

Don't Dig Up Your Regrets

Joe Gutel Sr., an Assemblies of God deacon in Storm Lake, Iowa, was cleaning his barn with another deacon one day. Over the years, Joe's church had developed a reputation of producing great ministers, and the two deacons were discussing how to handle some problems in the church.

The one deacon said to Joe, "You know, that problem that was in the church a couple of years ago has sort of gone away, but we never got to the bottom of it. I think we ought to go back, discuss it further, and deal with it so it never comes up again."

Old Joe Gutel just looked at him and pointed out the obvious analogy. "Well, I reckon that there problem is like the manure on this here barn floor. It don't smell near half so bad if you don't dig it up."

I regularly confront situations where I must decide whether to jump in right away with a solution or give the issue time to work itself out. Taking the latter course may mean it will come to me again by a departmental or other process later, but initially I need to give it space and time. A key to effective conflict management is knowing when to get in and when not to get in. It's a balance between initiative and response.

Some issues are better left alone initially. They will either go away on their own, work out apart from your intervention, or they may come back later when your participation is clearly needed. One of the arts of leadership is to develop an intuitive sense—in conjunction with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—to know when to dive in and when to stay out. Whenever I have found the right balance, issues have been resolved with minimal problems. I've learned usually to be slow to pull the trigger because when I jump in prematurely, I almost always regret it.

Rehash leads to regrets. “Leave well enough alone” and “Let sleeping dogs lie” may be quaint sayings, but they have their rightful place in ministry management. If a problem has ceased to be a problem even though you never officially solved it, you should probably just be thankful for the resolution.

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