



**STRUCTURE NEXTGEN STAFF TO
MOVE FURTHER, FASTER**

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Interview

The handsome, yet much older gentlemen, Kenny Conley, interviewed me on our process of restructuring our NextGen team a few years ago. Read the whole story [here](#).

Structure as a Tool

As a leader, you need to have many different tools in your toolbox.

I'm here to talk about one tool. It is a tool I didn't have in my possession for the first 8 years as a pastor.

This tool is called **structure**.

Structure sounds dry or boring, but it isn't. It can actually solve some of our most pressing and stressful problems - people problems (they're the best and worst parts of what we do)

Motivation, job satisfaction, teamwork, innovation, collaboration - these are people-first problems and they can all get messed up when we get structure wrong

Make no mistake: **Structure is personal**.

Why do you need this tool?

Every tool has its uses. Here are some scenarios that I think this tool can fix:

You have great people... in the wrong roles

Your staff coordinate well... but only with their own teams

You have a highly creative team... but their quality is "meh"

Your team values excellence... but never innovates

You have a new vision and strategy... but nothing changed



Dan the silo guy – My first ministry job

I spent 8 years as a youth pastor.

I had complete freedom and autonomy. As long as I had teens showing up and didn't raise the budget too much, I could do whatever I wanted. Nobody checked in, nobody asked for evaluations or metrics of any kind, nobody really even knew what I was teaching.

This was great, for awhile. Then I realized that this hands-off approach probably meant that no one really cared all that much about what I was doing, and that's pretty demotivating.

You monitor what matters, and nobody was monitoring me and the ministry

For all intents and purposes, **I was in a silo**. With high walls.

Why did I do this? Am I silo-guy? Is that my leadership type? Is that a Myers Briggs type (Classic ENFJ silo-builder)?

No! I actually love working with people and coordinating efforts.

So what was I doing? What happened?

The answer was pretty simple: **I was doing what my job description told me to do**.

This wasn't a people issue. This was a **structure issue**. It was a system and a culture issue.

Define Structure

We're talking about organizing people.

How are people grouped into teams, what jobs are assigned to them, how are they all connected, who reports to who, etc.

Commonly shown in organizational charts.

These reveal a great deal of what we believe about staff and ministry



Staffing Assumptions

1. We need more staff

“I just need more names on that Org chart.” I’m in all the boxes!

Maybe you do. Share averages – 1 FTE/50 kids, 1 FTE/75 teens

Instead of trying to fill all the seats on the bus, maybe you need to rearrange the seats

If your structure is a mess, adding another person will only increase the complexity

2. We need better staff

My team is too inexperienced, too hard to work with – they’re just not “high capacity”

Is it a people issue?

Research shows that when we’re in a situation, we’ll recognize that other forces are at work that impact our ability to make changes, but when we’re outside of it looking in, we are far more likely to place credit or blame on the individuals involved

So, if your ministry tanks due to no fault of your own - cultural trends, systemic issues - people will still view it as your failure.

Now turn this around on your team - they're experiencing failure - we have a bias that will cause us to believe it's their fault. It might not be.

Dancefloor analogy – DeVries and Safstrom

Dancer rolls her ankle by going through a hole in the floor. No one repairs it but simply brings in a backup dancer and keeps going

Maybe your team members aren’t good dancers, but it’s awfully hard to get better when the floor is broken.

Fix the floor first and then you’ll see what you’re really working with.



3. Our church is unique

You need to be a big church

You need to be a small church

You need to be a new church

The principles of how to structures scale can be helpful in any organization.

4. Our church is not unique

You can learn from others, but you can't copy and paste.

Sports analogy

The reason why sports teams don't structure themselves like other sports teams is simple: *they're playing a different game.*

This is a lesson that many churches have yet to figure out.

Structure is one piece of a larger puzzle. You can't adopt someone else's structure without adopting some of the other elements. You have unique staff, unique culture, unique strategy, skills, etc.

5. We have to staff by age

E.g. Preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, young adults, men's ministry, women's ministry, senior's ministry, marriage ministry, singles ministry, fitness ministry, cat-owners ministry...

This is called a "divisional structure." Do you know who made it the norm? General Motors - Chevy, GMC, Saturn, Pontiac, Buick, etc.

Just about everyone copied them, including churches.

This isn't a Biblical model. It doesn't make it wrong, but it does make it *optional*



6. One person at the top

Unity of command – “if there’s more than one head, it’s a monster”

Every person reports to one person.

Again, not wrong, but *optional* – we don’t see this in the early Church

Multi-site models using a matrix structure is one example of reporting to multiple people

When is it the right option?

Jay Galbraith’s research: “*when the challenges a corporation faces are so complex that they require a set of skills too broad to be possessed by any one individual.*”

The point: Don’t make assumptions. Everything is optional. You don’t need to do what others are doing.

Core pieces of structure

Structure isn’t just large-scale changes that mess with your whole org chart.

There are different dials on this tool that can adjust different settings. Here are some of those dials you can begin turning:

Job design

“Who will be responsible for what?”

Division (differentiation)

Primary methods:

Product – program or service determining your staffing roles (e.g. weekend worship, midweek service, small groups, special events)

Demographic – subset of product – age-based and need-based programs



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Advantages: Focus, specialization, sense of ownership over a single outcome

Disadvantages: Silos, misalignment, redundancy, lack of integration into the church

Function – worship, teaching, prayer, leader recruitment and development, programming, audio/video tech, event planning, admin/support, financial management, marketing and promotion, facility design and usage, LG production, and more.

Advantages: Alignment across ministries, freedom to change programming, consistency in quality, usually a better match for natural gifts and abilities

Disadvantages: Less focus on individual programs meaning that one program might not get the attention it needs (only generalists at a program level), potential silos here as well

Process-based:

Spiritual growth processes (unbeliever – new believer – maturing believer)

Overall planning processes (vision – strategy – operations)

Community integration processes (Northpoint's model of “guest – friend – family”)

Volunteer processes (recruitment – onboarding – development)

Programming processes (research and development – event planning – execution)

Advantages: Efficiency (think assembly line), coordination among staff

Disadvantages: Weak links, breaking up the continuity of relationships

Next Step: Make a task inventory. What are the “strategy critical” tasks in NextGen? What is the same, shared, and separate?



Authority relationships

“Who can make what decisions?”

Why increase or decrease the power distance?

Increase	Decrease
Provides motivation, freedom, and sense of responsibility	High need to maintain strict quality controls
More responsive and adaptive	Stable environment where consistency is key to success
Increased creativity and innovation	The risks associated with failure become unacceptably high
Ideal for non-routine tasks where decisions need to be made frequently	Routine tasks with only minor decisions needing to be made
Requires highly skilled, trained, and experienced workers	New, inexperienced staff who require further coaching before increasing authority

Avoid simply separating thinkers from doers – people on the front lines need to be involved in the thinking

Next Step: Make a list of decisions that need to be made regularly in ministry and think through who should have the authority to make them. Does it have to be you? Could you accomplish your strategy better, and quicker, if you handed off the keys?



Span of control

“How many people and how much responsibility does any one person oversee?”

More than just people, scope of responsibility over ministries and resources as well

E.g. Small team but large budget, small team but large area of responsibility (NextGen)

Benefits of large and small:

Narrow span:

Tighter quality control

More coaching opportunities

Potentially requires less qualification due to strong oversight

Tall hierarchies and lots of levels

Lead to difficulty coordinating across ministries

Wide span:

Correlated with higher creativity and innovation due to greater autonomy and responsibility.

“Fail fast and fail cheap” – people can make quick decisions and test things out

People on the front lines make the decisions, which are often better decisions

Unless they're not. Poor decisions out front can lead to misalignment.

Require high capacity leaders in every position.

The risk is worth it if your strategy is entrepreneurial and pioneering (centralized can be innovative on a very small team or startup).

A balance: Centralize strategy and values, while decentralizing decision-making authority

Next Step: Test it out on paper. Play with a few scenarios and talk through them as a team.



Coordination

“How do people communicate and collaborate?”

Structure is all about communication paths

Vertical and horizontal coordination systems

Meetings – have a rhythm

Collaboration tech – email, Asana, Slack, cloud-based sharing, etc.

Informal coordination – office layout, breaks

Formal communication – weekly reports

Shared tasks – e.g. Parent cue emails

Cross-functional teams

Go to www.dandoerksen.me/ministrystructures for a more in-depth look at each of these four components.

Next Steps

Know your current structure

What’s working and what isn’t

Listen to your staff - what is frustrating them, how would they change their jobs

“If you could do create your own job within the church, what would you do?”

Know the “real job descriptions” – what is everyone actually doing and how many hours is it taking them?



Plan for growth

How do you structure for growth?

For my team, I have at least three options:

Widen my span.

Add a layer beneath my directors and increase their authority.

Turn individual roles into teams.

Don't need to get locked into one future model

E.g. if you find you have young inexperienced leaders that you want to bring on board and coach, you'll want to change your span and authority. If you suddenly get a ministry veteran on the team, you can change your structure. Stay flexible and have a few templates moving forward.

Learn how to lead change

Remember: Structure is personal

If you don't think so, just try to change it and see what happens

You will meet resistance.

Resources:

Leading Change – John Kotter

Leading Change without Losing It – Carey Nieuwhof



Closing - Structure is strategic.

The strategy of the church is not the same as it was 200 years ago, or even 100 years ago, so why would our structure be the same?

What was successful 30 years ago is not being as successful today

Let's discover the structure for 2025

Not maintain the structure from 1985

What is the strategy for today's Church and what structure do we need to meet the needs of today's world?

Q&A

Didn't get your question answered? Reach out! dan@dandoerksen.me.

