

Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information.

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A Christian Psychologist Weighs in on COVID Stress Among Church Workers and Christians

Our leader at Church Doctor Ministries, Tracee, and I arrived in separate cars within a couple minutes of each other. Our destination was Starbucks. Our mission was to meet our longtime friend—a psychologist who provides great wisdom for our work as consultants to churches.

As we approached the doors of Starbucks for our meeting, it became immediately clear that the doors were locked. “Drive-Thru only.” Welcome to yet another stress of COVID! Where do we look for him? Now, where will we meet?

There he was, sitting in his car, experiencing the same stress! Every special minute with this incredible guy is important. We didn’t want to waste precious time. We spotted an outside table and suggested we sit there and talk—without coffee.

Denny Howard

First and foremost, Denny Howard is an awesome Christian. He has spent most of his life counseling Christians: pastors and church members. We first met when Church Doctor Ministries was relatively young. As we developed our Staffing Consultation, we were looking for a Christian-based instrument

Kent R. Hunter is an author, church consultant, and conference speaker. Kent’s passion is to help the local



church become more effective for making disciples of Jesus Christ. He is the author of *Who Broke My Church?* and *Restoring Civility: Lessons from the Master*. His recent podcast is “Mission Possible: How Everyday Ordinary Christians Become World Changers.”

www.churchdoctor.org

Email Kent: kenthunter@churchdoctor.org

that would help us bring guidance and help to church workers in the congregations we consult. Denny has put countless hundreds of hours in developing the *LivStyle* instrument, which provides a lengthy report of a range of psychological elements for an individual. It is great for our work because it is Christian-based. The instrument actually ties a person's profile to that of a biblical character—a biblical man for a male and a biblical woman for a female.

Denny is the author of the book *At Full Strength*. His strong commitment to Christ, the church, and church people makes him a great long-term partner for Church Doctor Ministries.

Reflections of Civility: Church Doctor Tools

In his reflection of church people with challenges, Denny shared that the church is often uncivil toward staff and members who struggle with psychological issues. As Church Doctors, we are not qualified to diagnose these issues, but we encounter enough evidence to warrant a referral to get help. In his experience, Denny says that church leaders should be more compassionate toward the challenges staff people face.

We shared a recent challenge we faced when consulting a large church. Most of the members we interviewed love and appreciate the senior pastor. Some others, however, have seen behavior that is unusual. Sadly, there is a small group of people who think the pastor should leave. They focus on the symptoms rather than wondering about the causative issues. As Church Doctors, we have a biblical approach: *In the church, we do not shoot our wounded. We get professional help. Our goal is toward healing. As "outsiders," we can be more objective. We privately urge staff members to get help.*

When we consult a church, we ask all staff to take a spiritual gifts survey. That helps us determine whether they are serving in their gifted areas. It's amazing that so many congregations—even at the staff level—don't operate according to the unique spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit. They are described in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and Romans 12, as well as a few other places in the New Testament.

We also use the *Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis*. While it is not an in-depth survey, it does point out strength traits and trait opposites. This survey helps us to ask certain questions during staff interviews as we are involved in the consultation. Again, our core mission is not as psychologists. However, these surveys help us point out the possibility of needs for help among staff.

We sometimes use the Conflict Management Survey, especially when we are asked to conduct a Staffing Consultation. In theory, many believe church staff should never have conflict. In truth, the Enemy works hard in this area.

Denny Howard's *LivStyle Profile* is an outstanding instrument. We are grateful for the privilege of using it. It is a comprehensive report that helps us to learn about those who serve the church. We also use it for churches we consult that are looking at candidates to add to their staff.

Denny Howard on the Impact of COVID

Recently, we have noticed some unusual extremes in the reports of the *LivStyle* instrument. So, we asked Denny if they were related to COVID. He shared that COVID has produced a high level of anxiety and uncertainty. Some of the symptoms include depression and lethargy as well as aggravation and frustration. This causes church leaders to feel impotent and sometimes act mean-spirited. He pointed out that the behavior is an organic response. It begins in the brain. Some pastors he sees feel: "I don't want to do this (ministry) anymore." Others say, "I am going to look for another church."

"What they don't realize," Denny says, "is that this is a natural response from the brain. They need to work through this."

Denny says that COVID makes this a time of uncertainty. With the advent of variants, that leads to despair. The length of the pandemic works toward the same reaction as those in WWII who were in concentration camps. However, he added, "The most robust of those, in the camps, as well as those on church staffs, will find a purpose in the mess." This is important when people begin to think and feel that COVID is the "new normal."

Denny reflected that many pastors and their spouses don't feel very valued. He conducted research with 863 pastors. He said that the key issues revolve around three questions about how church leaders feel: (1) Do you value me? (2) Do you value my contribution? and (3) Do you value my feedback?

What can church people do for staff? Denny Howard feels one of the best ways congregational boards and leaders can help their church staff is to show appreciation. He says, "When it comes to pastors and staff, church members and leaders need to communicate that they are valued."

At Church Doctor Ministries, we are grateful for the long and special relationship we are blessed to have with Denny Howard. He is not only a brilliant psychologist, but he also has a heart for church people to become whole and healthy. He has conducted volunteer work all over the world in the name of Jesus. He has helped Church Doctor Ministries immensely, as we serve churches to become more effective to reach lost people and also help those who lead these churches.