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Signs Your Organization Is Hurting

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A Biblical and Practical Perspective

Just as a physician recognizes physical illness through symptoms, organizational leaders can identify institutional dysfunction through observable signs. The health of an organization—whether a business, nonprofit, church, or ministry—reflects in how people interact, how work gets accomplished, and how vision is pursued. This article examines warning signs of organizational hurt from both biblical principles and practical management perspectives.

The Spiritual Foundation: What Scripture Says

Before examining specific symptoms, consider the biblical foundation for healthy organizations. The Apostle Paul describes the body of Christ—a metaphor for both church and organizational community—as an interconnected system where each member's health affects the whole. When one part suffers, the entire body suffers (1 Corinthians 12:26). This principle applies universally: organizational health is holistic.

Proverbs repeatedly warns leaders to watch for signs of decline. Proverbs 27:12 states that prudent people see trouble and take refuge, while the simple keep going and suffer for it. Healthy organizations have leaders vigilant enough to recognize emerging problems before they become crises.

Sign #1: Breakdown in Communication

What It Looks Like

People communicate only within their silos. Information travels slowly or doesn't travel at all. Rumors fill the vacuum where facts should. Leadership messages are either missing entirely or filtered so heavily by the time they reach staff that the original meaning is distorted.

Biblical Perspective

In Proverbs 11:14, Solomon writes that 'for lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is sure with many advisers.' Communication isn't merely practical—it's essential to collective discernment. When leaders stop listening or sharing, they sever the lines

through which the organization's body receives vital information. While the confusion at the Tower of Babel was warranted and sent from God to disrupt a sinful objective, the story also illustrates how communication breakdown literally stops the work of building (Genesis 11:1-9).

Practical Steps

Institute regular all-hands meetings. Create multiple communication channels so no single person or platform is the bottleneck. Encourage transparent sharing of both good news and challenges. Leaders should model vulnerability in communication, acknowledging difficulties rather than pretending everything is fine.

Sign #2: Loss of Trust Between Leaders and Staff

What It Looks Like

Employees do exactly what is required—no more. They withhold discretionary effort and ideas. Complaints to HR increase. Staff members request transfers to other departments or organizations. In meetings, people agree outwardly but undermine decisions privately. Exit interviews reveal that people left primarily because they didn't trust leadership.

Biblical Perspective

The relationship between leader and follower mirrors the relationship between believer and God. Exodus 14 shows the people's trust in Moses wavering when they faced the Red Sea with Egyptian armies behind them. Trust erodes when leaders appear to make decisions based on self-interest rather than the welfare of those they serve. Jesus told his disciples in John 10 that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Leadership without sacrifice destroys trust.

Practical Steps

Leaders must consistently follow through on commitments, no matter how small. When mistakes are made, they should be owned quickly and transparently. Conduct anonymous surveys to understand trust levels. Ensure decision-making processes are visible and explained. Make personal investments in relationships beyond transactional meetings.

Sign #3: Mission Drift and Loss of Purpose

What It Looks Like

The organization pursues initiatives disconnected from its stated mission. Staff members can't clearly articulate why the organization exists or what it's ultimately trying to accomplish. Energy is spent on secondary concerns while core work languishes. People feel like they're building someone else's vision rather than their own.

Biblical Perspective

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly reminds his people of their calling and purpose. When the Israelites forgot their identity as God's chosen people and adopted the practices of surrounding nations, they spiraled into decline. Proverbs

29:18 warns: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Purpose is not motivational fluff—it's the organizing principle that determines whether every decision moves toward or away from the goal.

Practical Steps

Regularly revisit and clarify (refresh if necessary) your mission statement through collaborative discussion. Help team members see how their specific roles connect to the larger purpose. When considering new initiatives, explicitly evaluate them against mission alignment. If they don't fit, say no—clearly and without guilt. Make mission the filter through which all decisions are made.

Sign #4: Excessive Conflict or Suppressed Conflict

What It Looks Like

In some cases, the organization experiences constant tension, drama, and interpersonal friction. In others—perhaps more dangerously—no one disagrees openly. Meetings are cordial and agreement appears unanimous, but people express their true opinions only outside official settings. Decisions made in these meetings are later ignored or subtly subverted.

Biblical Perspective

The apostle Paul describes a healthy church as one where truth is spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15). He addresses conflict directly in 1 Corinthians 5 and in his letters to the Galatians, not avoiding the discomfort but engaging it for the sake of truth and unity. Proverbs 27:12 notes that 'as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another'—conflict itself isn't the problem; how it's handled is. Both explosive conflict and suppressed disagreement indicate dysfunction.

Practical Steps

Create psychological safety where disagreement is expected and respected. Teach team members to separate the person from the idea—disagreeing on strategy doesn't mean disrespecting the person. Model healthy conflict resolution from leadership. When you see conflict, address it promptly and directly rather than allowing it to fester or drive people underground.

Sign #5: High Turnover and Difficulty Recruiting

What It Looks Like

Good people leave frequently. The organization struggles to attract quality candidates. Those who stay often express frustration or resignation. New hires spend considerable time discovering unwritten rules and navigating organizational politics. Institutional knowledge walks out the door with departing staff.

Biblical Perspective

The Old Testament principle of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) established that people need rest, restoration, and the opportunity to return to family and purpose. When an organization treats people as disposable—working them into exhaustion, failing to invest in their development, ignoring their wellbeing—they violate this fundamental

principle. The person who leaves isn't always the problem; it could be the system and processes (or lack thereof) that drives them away.

Practical Steps

Conduct exit interviews and take them seriously. Ask departing staff what would have kept them. Review compensation to ensure it's competitive and fair. Invest in professional development and career growth. Create sustainable workloads rather than expecting heroic effort continuously. When people do good work, acknowledge and reward it genuinely.

Sign #6: Lack of Innovation and Adaptability

What It Looks Like

'That's how we've always done it' becomes the primary justification for decisions. The organization struggles to adapt to changing circumstances. New ideas are met with skepticism or resistance. Team members stop suggesting improvements because suggestions are rejected. While competitors or similar organizations innovate, this one stagnates.

Biblical Perspective

God created humans in His image with the capacity to create, solve problems, and adapt. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is praised for her ability to see what is and what could be. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly calls people to embrace new seasons and new ways of working. Jesus challenged the rigid religious structures of His day not because the old way was always wrong, but because circumstances had changed and flexibility was required.

Practical Steps

Create systems where ideas can surface easily. Allocate time and resources for experimentation. When innovations work, celebrate them. When they fail, treat failures as learning opportunities rather than reasons for punishment. Bring in outside perspectives through consultants, board members, or advisors. Regularly ask: 'What would we do differently if we were starting fresh today?'

Sign #7: Financial Pressures and Unsustainable Growth

What It Looks Like

The organization operates with razor-thin margins or chronic deficits. Growth happens too quickly to establish proper systems or culture. Resources are constantly stretched. Leaders make financial decisions reactively rather than strategically. There's no reserves for emergencies or investments.

Biblical Perspective

The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25) emphasizes the importance of preparation and wise stewardship. Acts 20:35 says, "It is better to give than to receive". God call us to give out of His goodness to us, but also, like Joseph preparing for a famine, He calls us to good stewardship. Financial health isn't about greed—it's about responsible stewardship of resources entrusted to you. The

Proverbs repeatedly praise those who save, plan ahead, and live within their means, warning of poverty and collapse for those who refuse to be prudent.

Practical Steps

Build reserves equivalent to 3-6 months of operating expenses. Grow only as fast as your systems can support. Make financial decisions with input from trusted advisors who are independent of day-to-day operations. Create a realistic budget and monitor actuals regularly. Don't fund growth with unsustainable debt or unrealistic revenue projections.

Sign #8: Leadership Isolation or Desperation

What It Looks Like

The top leader makes major decisions alone without input. Critical voices are silenced or sidelined. Leadership appears exhausted and defensive. There's an 'us versus them' mentality between leadership and the rest of the organization. Long-time leaders or board members are pushed out when they ask hard questions.

Biblical Perspective

Moses learned this painful lesson when he attempted to lead Israel alone. His father-in-law, Jethro, observed and confronted him, saying, 'What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out' (Exodus 18:17-18). Jethro's solution was to develop leaders at various levels. Throughout Scripture, effective leadership is collaborative leadership.

Practical Steps

Develop a leadership team, not a one-person show. Delegate genuinely, not to hand off undesirable tasks. Seek out advisors who will tell you hard truths. Welcome questions and disagreement from board members and senior staff. Invest in developing future leaders. If you find yourself having difficulty delegating, reflect on whether you're operating from scarcity or control rather than health.

Moving Toward Healing

Recognizing signs of organizational hurt and dysfunction is the first step toward healing. As Jesus said in Luke 6:41-42, we often see the speck in others' eyes while missing the plank in our own. This principle applies to any organization and its leaders. The healthiest organizations are those led by people willing to honestly assess where things have become unhealthy.

Healing requires commitment from leadership to change, courage to address difficult issues directly, and patience to allow systems and culture to shift. It often requires external help—whether from consultants, board advisors, or trusted mentors who can see with fresh eyes what insiders can no longer perceive.

Most importantly, it requires humility. As 1 Corinthians 13:11 reminds us, sometimes we must put childish ways behind us and grow into mature understanding. An organization that admits it is hurt, and seeks to heal, demonstrates the kind of wisdom Scripture consistently praises.

The question is not whether your organization shows any of these signs—many healthy organizations experience one or two temporarily. The question is whether leadership has the wisdom to recognize them, the courage to address them honestly, and the humility to seek help when needed. In doing so, you honor both good business sense and the biblical calling to build something that reflects health, integrity, and purpose.

If your organization needs help, reach out to perfectlyflawedleadership@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you and help establish Biblical and Practical principles for your organization.



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