



How Much Is Your Time Worth?

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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This is a question many ministers are loath to ask. Some resist asking it because we believe God has called us to a ministry that responds to whatever is placed in front of us each day. To value our time in dollars would seem to be decidedly secular and inappropriate. Some resist because we suspect our time is not very valuable by any measure. We do not want further evidence of this. Many have just never thought specifically in terms of the monetary value of our work and service in terms of per hour.

For those who have been resistant for any reason, or just never thought about it, I challenge you to reconsider. It is not that I think we should decide how to spend our time solely on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis. But, we, like all Christians, are called to be good stewards of our time and energy. "Going after every ball" leads to exhaustion, burnout, and ineffectiveness. I have seen lots of ministers—including myself—doing tasks that could easily and better be done by volunteers or by non-ordained staff, if only we had planned better. We often fail to plan because we fail to adequately value our own time.

How Do We Value Our Time?

Money is not the only way to value our time, or to make decisions about exactly how we should spend our time. But, it should be one of the ways we think about our work. As Stephen Covey might say, failing to understand the value of our time encourages us to respond to the most urgent issues rather than many important issues. Urgency and importance are key characteristics that must be discerned by every Christian. Martha was overcome by urgency, while Mary understood what was important at that time.

How do we value our time in monetary terms? Very simply! Take all the costs associated with the church providing your ministry and divide it by the number of hours you work. The costs go beyond your salary. Including all costs means adding up salary, housing, pension fund contributions, travel expense, the cost of providing an office (which includes space, utilities, supplies, clerical support, etc.), continuing education funds, book and journal funds, convention funds, sabbatical funds on an annual average basis, health insurance, and any other costs you can determine. Add these up on an annualized basis which is the total spent for these things in a year.

Next, figure how many weeks you work in a year. Subtract the weeks of vacation you are granted from 52. For example, if you get four weeks of vacation per year, subtract those to arrive at 48 weeks.

How many hours do you work on average? Yes, this is a subject for another article on the stewardship of our own time and person! But we are not going there for now. For the purposes of this article, just use your average number of hours worked per week. For many full-time ministers, this will be somewhere between 45 and 55 hours. For some it goes as high as 60.

Multiply the number of hours you work per week times the number of weeks you work, and you have a reasonably accurate estimate of the number of hours you work in a year. Divide the total cost of your ministry annually by the number of hours you work annually and, eureka! You now have the cost per hour of your work. For example, if you work 50 hours per week on average, 48 weeks per year, that is 2400

hours per year. If the church's combined cost of providing your ministry is \$100,000 per year that amounts to about \$42.00 per hour.

This cost per hour is the same whether you are counseling someone contemplating suicide, preparing a sermon, setting up chairs for the evening fellowship dinner, or folding worship bulletins. While an effective clerical and janitorial staff is certainly valuable members of the team, \$42.00 per hour would generally be considered a rather high cost for clerical or janitorial work.

What are Our Time, Energy, and Cost Balance?

The relationship of cost per hour to an appropriate level of quality in regard to particular ministerial tasks is worth considering as well. Many ministry tasks can be done adequately in less time than they can be done perfectly. If you are a perfectionist, how much additional time—and therefore money—are you spending to get from adequate to perfection? The answer may help you see that your perfectionism is not only costing many dollars but is also damaging your ministry because it makes fewer hours available to work on those tasks that really do require a high level of quality.

While it is not an exact correlation, there is a fairly straight line correlation between how much time and energy I spend on my preaching and how satisfying the outcome is for both me and my listeners. Perhaps if our members knew what our time is worth per hour they would predict how much time we spent by how much they thought the sermon was worth. "Well, pastor, excluding actual delivery time, I'm guessing that was about a \$60.00 sermon!" Maybe we do not want to go there. On the other hand, we all know that \$400.00 sermons will, on average, be a whole lot better than \$60.00 sermons!

The point is, if we do not have some awareness of what our time is worth, we will tend toward thinking it is not worth much. We will spend our precious hours doing what we most want to do, or avoiding what we do not want to do, instead of spending those hours doing what we most need to do and do well.

In addition to the impact valuing our time can have on us, it might also help our parishioners take our time more seriously! Of course, some of us would resist bringing this to their attention because we fear they might not contact us when they need to contact us if they know the monetary value of our time; especially those who have low self-esteem. There is probably a little truth in this. On the other hand, perhaps in some congregations, clergy would be treated with more respect if the lay leadership, at least, understood how much they are literally investing in their minister's time per hour.

What is Your Cost Per Hour?

As I said at the beginning, it is not that I think we should decide how to spend our time solely on the basis of cost-benefit analysis. Yet we, like all Christians, are called to be good stewards of our time and energy. We might make some different, better, and more faithful choices if we are aware of how much of the congregation's budget we are spending in every hour of ministry we do.

Go ahead. Figure your cost per hour. Then reach out in conversation to your coach, spiritual director, or peers in ministry to wrestle with how you feel about how much your time is worth. It may make you cry! At the least, it may help you make better decisions about how you spend your time.

Important Things to Know

Dick Hamm is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is also executive administrator for Christian Churches Together in the USA. His most recent book is ***Recreating the Church: Leadership for the Post-Modern Era***. He is available for speaking and coaching with leaders, congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. ***Travel Free Learning*** is a leadership development emphasis of The Columbia Partnership. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.