



Standard

Excellence in Leader Care

Every organization's board and senior leader shall work together to develop a care plan for the senior leader. The plan shall be approved annually by the board to demonstrate the organization's commitment to caring proactively for the leader's well-being and integrity.

Commentary

Church and ministry leaders experience unique challenges in their roles—challenges that are often personally draining. Leaders who have shared with ECFA about the topic of leader care frequently express a need for support to help them address the pressures of ministry and life. If inadequately addressed, such pressures can lead to exhaustion and/or a sense of isolation. In a weakened or injured state, a leader may be more susceptible to abuse authority, create unreasonable expectations of self or others, sidestep appropriate accountability, or engage in other unbiblical conduct.

Just as Aaron and Hur supported the arms of Moses to enable Joshua and the Israelites to carry out their mission at Rephidim (Ex. 17:8-16), so a God-honoring board can lift the arms of its senior leader and be a catalyst for the daily and long-term flourishing of their entire organization.

This standard requires the board (or a board-approved committee) and the senior leader (CEO, Lead Pastor, or equivalent) to partner together to create a plan that provides proactive care for the holistic well-being of the leader and supports his or her integrity. Further, this standard requires the board (or board-approved committee) to review, approve, and document the plan's approval annually in the ministry's board or committee minutes.

The leader's role and responsibility. A senior leader, as one in a role of authority, must strive to live above reproach in accordance with biblical expectations (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:6-9). A senior leader must take personal responsibility for investing in his or her relationship with Jesus and for guarding his or her heart (Prov. 4:23).

A senior leader should discern the areas in his or her life that may need additional care. The senior leader is responsible for communicating truthfully with the board (or board-approved committee) in a way that allows them to develop an effective plan to proactively care for the leader's well-being. The leader should also endeavor to submit in a spirit of love and humility (1 Pet. 5:1-6) to the soul-nourishing care and support offered by the board.

The board's role and responsibility. While a leader bears primary responsibility for guarding his or her own heart, the relationship and support between a ministry's board and its senior leader is vital. Although an organization's board does not typically serve as a leader's personal "accountability group," it does have a responsibility to offer care and support in a spirit of love and humility (1 Cor. 13:4-8, Phil. 2:3-4). This includes the responsibility to pray for the leader and to work with the leader to develop a proactive plan to care for the leader's holistic well-being.

Developing a leader care plan. The type of holistic care plan developed by the organization should be based on the unique needs of its senior leader and may change from one year to the next. ECFA believes that regular prayer by the board for the senior leader should be a central element of any plan. ECFA also encourages members to include substantive, observable, and proactive practices that afford adequate opportunities for the leader to rest, recover, and grow.

A board (or board-approved committee) should consider what practices will help their organization's senior leader in his or her unique circumstances each year to pursue a life "nourished on the truths of the faith" (1 Tim. 4:6) and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). A board should consider, based on discussions with the senior leader, how it can appropriately support him or her in the face of the world's deceptive desires (1 Jn. 2:15-17) and the "flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16), and how it can encourage the leader to persevere and grow in a life of truth and love (1 Tim. 4:11-16).

This standard is not prescriptive regarding the contents of such a plan. However, ECFA has identified examples of substantive, observable, and proactive practices that may be included in the leader care plan to meet the requirements of this standard.

Examples of Leader Care Plan Elements (Suggestions—Not Requirements)

We note that for the purpose of the standard to be realized, the plan and its elements must be followed. Creating a plan that exists as a document without following through on its elements would serve no useful purpose.

- The board demonstrates a pattern of regular prayer for the organization's senior leader, as well as for his or her family.

- The senior leader spends consistent time in the Word with prayer and reflection, regular time in worship, and fellowship with other believers.
- The senior leader takes appropriate time off from work each week.
- The senior leader ensures that his or her work schedule and travel obligations are reasonable, appropriate, and sustainable when considering the leader's personal and family responsibilities.
- The senior leader schedules regular vacation time each year—with minimal work-related interruptions.
- The senior leader obtains annual physical health examinations and maintains a proactive relationship with healthcare providers (including counselors, as appropriate) to support the leader's physical and mental health.
- The senior leader maintains healthy, supportive personal relationships outside of the organization that allow the leader to safely decompress from work obligations.
- The senior leader builds relationships with pastors or similarly trusted spiritual leaders outside the organization who can serve as mentors or counselors for him or her.
- At appropriate intervals, the board offers the leader specific opportunities for extended personal rest and spiritual growth. Such opportunities may include retreats, sabbaticals, or similar experiences.

Summary: Ministry leaders should earnestly seek to follow Christ's example as they strive to live and lead with integrity. Boards should proactively pray and care for their senior leaders to foster a Christ-centered organizational culture that furthers the organization's mission and enhances trust among givers, congregations, constituents, and a watching world. This standard requires the organization to adopt and implement a plan to support these commitments.