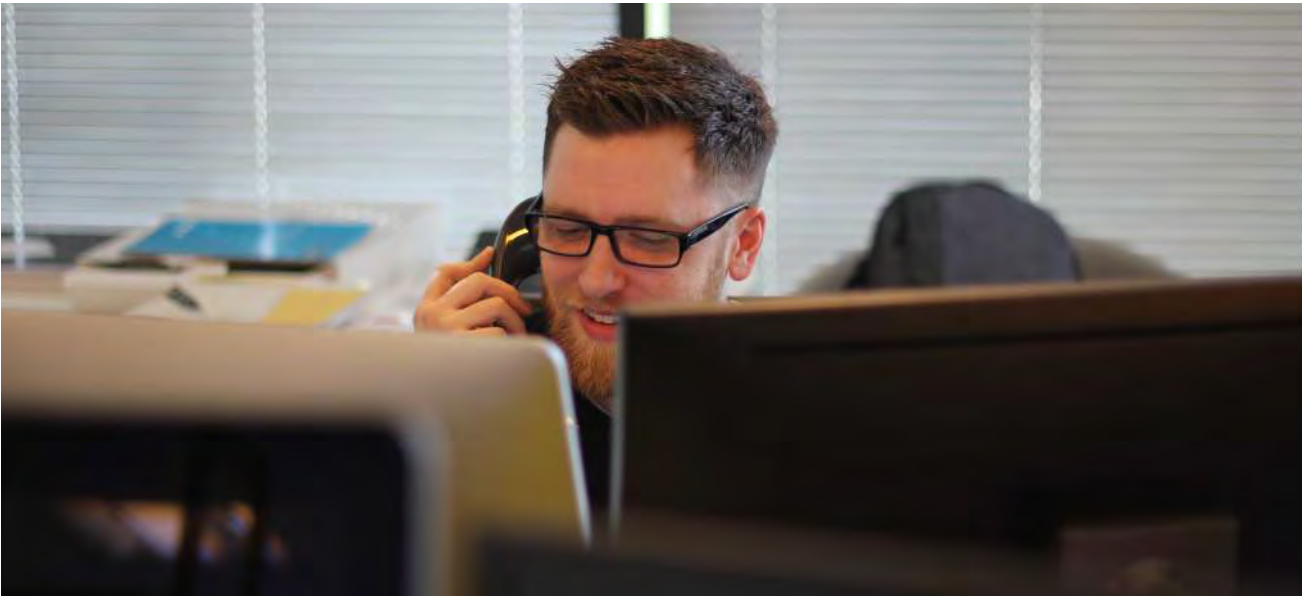


stuff you wish they taught in seminary

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a wooden pencil with a sharpened lead tip, resting diagonally across the pages of an open book. The book's pages are visible, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

COVID-19 Killed Church Consulting.
Long Live Strategic Outsiders!

RICH BIRCH



It's already been said a million times, but we are living in an unprecedented age. This is true for your church as well as mine.

The impacts of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic meltdown that are rippling across the country are having profound impacts on churches everywhere.

As someone who has spent a tremendous amount of time over the last 10 years helping churches across the country, I think this crisis has had a unique impact on church consulting in particular.

At their best, church coaches and consultants are a shortcut for your church to step towards a better future. **This is an effective way to help your church become unstuck or to accelerate your development in a particular area.**

However, there's a style of church consultant that has always struggled with generating actual results for churches and it's an even greater issue in today's climate. **Church consultants who base their entire framework on practices that happened in churches 15 years ago or those who encourage churches to become more like they were in past years are irrelevant today.** The dynamics that churches are facing across the country are so unique today. Any service provider that tries to replicate something that might have worked years ago into new environments is going to experience decreased effectiveness and potentially even damage churches.

Everything has changed and therefore church consulting that is based on previous practices for another time and place has dramatically decreased in value.

However, there are many strategic outsiders who can provide a tremendous amount of insight and value to your church in this season.

In fact, this is actually the best season for your church to engage with a strategic outsider in order to wrestle through some issues that your church is facing. Now more than ever, you need wise counsel to help you think through what you're doing at your church and how you're doing it.

*"Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success."
Proverbs 15:22*

3 Reasons "Old School" Church Consulting is Dead

The truth is you should entirely avoid a dated approach to consulting support for your church. Here are three telltale signs of church consultants that you need to disengage with quickly.

- **Printed Binders** // It has been said that by the time ideas end up in a book, they're already outdated and no longer have relevance in the marketplace. This is doubly true for consultants who base their practice on glossy printed binders that they'll flip through to show you what has worked in the past. If a church

consultant is simply pulling past ideas off the shelf and trying to apply them to your church today, they're not going to work in this current season.

- **“Swiss Army Knife” Consulting Groups//** Organizations that offer general church consulting (that is to say, they'll fix any and all of your problems) have decreased in value in the current environment. Any church consultant that has such a wide practice has very little relevance or effectiveness in addressing specific areas where you need to push your ministry forward. Be wary of church consulting firms that want to offer you a wide variety of solutions, rather than going deep on a few big issues that your church is facing. You should be buying a specific solution to a specific problem, not hiring someone to tell you every little issue you have in a wide variety of areas and then attempting to sell you services to fix all them.
- **Be Wary of Leaders with Isolated Tribes//** In this season, we need to broaden the communities we are connecting with. If the church consultants you're engaging are from a narrow tribe and don't have a wide network of connections, it will limit their effectiveness. You need to find solutions from the various fringes of the body of Christ. Consultants that have a narrow group of people that they consistently and solely talk with will decrease in value to you in the long-term.



3 Characteristics of Strategic Outsiders You Should Engage with Today

In a time of great uncertainty, it's important that you bring expertise to the table. **Now is a perfect season for you to engage with a strategic outsider to help your church solve some prevalent problems or to accelerate an area of your ministry that needs to develop.** Here are three characteristics of strategic outsiders who can help push things forward.

- **A Discernible Framework to Apply//** Be looking for a strategic outsider who has brought their expertise to the point where they have a framework to apply to the problems that you're looking to solve. This framework will help you not only understand your problem more clearly but show you a path to move forward. These frameworks are designed to take the principles from a wide variety of churches and apply them to your church. It's about finding common lessons from the body of Christ and helping you understand how to apply those to your context. A framework also helps equip your team after the strategic outsider has finished their time with your church. Clearly understand the framework and you'll be able to continue to apply it beyond the engagement period with that coach.
- **Accessibility to Answer Specific Questions//** The highest value a strategic outsider can provide is their ability to answer questions specific to your situation. Look for strategic outsiders that position themselves to be hyper available to you to answer these questions. Your church is a complex system of relationships and history, and you need someone to help you navigate that complexity. Search out strategic outsiders that make themselves available to dive deep with you in the areas that are specific to your church.
- **Tap Into Their Network//** Now more than ever before it's important that the strategic outsiders you engage with have a wide network of relationships. Perhaps even more important is that your time with them allows you to tap into their network. Look for strategic outsiders that are familiar with a wide swath of the body of Christ and are helping you find solutions that might be slightly outside of your normal circles of influence. Listen carefully when these leaders speak. Are they engaged with a large number of varied church leaders from across the country?

Strategic outsiders who have spent time getting to know other church leaders and what's happening in other churches can be incredibly valuable as you tap into that network and seek to apply the lessons of others to your church.

Strategic Outsiders You Should Connect with Today

Here are some trusted individuals who provide coaching and consulting for church leaders. I would highly recommend that you reach out to and connect with each of these people in this season. They all provide insight and coaching in a specific area that could help your church take huge strides in this season.

- [Jenni Catron](#) // Cultivates extraordinary teams through executive coaching and organization consulting
- [Kenny Jahng](#) // Teaches how to use Storybrand, PR and content to drive engagement
- [Dave Miller](#) // Offers a leadership pipeline to develop future staff
- [Carey Nieuwhof](#) // Future church and help for senior leaders
- [Shawn Lovejoy](#) // The senior leadership coach to walk alongside you
- [Justin Piercy](#) // Leveraging online data for church growth
- [Rich Birch \(me!\)](#) // Loves to help with church growth and multisite



Engage with a strategic outsider this summer and see how things will be different this fall at your church.

I'm a firm believer that strategic outsiders can help your church take a huge step forward. This is a great season for you to reach out and connect. Don't miss the opportunity to plug in!

Visit unseminary.com for more free resources!

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