



Faith Pulpit

The Danger of Drifting

I. The Principle of Drifting

Every organization sooner or later faces the danger of losing its founding focus and of moving away from the distinctive characteristics, priorities, and convictions which brought it into existence. Some of the factors which help to bring this about are Time, Size, and Affluence. The longer an organization is in existence and the larger and more prosperous it becomes, the greater the tendency to shift the organizational emphasis and one's loyalty from the original distinctive convictions to support for and loyalty to the organization itself. This deemphasis on convictions allows for the toleration of attitudes and views which in previous times would have been unthinkable. This shift in emphasis is often unintentional; and because the organizational drift is very gradual, it usually goes undetected until the change is quite pronounced. While this is true generally of most organizations, it becomes of special importance when recognized as true for Bible-believing organizations as well.

II. The Process of Drifting

How and why do organizations undergo the drifting process? As an organization grows and prospers, it attracts workers and supporters who appreciate its affluence and potential for success in mission. While such people are often very talented, they may not fully understand nor are they necessarily committed to the organization's founding convictions. They may even have grown up within the context of the organization and yet are hesitant to embrace its unique distinctive qualities. Often these folk are well meaning, but gradually some of them come to view the organization's original intentions as a hindrance and obstacle for obtaining its greatest potential. Thus, there is the worker/supporter who has infiltrated the organization but is not supportive of its original convictions.

The key to what happens at this point is in the hands of the organization's leadership. Depending on the kind of organization it is and how it is set up, the leaders have the authority to deal with or ignore the drift problem. The organization's controlling board, administrative leaders and staff may all play a part here. Often what happens is that those who have the ability to keep the organization on course and stop any drifting become more concerned about peace and harmony within the organization (which, of course, is a legitimate concern) than with the danger of the drift. As a result, the leadership is often willing to tolerate divergence and drift. It is this tolerance of drift by the organization's leadership which eventually allows organizations to move far from their original intentions.

III. The Prevention of Drifting

Particularly when organizations have been formed to perpetuate the truths of Biblical Christianity, the question must be asked: what can be done to halt the drifting process? The responsibility here rests with the organization's leaders. What should they be doing?

1. A basic first step is to recognize the possibility and dangers of drifting. Such an alertness allows periodic regular review and reflection on where the institution is headed. This kind of a recognition seems to be threatening, however, to certain ones in leadership, as if this admission were a negative reflection on them. The blindness of some leaders at this crucial point is astounding.
2. Leaders need to have discernment, determination, and courage to act. After all, these persons have been placed in positions of responsibility because their constituencies trust them to do what is right. Now they must not waver. They must not only have right convictions, but they must be willing to press for them as policy.

In reviewing the historical record of a certain educational institution, one has observed: "the volume is of considerable significance to those who are interested in the present climate of change in which the evangelical Christian colleges of today find themselves. The focus of attention really should be directed toward the leadership of the institution as represented by its president and faculty. As far as the chief executive is concerned, it is clear that it is not sufficient for him to hold to certain convictions. It is the degree to which he is prepared in a forceful way to promote such convictions on campus that is decisive. Otherwise, his tolerance or acquiescence inevitably will permit others to assume the role of actual leadership and effect change" (Hudson Armerding, in his review of: John Barnard. *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College, 1866–1917*. In *Christian Scholar's Review*, Summer 1971, Vol. 1, #4, pp. 342–344). This may mean taking actions which are both unpopular and unpleasant at times, but it is much like corrective surgery which must be done.

3. Also, there needs to be an emphasis upon and an explanation of the distinctive convictions of the organization. These convictions should be in written form, and they should be regularly advertised as

standards from which the organization will not move—either in theory or in practice. This means such a written statement should be carefully thought through. It should express all of the convictions and priorities deemed important, and no divergence from the standard should be tolerated. This standard, moreover, needs to be regularly held before the organization’s workers and constituency. It is sometimes assumed that having stated these convictions, others will understand and agree. History tells us that this simply is not true. There needs to be continued emphasis and explanation of the organizational distinctive convictions.

4. Further, the organization ought to recruit, hire, and promote personnel who are not merely tolerating but who stand for and are wholeheartedly committed to these distinctive convictions. Learn the convictions of potential personnel before they are hired, and deal firmly yet kindly with those who cannot fit this pattern. While this is no complete guarantee that drift will never take place, such a response, as has been outlined, will help insure the organization’s present direction. Not to do this invites drift for which the organization’s leaders must one day answer before God.

Dr. George Houghton

Former VP of Academic Services at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | [Other Articles](#)

George Houghton, former vice president for academic services and college dean at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, is a graduate of Bethel College, Central Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and holds a Master's and a Doctor of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He retired in 2010 after serving for 36 years at the institution.