

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# How to Determine Your Span of Care

## - Episode 190

### *Creating Alignment in Your Church (Part 2)*

To experience alignment in your ministry strategy and among the staff and volunteers on your team, you have to help every ministry team and every team member know what part they play. Without that clarity around roles, people start pulling in different directions. But how many people should the senior pastor be directly responsible for leading in this way? The senior leader's span of care can significantly impact a team's ability to clarify roles and maintain alignment.

In this episode, we give you some really practical ways to think about getting your span of care to its healthiest place—for both you and for the ministry.

### *What Is Span-of-Care?*

- Span-of-care refers to the number of people who are looking to you personally for leadership and direction—the number of people who directly report to you.
- Sometimes we think increasing the number of people we lead will fix misalignment issues, but trying to lead too many people has the opposite effect. It compounds the problem.
- When your span of care gets stretched too wide, you naturally have less time to invest with each person on your team. Over time, the people you are leading will become less connected to the overall direction and priorities of your ministry. The more disconnected they are from their leader, the more they begin to operate independently from the rest of the ministry. Silos begin to form.
- At best, the team isn't aligned. People begin pulling in different directions. At worst, division sets in. The team begins to pull apart, which means the church begins to pull apart.

### *How Span-of-Care Issues Arise*

- Span-of-care isn't typically a problem in smaller churches—the team is small and everyone reports to the senior pastor. But as a church grows, every pastor or director reports to the senior pastor. And then with more growth, all the leaders who lead and empower other leaders report to the senior pastor. For churches to continue to grow in health, the structure has to change.

- When you increase the number of people you lead, it also increases the number of people who will expect to have a voice in the decisions you make. After a certain point, too many voices leads to a diminishing return when it comes to making better decisions.

## *How Many Direct Reports Is Too Many?*

*The sweet-spot number will be different for every leader, but there are a few tests you can use to determine yours. Ask yourself:*

1. **How many people can participate fully in a meeting where we're discussing future direction and strategy?** (Hint: It's very, very rarely more than 8.)
2. **How well can I keep up with what's going on with my direct reports?**
  - Do I know their current work priorities?
  - Development needs?
  - What they're celebrating in life?
  - The challenges they're experiencing in life?
  - Names of their spouse and kids?
  - Do I know how to pray for them today?
3. **Do I have enough time to own the roles I can't delegate?**
  - If you don't have enough time to invest in teaching, being the key leader of leaders in your ministry, vision casting, and in being the primary culture champion, you're trying to lead too many people.
  - In our experience, 8 is way too many direct reports for most senior pastors, because you are also responsible every week for study, message prep and live teaching. This is why as your team grows, you typically need an "integrator," someone in an executive pastor role to help manage the team.

## *Next Steps*

- Harvard Business Review - [The Most Productive Meetings Have Fewer Than 8 People](#)
- Tony's article, [The Rule of Eight](#) for church leaders
- Tony's article, [When Large Churches Get Stuck: Reducing Span of Care](#)
- [4 Roles a Senior Pastor Can't Delegate](#) - You can get that eBook free here. Feel free to share this link with another pastor you know.

To learn more about building alignment, register for the Unstuck Masterclass:

[4 Keys to Align Your Strategy and Your Team.](#)

Listen to the episode on iTunes or at [theunstuckgroup.com/episode190](https://theunstuckgroup.com/episode190).