’s vision for the worship service happen.

The second example involved Steve settling Cal’s conflict with a staff member because Cal does not like conflict. “He (Cal) was going on a trip. He had a conversation with a staff person the day before and asked me to handle a few things between him and the staff person. He doesn’t like conflict. He wants me to get into the conversation with the other person even if it is a conflict that doesn’t involve me.”³⁵ In this illustration Cal’s nature of being a people pleaser prevented him from settling a conflict. Steve’s job was to settle the conflict and keep the staff moving forward in their work.

Cal’s outgoing nature attracts people and makes them feel warm and comfortable. He is complimented by Steve’s business orientation to keep the system running and in line. Northwoods has the experience of two strong leaders that can combine to give the warm feeling needed to the congregation and visitors, but the skills needed to keep the organization running like a well oiled machine.

Steve describes Cal’s vision as one of desiring to see the church grow. He wants to see new believers cross over the line of faith and then grow in that faith. If the church comes upon a stagnant period, he finds it unacceptable and wants answers to making it grow again. If an area has become stale, he tries to ignite the spark to help it move again. “One instance was when the Men’s Ministry became very stale. For one year Cal taught the first Saturday of every month. He cast the vision for that ministry. We aligned the adult ministries director to that new strategy and that ignited that ministry. Not just because Cal was teaching but because it really gave good focus on the ministry and it was my responsibility to make sure they stayed on line there.”³⁶

Trust During Disagreements

Like any relationship there are also times of struggle and disagreement. On one occasion the city wanted to purchase two acres of land from Northwoods to construct a fire station for the community. Steve spent a lot of time working with Cal and the board of directors of the church on the matter and the outcome was a mutual agreement that they should sell the two acres to the city so the fire station could be built. Because of the special nature of the sale, the elders recommended that the church membership should vote on the issue. It was the first vote the church ever took. During the meeting one church member asked how the senior pastor was going to vote. To Steve’s amazement Cal told the member he was going to vote “no.”

I don’t know what my face did, I tried not to blink or look at him. I had several people come up to me after and ask how I voted, I told them I also voted “no”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

because I was following our leader. After it was over, I walked into his office and asked why he didn't tell me that he was going to vote no. He said he hadn't come to that conclusion until earlier that day after talking to one of the elders who warned that the church would be 'in bed' with the city. As the executive pastor I needed to be loyal to his vision. There are a lot of executive pastors doing their own thing. There have been major conflicts between Cal and myself, but in front of the church and staff they will never see any of it. We need to be able to respect one another. We have to have that type of rapport.³⁷

Ultimately Steve would carry out the vision of his senior pastor even when he was caught off guard. He kept questions of the vision and the direction of the church for private discussions and led the way of organizing and implementing his senior pastor's vision in the public eye. Steve understands the need of showing support for his senior pastor and guarding the relationship they experience.

When we are in our leadership team meeting if there is anything I am sensing in that meeting I will bring it up to Cal during a break but not in the meeting. If I sense that he is being "wishy-washy" on a decision because it will upset another staff member, I become almost a coach to him to give him permission to say what he really wants to say. I have to be careful because what I am really saying is "will you give me permission to ask that of you" without saying that in front of everybody. There are times when I may be pushing for something and I see him shutting down on a subject I will approach him at a break. I will not broach these things in the meeting.³⁸

The relationship between Cal and Steve reflects the authority Steve sees in Cal as his senior pastor. There is also the ability to confront but in private not in front of other staff.

Kirk Moser has been on staff at Northwoods Community Church since November 1990. He currently serves as the Production Director for worship. He gives his thoughts on Cal and Steve's working relationship. "Out of all the people, they would be the ones who have the closest working relationship, they have to learn to get along, how to fight and fight well, you can't take things personal, you've got to work them through, almost like a marriage relationship, Cal has hired Steve just to make sure that things would get done and get done right, and that's what Steve would do."³⁹ Kirk Moser calls the relationship similar to that of a marriage. Cal and Steve can argue in private and have different opinions. But when they are in public, they are as one.

Article Six of the Northwoods Community Church By-Laws describes the role of the senior pastor. "The Senior Pastor is empowered by the Board of Elders to give global leadership to the Church. His primary responsibilities include his leadership role on the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kirk Moser, interview by Larry G. Hoyle, "Topic," July 15, 2008, Telephone.

main boards of the Church, regular teaching at the main services of the church, and being the primary vision caster for the future direction of the Church.”⁴⁰

Likewise Article Seven of the Northwoods Community Church By-Laws describes the role of the executive pastor. “The Executive Pastor is empowered by the Senior Pastor to provide global ministry development, coordination and communication for the Church. He will work closely with the Senior Pastor as an extension to implement and to carry out the mission, vision, and strategy of the Church.”⁴¹

The church by-laws are clear in pointing out that vision casting in its primary role would be carried out by the senior pastor while the executive pastor will carry out the vision cast by the senior pastor. In the example of the land sale to the local government, Steve would carry out Cal’s vision even when Steve was unclear about the change of direction. The by-laws also make clear that the power Steve has in his executive pastor role comes from the senior pastor at his discretion.

Linda McMillan was on staff at Northwoods Community Church for twelve years. She most recently served as the Chief Financial Officer reporting to Steve. She described Steve’s role as Executive Pastor in this manner:

Steve has really devoted himself to hearing and catching Cal’s vision and then being able to implement that vision. Cal is very “visionary”, but to get from point A to point B is not a part of his makeup, and that’s where Steve excels, he knows the path almost instantly. That is the truth. He can put together a plan in his head, and I know that he has taken a great deal of criticism for this very thing, but from my vantage point he is usually right, and you can’t argue with that.⁴²

Linda’s comments would echo the position of the church by-laws that Steve is to implement the vision cast by Cal. Cal may not be able to see how the vision will move forward, but Steve is gifted to take Cal’s vision and move it from beginning to end.

A Church that Values the Whole Person

Steve places great value on his family time. That guard on family time comes from the expectations and values placed on staff family life by Northwoods. Steve experienced a different attitude about work time and family time at previous churches.

At the other churches, I was working 80 or 90 hours per week. It was killing me. My wife was a single mom – it was terrible. When we moved here it was, guard your family time. I put around 55 hours in per week. I remember Valentines week after I was here six weeks, and my wife looked at me and said don’t you have something to do tonight? It was a total culture shock – when we got here the church really protected your time and your allotment of time and what you did

⁴⁰ “Northwoods Community Church by-Laws,” (2007), 7.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Linda McMillan, interview by Larry G. Hoyle, “Topic,” July 15, 2008, Telephone.

with your family- I have to report every week everything to Cal that I do as a husband, father, laity involvement, and my staff oversight.⁴³

Northwoods takes the family life of their staff seriously. Importance of minister's family life is illustrated by Northwoods' concern about the amount of time spent each week with the family and the activities that take place. Encouragement to "guard your family time" was a relief for Steve as he moved from his former church where he worked 80 to 90 hours a week to Northwoods where he works 55 hours a week on average.

Northwoods Community Church divides the week into twenty-one blocks. Each day has three blocks: morning, afternoon, and evening. The church encourages working only twelve of the twenty-one blocks and the other nine blocks set aside for family and other interest than church. Within those twenty-one blocks, staff members are also encouraged to have no more than two evenings a week involved with church work. The church also sets aside time for family by offering family days for staff at water parks, picnics, and other fun fellowship family time.

Even at home Steve's organization skills as an executive pastor shines. Thursday night is date night with his wife. Steve has three children, two of which are in college. Each college child will receive three campus visits from Steve each year. Every other Tuesday he has date night with his youngest daughter. He keeps a well defined time-off each week. At 1:00pm on Sunday his worship duties are complete. Steve does not return to the office until 7:00am Tuesday morning. The time off is spent with his wife, family and running errands.

A typical work week for Steve starts on Tuesday. The day includes executive meetings or leadership team meetings. On Tuesday nights Steve will attend either the elder board meeting or the board of directors on alternating weeks. Wednesdays include meeting with staff and dealing with administrative issues. Wednesday night involves the weekly worship service and work with volunteers. Thursday mornings involves time to catch up on emails, phone calls and other busy work. In the afternoon he has weekly meetings with the senior pastor and chief financial officer. The creative arts director has Steve's attention each Friday morning to coordinate logistics of the Sunday services. By noon Friday the day is usually wrapped up with Steve returning Saturday by 3pm until evening for Saturday night worship service. The Sunday schedule starts at 7:30am and ends around 1:00pm. When he leaves church on Sunday he usually does not report again to the office until Tuesday morning.

Advice for Transitioning from Administration to XP

It is apparent after completing ten years as executive pastor of Northwoods Community Church that Steve Shaffer's transition from church business administrator has been successful. But he gives advice for those seeking to change from the position of administrator to executive pastor.

⁴³ Shaffer.

Before I made that transition, I cast a vision for that position that was a little different than that from the previous two other executive pastors. I identified some weak links on the staff. I said as executive pastor, I feel my role is to get those staff in alignment, work with goals and objectives for those people – if they don't reach those goals, I would have the authority with the senior pastor to make those adjustments. Before I made the move I would give a core group their assessment and let them know what to expect. Some may have seen you as a peer – they will now see you in a different role. We were running probably 22-24 staff at that point and we lost about 20% of our staff.⁴⁴

Steve did not jump into the job without being transparent about how he expected the role of executive pastor to be filled. He was open to the church leadership about changes needed and the direction he felt the staff should go under his leadership.

Steve has been influenced by the strategic mind of Greg Hawkins, Executive Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church and has had several meetings with him. The writings of John Maxwell and a book entitled Leading from the Second Chair by Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson were also of great interest. Steve also networks with two senior pastors. These pastors have no relationship with Cal and are not part of the same denomination as Northwoods. But networking with other senior pastors gives Steve a fresh look on his experience at Northwoods Community Church.

Steve began his ministry of executive pastor by being up front with the church leadership about the direction he would go and the areas he saw needed correction. This clarity gave everyone a sense of what changes would be required of staff to make this a successful journey together. His close relationship with the senior pastor provided the trust required for a senior pastor and an executive pastor to work well. Steve's desire to carry out the vision of the senior pastor and not become the vision caster helped the lines of leadership to be clear and in order. His willingness to carry out the wishes of Cal Rychener even when he disagreed with him showed his respect for the calling of senior pastor. After ten years as executive pastor of Northwoods Community Church, Steve appears to have "Played well in Peoria."

⁴⁴ Ibid.