LAUNCH

4 Realistic Goals for Your First Year of Counseling Ministry

Sequential, achievable goals for a church's first year of embracing biblical counseling.

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I talked with several churches recently that had taken groups to weeklong biblical counseling training conferences or purchased curriculum to develop a training process. Unfortunately, they were frustrated because they had little to show for it. They received valuable teaching they wanted to implement, but they seemed no closer to a biblical counseling strategy. As the executive director of a training center, I hear these stories often: far more people have attended biblical counseling training than are using those skills regularly. What should we do about it? **Churches need realistic goals for their first year**. Here are the four sequential goals we lay out as realistic.

THE FOUR FIRST-YEAR GOALS

1. Unify the leadership around the vision.
2. Implement a training process and seek partnerships for collaboration.
3. Put your biblical counseling ministry plan in writing.
4. Determine first ministry experiences.

GOAL 1 · UNIFY THE LEADERSHIP AROUND THE VISION

Many churches underestimate the confusion, opposition, and controversy that introducing a biblical counseling vision can cause. Lay counseling ministries that flourish have a supportive leadership team that embraces the vision. Before any training partnership begins, take steps to unify your leadership. When your leaders talk about a biblical counseling vision, is there opposition or agreement — dedication or apathy — fearful concern or committed conviction? A vision met with opposition or apathy will take far longer to implement. **Plowing ahead with training before obtaining a clear vision and unified leadership will likely lead to little long-term success**. The conversations that happen before training ever starts are crucial for success.

GOAL 2 · IMPLEMENT A TRAINING PROCESS & SEEK PARTNERSHIPS

One advantage of partnering with a training center is the resourcing and experience most new church ministries don't yet have. If biblical counseling training organizations deserve to exist, they had better be about helping churches make and grow disciples — equipping leaders to answer the struggles of a hurting world wisely. Get references from people who have trained with them and the results they obtained. Do you have rapport and connection with them?

LOOK FOR A TRAINING PARTNER THAT…

- Will equip *you* to train your people
- Aligns with your philosophy and church culture
- Will answer your questions and help you solve obstacles to implementation
- Offers a variety of ongoing training and resources to your people

GOAL 3 · PUT YOUR MINISTRY PLAN IN WRITING

"Nothing is official until it is in writing." Biblical counseling ministries require a longer development, training, and execution curve than most volunteer ministries — and every location faces different obstacles, whether inner-city Chicago, rural Kansas, suburban Minneapolis, or the Bible Belt. You won't have it all developed in the first year, but you should know where you are headed. **Your written plan needs to address four areas:**

- **Leadership** — Do you have the leadership to oversee the ministry? How will leaders report and be supported? What is the structure? How will you gather and train those who show interest?
- **Logistics** — Do you have a clear written plan and policies? A solid intake form that explains what your ministry is and isn't? (The "Lay Counseling Risk Management Guide" offers a helpful format and examples.)
- **Legal** — How will you safeguard your church, counselees, and counselors? Do you know your state's laws? Are your policies in writing, with a plan to communicate them regularly? (See the "Lay Counseling Legal Guide" and "Counseling Ministries: A Legal Checkup.")
- **Learning** — How will your counselors continue to grow? Who will help your people sharpen their counseling skills and knowledge? A quality training partner helps you move forward faster.

GOAL 4 · DETERMINE FIRST MINISTRY EXPERIENCES

The question training centers hear most: "When are people ready to begin counseling, and how do we start them getting experience?" Experience is necessary — once people taste these powerful yet simple principles at work, they often develop a passion for more. Propriety and confidentiality must be stressed, but the best equipping happens not only in the classroom but through **actual observation and involvement**. Four

models help potential lay counselors take a first step:

1. **Homework Helper** — A wise friend assists a counselee in completing assignments given by the counselor — accountability and encouragement now, and a first step toward lay counseling later. "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prov. 15:22).
2. **Life-Experience Advocate** — Who can better help someone through cancer than a person who saw God's faithfulness in the same affliction (2 Cor. 1:3–7)? Those facing addiction or marriage struggles find hope from those who have already experienced victory (1 Cor. 10:13).
3. **Counseling / Pastor's Office** — Observers watch an experienced counselor at the counseling table — silently at first, then increasingly involved. Experienced leaders mentor by inviting others into sessions.
4. **Living Room** — Especially in marriage ministry, one married couple ministers to another. The informal setting of a home helps couples open up, and great marriage studies give new leaders a ready topic and confidence.

Biblical counseling isn't simply a doctrinal position a church affirms or denies. We are called to put the philosophy into action — to stand in the battle with those who are struggling, offering help and hope. If you are committed to the philosophy, keep working toward the practice. And if you need help, reach out to those who have walked this path before.

THINK IT THROUGH

Where is our church in the process of putting our biblical counseling philosophy into practice?

Which of the four goals is realistic for our church this year — and do we have a plan to accomplish it?

If we haven't gotten past philosophy to practice, where is the vision breaking down?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

RPM Ministries — Dr. Bob Kellemen (the 4E Process)

Envision, Enlist, Equip, Employ — building a church OF biblical counseling, not just one WITH it.

- Equipping Biblical Counselors: A Guide to Discipling Believers for One-Another Ministry (book)
  rpmministries.org/bookstore/equipping-biblical-counselors-a-guide-to-discipling-believers-for-one-another-ministry/

From the LAUNCH Library

Your own ministry resources for the first year.

- Best Practices of Successful Counseling Ministries — the 10-worksheet series
- Stick to Six to Start: Shepherding the Basics
- Blueprint for a Successful Counseling Ministry

OUR FIRST-YEAR GOALS

Name the goal you will pursue this quarter, the leader who owns it, and your first step.

By Tim Allchin, D.Min., Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Center (biblicalcounselingcenter.org). Presented with grateful credit to Dr. Bob Kellemen — Equipping Biblical Counselors: A Guide to Discipling Believers for One-Another Ministry — and RPM Ministries (rpmministries.org).