

## *Some Basics for Evaluating*

Evaluating is a chance to take stock of what has happened and is happening as a result of the work that has been done. It is also a chance to consider course corrections for the work as it moves forward. It is also a great chance to articulate lessons learned so far.

It is important to remember that evaluation is not the same as criticism. Too many people have had bad experiences because evaluation has been synonymous with a negative experience. Healthy evaluation includes not only negative feedback about things that went wrong, but also positive feedback about things that went right!

This simple paper is designed to provide some basic pointers for evaluating a ministry. Using it as well as other simple evaluation tools you find should give you enough to do a good job at asking key questions and getting the most out of a time of evaluation.

### SOME KEYS TO DOING A GOOD EVALUATION

1. ***Attitude matters!*** Because so many people have been beat up in an evaluation along the way, people tend to be fearful. Even the word can make some people's heart rate change. Stay positive and encouraging. This doesn't mean to not include negative critique in the process – be honest. But honesty is often more balanced than people's experiences.
2. ***Be clear what you are evaluating.*** It is often easy to get into a conversation about something being evaluated and then follow tangents along the way. Map out the key things being discussed, be clear with people ahead of time, and stick to it. Adding other things can feel like a tangent, a waste of time or an ambush. Plus, these added sidetracks add time that is often not fruitful and leave everyone feeling tired and low at the end.
3. ***Use the plan to do the evaluation.*** If a plan was made (and it should have been in most cases) then using it to do the evaluation is important. If a plan was not clearly made, that may also be something to include in the evaluation. How can evaluating this plan help make planning stronger in the future?
4. ***Involve the people most impacted or relied on.*** If a plan's outcomes are being evaluated and several people were involved in carrying it out, try not to just talk to the leader(s) in the evaluation phase. There is more at stake, more to be learned and wider participation that will benefit everyone if this is done well.
5. ***Be sure to say "thanks."*** Gratitude is one of the most fruitful outcomes possible. Evaluating is not only a chance to determine if a good job was done but also to thank the people who did it! Too often we beat up people for failing and overlook people who do follow through. The reverse has been shown to produce better results most of the time – so thank you is a fine evaluation practice!

## SPECIFIC EVALUATION STEPS

An evaluation can be shorter or longer depending on the scope of what is being evaluated and the people involved in making it happen. For example, evaluating a smaller action may simply take a half hour as a part of another meeting. On the other hand, an evaluation of an entire ministry may involve more than one day if the project is big or takes place in a larger field setting. Seeing the results may be as/more helpful as just hearing about them. If the person(s) leading the evaluation are from outside the project, taking time for them to see it first hand may be important. If the person(s) leading the evaluation are closer to the project, then this “show and tell” phase may be less needed. Use good judgment and proceed according to both practical concerns and in ways that make the evaluative time the most helpful that it can be.

With that in mind, the following questions should be considered in framing an effective evaluation:

1. OUTCOMES:
  - a. Did the outcomes you planned for in your initial plan happen?
  - b. Using the measurements listed in your original plan, how did they “measure up?”
  - c. What additional unexpected “collateral benefits” occurred as well? What benefit did they produce?
  - d. How do the people working on this feel about their work? Was this an uplifting or a depressing experience and why?
2. MISSIONAL STRATEGY:
  - a. How has God’s work been advanced in this work – how has this been truly missional?
  - b. How do the things that happened relate to and advance the organization’s purpose, guiding principles and strategic directions?
  - c. How is the organization in a better place as a result of this work?
  - d. What new ideas for joining God’s work come to mind because of what has happened in this project? Who needs to hear these ideas?
3. PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCE AND CAPACITY
  - a. Did the original team stay intact and follow through to completion? How was that experience for them?
  - b. Did new people get involved in this project? If so, who invited them or how did they get connected? If not, was an opportunity missed that could be a learning opportunity for a future effort?
  - c. What sense of accomplishment do people who worked on this feel or not feel as a result?
  - d. What new skills or ways of working did people develop and/or learn along the way?

- e. What lessons or advice would you articulate now for someone starting a project like this?
4. TIMEFRAME:
    - a. Did the plan unfold on schedule and get completed as expected?
    - b. If so, what made it run smoothly? If not, what adjustments were made to develop a new timeline?
    - c. If this was not articulated clearly, how could adjustments be better made and communicated in the future?
  5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT:
    - a. How did accountability function?
    - b. Did a coach or supervisor stay connected and provide ongoing support?
    - c. What other supports would have been helpful?
  6. GRATITUDE
    - a. Who did a good job and helped make this happen?
    - b. How will you thank them and who is responsible for seeing that they are thanked?
      - i. Personal thanks (notes, letters, phone calls, gifts, etc.)
      - ii. Corporate celebration (public acknowledgement, celebrations, etc.)
    - c. Be sure to offer prayers of thanksgiving in the evaluation closing. Since this work should be tied to joining in God's work, thanking God is both appropriate and a reminder to all that this is more than just our project – it belongs to God.
  7. OTHER: Other questions that may arise specific to the work being done.

Be sure to do the above work in an environment of trust and prayer. Being conscious of God and God's missional work is an essential part of assessing how something contributed to what God is up to. Being prayerful allows the evaluation to be conscious of God's thoughts on the matter and be more than just a human effort.

For each project being evaluated, taking time to ask and answer the above questions can be invaluable. This not only allows for the work to be assessed and the bar to be raised. It is also a capacity building exercise for the people involved. Plus, since evaluation provides a chance to learn and grown, doing this makes future work stronger – both in the area being evaluated and in other work done by the people or the organization in the future.