

# 10 Reasons Not To Take That Church Job

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You finally got that job offer, and the excitement is electric. It's not easy getting a job, particularly if it's a ministry job. So when the offer finally comes, you should be grateful and say yes, right? You should view the offer as a call from God, right?

Maybe not.

Too often, we see candidates who in their past have taken a job they shouldn't have taken, only to wind up regretting the decision later, staying in the position a shorter period of time than they thought they would, and ending up with a resume filled with lots of "job hopping."

In order to prevent this from happening to you, what are the warning signs that you should look for when evaluating a job?

After helping hundreds of churches find their key staff and build their teams, we've seen some clear patterns from people with a history of getting caught up in the excitement of a job offer. Below are 10 "flags" to look for; some are "red flags" and some are "yellow." But all 10 are worth paying attention to before you sign on the dotted line. So pause before you accept that offer, and carefully consider these 10 reasons to *not* take the job:

## 1. When it's not where God is calling you right now

No matter how much you need a job, or how anxious you are to work in ministry, do NOT take a job at a church just to take a job. Too many candidates get nervous about needing to make a change, start working, or get a job right out of seminary, that they "dance with the first person that says yes."

The first rule of negotiation is “the person with the most time wins.” Buy yourself some time as you discern God’s call on your life in the here and now. If this isn’t the right job, then take a job at Starbucks. Apply at Apple. Find something to provide for you and your family and buy some time in your job search until you can discern where God is calling you.

## 2. When it’s not taking you where God is calling you in the long term

Some people might say that having a career path in mind is a bad idea in ministry. That it lacks trusting God’s guidance. Or that it is ambitious in a way that is unfaithful.

I completely disagree.

If you had asked me 10 years ago what I would be doing with my career, I never would have been able to forecast today. Careers take turns that nobody can predict, and only God can take credit for that. However, awesome careers are often marked by people who mapped out a plan, took the long view of what they felt called to accomplish, and made small daily steps toward that goal.

The old adage is true: “If you aim at nothing, you’re sure to hit it.”

Before taking the job, ask yourself, “Do I have a sense of what God is calling me to do with my lifelong career, and does this step help accomplish that long term goal?”

## 3. When it will put you underwater financially

The person who doesn’t provide for their family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Nobody I know goes into ministry for the money. Nearly every pastor, from those starting out in ministry to those at the head of the largest churches in the world, could make more money if they were in the marketplace.

However, just because you have gone into ministry does not mean you should have to be paid unfairly. And you certainly shouldn't take a job that will create the downward spiral of debt and stress in your life and your household.

Before taking the job, honestly assess where it will put you and your family financially.

## 4. When it is life-sucking and not life-giving

Know thyself. Know what you're passionate about, what fuels you, and what gives you life.

If the job you're being offered is great and prestigious, but isn't going to give you life, then don't go there.

Does this job fit your gift mix? Is it a job that will give you energy or drain your energy? Every job has parts that are not as fun as others, but if the job you're considering is one that will cause you to come home from work chronically tired and stressed, that's a problem. If it's a job that causes you to consider how to max out your vacation time, it might not be the job for you.

Successful people work more hours than unsuccessful people, and their job satisfaction is consistently higher as well. Work that energizes you will be work you will want to do and do well. Work that doesn't energize you will drain your joy, lead to a quick job change, and could even damage your family and your soul.

## 5. When you're only taking the job to work at "that" church

We work with some of the greatest churches in the world, many of which are known globally. But just because you are offered a job at a premier church does not mean it is a fit for you. In fact, we have found that the larger the church or organization, the more tightly defined their DNA and culture. A person who might make a great hire for one could be completely wrong for another.

The chance to work at a large, well-known church has great allure, particularly as you try and follow your career path. But that chance should be examined with extra care. Taking a position at a large church only to find you are not a great fit will almost certainly end in a short stay, an unhappy chapter, and a jagged edge on your resume.

## 6. When your spouse isn't 100% on board

You've heard the verse quoted at every wedding: "...a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together" (Mark 10:7-9).

It's not just a nice thing to say when a couple is getting married, they are wise words for every married couple to live by, especially in any big decision.

We've heard heart-breaking stories of couples who left the ministry, went through divorce, or had an extremely tough time adjusting because both spouses weren't on the same page with a major career or location move. When you are considering a new job, it is crucial that both you and your spouse think it's the right decision. You will need each other to rely on when you hit some tough roads ahead (and you will).

## 7. When it costs you your family

It's often said that the number one end-of-life regret people have is working too much at the expense of their family and friendships.

Churches should be immune from expecting staff members to have to pick between hard work and family, but unfortunately, sometimes that is not the case.

Before you accept a job, try to gauge the work/life balance of the people you would be working for and with. Look for a workplace that expects hard work *and* values family, that understands the importance of leaving early for a T-ball game on occasion, and that not only provides a vacation benefit but actively encourages you to use it.

## 8. When the organization has symptoms of a bad culture

If you accept a job at a workplace that doesn't have a good staff culture, chances are you won't be staying there too long.

When you're still on the "outside," it can be tough to see the signs of a bad culture, but here are a few key warning signs you can look for in a visit or ask about in an interview:

- Does the leader limit your time or discourage you talking with current staff members?
- Does the leader not want you to talk with key staff who have left the organization?
- Does the organization have a high turnover rates with staff members?
- Does it seem like anyone wants to hang out together after hours? What's the sense you get of the general morale among the staff? Does it seem to be lacking anything?
- Is it a "clock-in, clock-out" culture or do you see evidence of true job satisfaction? Is value of "fun" evident anywhere?

## 9. When the organization has been in steady decline for more than 5 years

Study after study has shown that once a church has a pattern of decline, turnarounds are exceedingly rare. If you are considering a church that has been in steady decline, know that you are likely headed into a situation that isn't going to change.

Many people are called to turnaround ministries (and I wish more would be!). It could be some of the most rewarding time in your ministry career. But it could also be the hardest. Turnaround work requires being a borderline workaholic, a willing congregation, and a whole lot of other factors.

Before taking a new job, take a long look at growth patterns of the organization so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not the job is for you.

## 10. When you are taking the job for what it could become

Many people take jobs when employers promise them higher pay in the future, promotions, the possibility of succession, etc. But promises are just that: promises. If you're not content with the way the job is at the present – position, pay, responsibilities, etc. – then don't take it for what is *might* become.

Also, be cautious with churches that want you to say you are coming for life. Yes, having a true and earnest commitment and buy-in are very important, but times change, chemistry changes, situations change; and while you don't want to job hop, it's just not realistic, practical, healthy, or Biblical to commit to a lifelong stay at one church. If it happens, great! But if it doesn't, that shouldn't be the sign of a failure, *nor* should it be a promise that needs to be made on the front end of taking the job.

Watching out for these warning signs will help temper the excitement of a job offer with the wisdom that's necessary for making a good choice. And great careers are marked by a collection of good choices in job stops.

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*Vanderbloemen Search Group is a pastor search firm that helps churches and faith-based organizations find great staff. If you are interested in conducting a compensation analysis for your church, consulting about your staffing or church development, or hiring us to find your next team member, contact us at [info@vanderbloemen.com](mailto:info@vanderbloemen.com).*