Dealing with critical issues and being confidential

Dr. Elie Henry

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"...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" - Solomon (Eccl. 3:7b).

Some typical confidentiality dilemmas that the leader faces

The Two Sides of Confidentiality

- The subject of confidentiality has two sides and as pastors and leaders we must be challenged in two separate but equally important ways
  - To keep secret
  - To tell

What does the word “confidential” mean?

- a. Having secret or private relations; trusted; intimate.
- b. Imparted in confidence; secret (confidential information).
- c. Disposed to confide in another.
- d. In government functions, it connotes the idea of classified or “top secret” information.

Confidential

- It comes from a Latin word meaning “with faith”. Your people come to you “in faith” that you will not abuse the privilege and that information that they relate to you will be safe with you.

- a. Confident

When people come to you they want to feel confident that you will protect them and their interests. A shepherd is a protector. He is to guard the sheep.

- b. Confidence

If people are going to have confidence in leaders, they must feel that leaders can be trusted.

What is our Christian duty when it comes to the issue of confidentiality?

- Practice the three laws of relationship
  - a. The law of love (Jam. 2:8)
  - b. The law of faithfulness (III John 5)
  - c. The law of edification (Eph. 4:29-30)

Our duty

- Avoid all seven sins of the tongue
  - a. Tale bearing or telling others those things that were told to him in trust and confidence.
  - b. Backbiting or speaking evil of a person in their absence (Pro. 25:23; II Cor. 12:20; Rom. 1:30).
  - c. Gossip or speaking idly or with evil intent of the affairs of others (Rom. 1:29; II Cor. 2:20; I Tim. 5:13).
  - d. Whispering or speaking secretly of others to one individual at a time in a plotting manner (Rom. 1:29; II Cor. 2:20).

Seven Sins of Tongue …

- e. Bitterness or speaking to others about someone else in a manner which denotes inward feelings of anger, hurt, indignation or repulsion (Eph. 4:31).
- f. Coarse jesting or speaking of serious matters in a light and frivolous way (Eph. 5:4).
- g. Slander or speaking falsehoods or misrepresentations which have the effect of damaging another person’s reputation (Col. 3:8; I Pet. 2:1).

Some cautions

- Watch what you share with your spouse and other leaders concerning matters of counsel. Learn to unload on God. We do not want others to pick up an offense that they do not have grace to handle.
- Be careful at home especially in front of the children not to discuss the problems of the people.
- Do not repeat stories of the failures of people especially when you do not have all of the facts (and we rarely do—hearsay).

What are the limits, if any, to confidentiality?

- In the Bible, there were times that you were not to be silent but you were to give testimony concerning what was happening.
  - 1. When someone was planning on apostatizing (Deut. 13:6-18, esp. vs. 6-8).
  - 2. When someone had committed murder (Ex. 21:12-14).
  - 3. When you knew the facts concerning other crimes that had been committed (Lev. 5:1).

What are the biblical issues that limit confidentiality?

- The Issue of Repentance and Reconciliation
- The Issue of Authority
- The Issue of Exposing versus Covering

What do we do when people come to us for counseling?

- 1. Only offer limited confidentiality based on trust.
- 2. Do not seek to know more than you need to know.
- 3. Encourage the person to report to his or her authorities.
- 4. Become a leader that is known for having sealed lips.

How to maintain Confidentiality

- **Comply with Privacy Laws**
  - **Familiarize yourself with your specific legal and ethical requirements.**
    - If you're not sure about a situation that could lead to a potential ethical or legal pitfall, don't do anything without doing your homework. Consult your profession's code of ethics, look up applicable local or federal laws, get advice from a trusted colleague (without disclosing private information), or contact your professional organization.
  - **Discuss legal compliance with any third-party associates**
  - **Obey mandatory reporting laws.**

How to maintain Confidentiality

- **Protect Confidential Information**
  - **Handle private documents carefully.**
  - **Lock file rooms, cabinets, and other storage spaces**
  - **Use discretion when discussing confidential information**

Prayer support

- Care should be taken when a worship leader or preacher invites topics for intercessory prayer, that people understand that they should only share information about people that is given with their permission.

- Disciplinary proceedings of the Church operate under strict rules of confidentiality.

Confidentiality and Technology

- Data storage
- Social Networks and websites
- Photocopiers
- Email
- Protecting contents
- Mobile technology
- Shredding