

# A HIGHER CALLING TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

THE PERFORMANCE IMPERATIVE FOR CHURCHES

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*Developed collaboratively by the*  
**LEAP OF REASON  
AMBASSADORS COMMUNITY**



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PERFORMANCE  
IMPERATIVE

# The Performance Imperative for Churches

## A HIGHER CALLING TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

What would it take to look in the mirror and know that your church is making a meaningful, enduring difference?

In this era of scarcity and seismic change, questions over how best to serve God and fulfill your mission carry increasing weight.

Churches have always been good at keeping count—whether it’s worship attendance, meals served, or people reached through a program or service. But “how many” only measures what we see on the surface.

The most effective churches go deeper.

No matter your mission—whether it’s nurturing spiritual growth, instilling faith-based values, or creating a more just and equitable society—you need a way of knowing that you’re reaching your God-given potential to serve and equipping your staff and volunteers to do the same.

### WHAT IS ‘THE PERFORMANCE IMPERATIVE’ AND WHO DEVELOPED IT?

“[The Performance Imperative](#)” is a framework to help organizations perform at a level worthy of their calling and the people they serve.

Developed by dozens of [leaders](#) from many parts of the nonprofit ecosystem, the Performance Imperative defines “high performance” by tying how an organization operates to why:

**High performance is the ability to deliver—over a prolonged period of time—meaningful, measurable, and financially sustainable results for the people or causes the organization is in existence to serve.**

The Performance Imperative also lays out in detail the seven organizational pillars that can help you progress the most on your journey toward delivering meaningful, measurable results for the people or causes you exist to serve. These are the seven habits of highly effective organizations:

- **Pillar 1:** Courageous, adaptive executive and board leadership
- **Pillar 2:** Disciplined, people-focused management
- **Pillar 3:** Well-designed and well-implemented programs and strategies
- **Pillar 4:** Financial health and sustainability
- **Pillar 5:** A culture that values learning
- **Pillar 6:** Internal monitoring for continuous improvement
- **Pillar 7:** External evaluation for mission effectiveness

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### WHY THE PERFORMANCE IMPERATIVE FOR THE FAITH COMMUNITY?

In the private sector, profit is a strong motivator. In the faith community, the motivation tends to be much more intrinsic. Pastors and church staff often speak of being called to their work.

What if that calling turned out to be the most powerful motivator of all?

And what if the church's unique position and role in our communities proved to be an ideal launching point for such a difficult but rewarding journey? Churches are:

- On the frontlines of most pressing challenges we face in our society
- In it for the long haul (serving God has never been a temporal task)
- Able to connect at the deepest levels with the people we serve.

That's why we developed The Performance Imperative for Churches.

### HOW TO USE THE PERFORMANCE IMPERATIVE

- Share copies with your governing body, ministry leaders, etc. to initiate the process of looking at your church's work through the Performance Imperative lens.
- Overlay your mission, vision, and/or core principles to the Performance Imperative to see how aligned you may already be or where there are gaps.
- Use it to spark introspection and discernment about how you can better support your staff and what new skill sets you may need to add to your team.

### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM USING THE PERFORMANCE IMPERATIVE

- A serious gut check for you and your staff
- Ways to discover whether a program should continue or stop—regardless of its popularity
- Specific ideas to improve your staff culture
- A new outlook on short-term budgeting vs. long-term financial stewardship
- Meaningful, measurable change in the lives of your congregants and others you serve

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### GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE FAITH COMMUNITY

To help you get started, we've developed a quick glossary, specifically for churches, to translate some of the terms used in the Performance Imperative:

**Executive:** Pastor

**Board:** Elders, Deacons, and Ministry Leaders (i.e., governing body responsible for stewardship, compliance, and strategic direction)

**Managers:** Ministry staff responsible for overseeing other staff and programs (may also be the pastor, in the case of smaller churches)

**Outputs:** What you count, such as membership, attendance, volunteer hours, and other activities and services carried out

**Outcomes:** What you wish to achieve for your congregation and others you serve, generally defined in terms of expected changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior, or condition (e.g., spiritual growth, reduced homelessness, improved public policies)

**Theory of Change:** Your church's shared assumptions about the processes and staff capacities necessary to produce the sequence of incremental changes your congregation and others you serve (e.g., the unchurched, the homeless, the poor) experience as they progress toward short- and long-term outcomes.

**External evaluation:** Surveys or studies (no one type is right for every church) that are capable of factoring out other explanations for how these results came to be.

We hope you use your influence to help start the honest conversations this journey will require.

We look forward to your feedback and stories.