

UNseminary

IS YOUR TEAM LANGUISHING?

PRACTICAL HELP FOR EXECUTIVE PASTORS

BY RICH BIRCH



It's clear that we're entering a post-pandemic stress period in the life of the local church.

All around us we see signs that our teams are stressed and not sure what to do next.

Anecdotally, we're hearing about huge turnover at churches, and we cannot ignore the rising anxiety in leaders across the country.

Recently, Adam Grant wrote an article in the New York Times called, "[There's a Name For The Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing](#)". This article has been passed around in many of my circles because it accurately captures where so many of our teams are at right now.

The sense of *blah* that has come over many of our team members is impacting not only their mental health but the ability of our churches to push forward and make a difference in our communities.

As executive pastors, we're concerned and are wondering what we can do to help.

Rather than being content with letting this problem roll over us, I want to provide some guidance to help you wrestle with actions you could take to help your team move forward. **I believe that it's possible to move from languishing to flourishing.** In this season, we must help all our team members take steps away from languishing and toward flourishing. Ultimately, we need people to grow their relationship with Jesus because He anchors our forward-facing steps.

Our friends at Medi-Share have released a particularly helpful study in light of the issues in Grant's article. This study is called the "[10 Things About Mental Health Every Pastor and Leader Should Know](#)" and its findings can help us figure out a way forward for our teams.

3 ACTIONS YOUR CHURCH CAN TAKE TO HELP LANGUISHING TEAM MEMBERS

- **Actively de-stigmatize counselling** // One of the shocking statistics that stood out in the Medi-Share study was that *71% of pastors fear their congregation knowing that they're getting counselling*. Counselling has been an important part of my journey as a leader over the last 10 years. I have found it exceedingly helpful. In my marriage, it's been a source of joy as we've taken time to slow down and draw from a trusted advisor who can help us wrestle through what God has to say about our relationship and help me think about thinking.

Gone is the season where pastors and church leaders need to think about themselves as superhuman. This statistic made me sad to think that there are still many pastors out there who fear that people in the church may think less of them for seeking personal counsel. Because in fact, the opposite is true. **Investing in your own mental health by seeking counsel is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness.**

As a leadership team, we not only need to provide access to counselling as a way of helping our team grow but actively work at de-stigmatizing it. Casually talk about it in your leadership teams. Ensure that the way you speak about it from the stage is pro-counselling. Find ways to encourage your staff to connect with counselling. Medi-Share provides remote counselling to its member churches, which is incredible! [Learn more about it here](#). I've found remote counselling to be immensely effective and easy to slot into my life during this season. It could be a perfect tool to offer your teammates as they navigate the post-pandemic period.

What can you do to help remove any hesitation around getting counselling for your team?

- **Help Your Team Make Professional Friends** // According to the Medi-Share study, *75% of pastors said they felt isolated and alone, both personally and professionally*. We all know that people who feel isolated present a real danger to their mental health and the mental health of those around them. The stereotype of the lone pastor sitting in their office, whittling away on their latest sermon while dealing with current church pressures has some truth to it. Ministry can be a lonely profession even for people serving on a team. We must turn this around for our people!

Within your staff community, ensure that you are creating opportunities for people to connect. One of the most important things that people need to succeed in any job is a "work friend". It is our responsibility to structure opportunities for friendships to develop and grow. Taking time out to do something social has always been

important for our teams and is doubly important in this season. You could also provide opportunities for your people to develop friendships external to your church.

Part of the reason why [we run online coaching cohorts at unSeminary](#) for executive pastors and team members is that we want people to develop friendships across the country. **One of the amazing outcomes of the pandemic is that people are increasingly more comfortable with meeting and developing relationships online.** These professional huddles are an important tool for people to develop friendships and not feel isolated. Sharing problems that you're having at your church with others can be a breath of fresh air and you'll realize that you're not alone.

How can you help your team make more professional friends in the next six months?

- **Encourage People to Live a Healthy Lifestyle** // It is a best practice to provide health benefits for your church. Now might be a great season for you to look at the health benefits that you provide. Ensure that whatever benefit program you're using provides a full complement of mental health resources. It would be good to review these benefits with your team to ensure they understand the importance of accessing every mental health opportunity that your insurance solution offers.

I've also seen various creative ways to encourage healthier living in church staff and members. Here are a few that may inspire you:

- **Healthy Living Team Competitions** // Where teams compete for who lives the healthiest life! Who can drop the largest percentage of weight during a given time? Fun! (Like "The Biggest Loser" but just for your staff teams.)
- **Actively Encouraging Exercise** // I've seen churches provide exercise plans and encourage teams to get out and exercise on "company time". This is not only for participants to feel better about their bodies but for them to also grow their relationships.
- **Rethinking the Church Snacks** // One of the real dangers of working in a local church is it seems like everywhere we go donuts and carbs are targeting our health and trying to bring us down to the stereotypical image of the overweight pastor. We need to work against this. When was the last time that you looked carefully at the snacks provided within your church environment? We must ensure that the snacks we provide reflect the lifestyle we hope our teams will follow.

What actions could you take to encourage your entire team to live a healthier lifestyle?

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR MORE HELP FOR YOUR TEAM IN THE MENTAL HEALTH AREA? DOWNLOAD THIS RESOURCE.

I strongly encourage you to pick up Medi-Share's report, "[The 10 Things About Mental Health Every Pastor & Leader Must Know](#)".

This report will give you a clear understanding of what's happening within your church team. It could be a great discussion starter. **Download this report and email it to everybody on your staff team. At your next team meeting, pull out a few statistics as a starting point to help your team think through and wrestle with their own mental health and how a positive environment can be created for your team.**

[Click here to download Medi-Share's report "The 10 Things About Mental Health Every Pastor & Leader Must Know"](#).