

Draft ECFA Leadership Standard announced March 4, 2024.

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Standard

Leadership

“Every organization shall proactively care for its leader and support the integrity of its leader in conformity with ECFA’s Policy for Excellence in Supporting Leadership Integrity.”

Commentary

A leader’s integrity is vital to an organization’s trustworthiness and to the effectiveness of its mission. The word “integrity”—based on the concept of being whole, complete, and sound—is commonly understood as the firm adherence to a code of moral values. Integrity is an essential leadership quality in Scripture, from David’s “integrity of heart” (Ps. 78:72) to Paul’s emphasis on “integrity and godly sincerity” (2 Cor. 1:12). Because integrity is one of the foundations of trust, it is also universally recognized as necessary for leadership and organizational success—even by many secular institutions, including in the marketplace, government, and other professions.

Leader integrity carries even deeper significance for ECFA member churches and nonprofits whose missions are Christ-centered (Standard 1) and who are committed to enhancing trust with givers and a watching world by upholding ECFA’s biblically based stewardship standards. The tone of integrity set at the top by a ministry’s leader is critical to promoting a Christ-centered organizational culture. One of the greatest risks to a ministry is an integrity failure by its leader. Not only are the financial and other operations significantly impacted by leader integrity, but the very mission and gospel witness of a ministry is at risk when there is a breakdown in leadership integrity.

The leader has a special stewardship responsibility in carrying out the organization’s mission and managing its day-to-day operations, all under the authority of the ministry’s governing board (Standard 2). The board has a unique opportunity and responsibility in the

context of Christ-centered governance to proactively care for its leader and support the leader's integrity as members of the body of Christ.

Standard requirements. Given the broad diversity of ECFA's membership and the unique needs of individual leaders, ECFA is not highly prescriptive in the requirements under this standard. Members are given much latitude to care for and support the integrity of their senior leader (CEO, Lead Pastor, or equivalent) in a manner that is best suited for their context while meeting the requirements of ECFA's Policy for Excellence in Supporting Leadership Integrity. As described further in the Policy, this includes at least annual discussions surrounding holistic care for the leader and the leader's commitment to upholding biblical integrity principles, which have been agreed upon between the organization and the leader in writing (e.g., a ministry code of conduct or similar document).

Scope of the standard. This standard is focused on supporting the integrity of the senior leader because the leader bears unique burdens, responsibilities, and influence as the chief servant of the ministry (Mark 10:43). These heightened burdens and responsibilities should be met with an increased level of care and support by the board, and make it especially important that the leader faithfully lives a life of biblical character and properly stewards the leadership role (Prov. 16:12, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:6-9, 1 Pet. 5:1-6). While this standard addresses certain requirements for the senior leader, ECFA encourages its members to consider similar proactive measures to care for and support the integrity of the ministry's other leaders, staff, and board members.

While the standard is intended to proactively promote leader care and support for leadership integrity, it will not prevent all instances of integrity failures in leadership. A ministry that has encountered an integrity failure at the leadership level may still remain an ECFA member provided that it has followed the minimum requirements of ECFA's Policy for Excellence in Supporting Leadership Integrity and governs responsibly in the wake of a problem.

The leader's role and responsibility. Leaders must take personal responsibility for investing in their relationship with Jesus and guarding their heart (Prov. 4:23), striving to live above reproach in the biblical expectations for leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:6-9), and submitting in a spirit of love and humility (1 Pet. 5:1-6) to the care and support offered to the leader by the ministry's board.

While no human leader is perfect, the leader's life should evidence traits like humility (Matt. 20:25-28), growth (1 Tim. 4:15), exemplary conduct (1 Tim. 4:12), the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), a posture of service (Jn. 13:12-17), and not loving the world and its desires (1 John 2:15-17). When leaders monitor their life and doctrine, they benefit both themselves and

those they influence (1 Tim. 4:16). Others can consider the outcome of a leader's life and imitate them (Heb. 13:7), as the leader follows Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

The board's role and responsibility. While leaders bear primary responsibility for guarding their own heart and integrity, a Christian community should edify and encourage one another (Heb. 10:24-25). Although the board may not be the leader's "accountability group" or pastor, it can play a vital role in offering care and support in a spirit of love and humility (1 Cor. 13:4-8, Phil. 2:3-4). This relationship and support between the ministry's board and the leader is vital in a ministry calling that includes many unique challenges and potential stumbling blocks to the spiritual life of a leader.

One of the critical responsibilities of a board is to help their leader develop holistically as is described in 2 Peter 1:5-9. Some examples of scriptural principles regarding Christian relationship that clearly apply to this relationship between the board and leader include: Do good to one another (1 Thess. 5:15). Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11). Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25). Love one another (Jn. 5:12). Confess sins to one another (Ja. 5:16).

Summary. Ministry leaders should earnestly seek to follow the example of Christ as they strive to live and lead with integrity. Recognizing the unique challenges of the servant leadership role, ministry governing boards should proactively care for their senior leader and support the leader's integrity to help foster a Christ-centered organizational culture and to reduce the risk of integrity breakdowns that could jeopardize the ministry of God in the leader's life as well as the ministry's ability to accomplish its mission. The leader's integrity and the board's appropriate care and support for the leader's integrity are critical to furthering the organization's mission effectiveness and trust before givers and a watching world.

ECFA Policy for Excellence in Supporting Leadership Integrity

The following responsibilities must be shared between the organization's senior leader (CEO, Lead Pastor, or equivalent) and the board or a committee consisting of a majority of independent members authorized by the board to proactively care for the leader and support the leader's integrity:

1. The board or board-approved committee is responsible for discussing at least annually with the leader how the organization can provide appropriate support in proactively caring for the integrity and well-being of the leader as a whole person (i.e., spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, relationally, and in other needs to care for the leader).

2. The board or board-approved committee must also follow up with the leader at least annually on the leader’s commitment to upholding biblical integrity principles, which have been agreed upon between the organization and the leader in writing (e.g., a ministry code of conduct or similar document). The board or committee does not need to function as a leader’s personal accountability group. The focus should be to provide an appropriate level of oversight to confirm that the leader remains committed to upholding the agreed-upon biblical integrity principles.
3. The board or board-approved committee shall document in the organization’s minutes the occurrence of the annual discussions described in items 1-2 above.

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