Ten Errors of First-Time Deacons

Welcome to life as a deacon! *Always* exciting, inspiring, fulfilling and self-satisfying. Wait… that's not exactly true. Let's start over.

Welcome to life as a deacon! Much different than you expected (that's a little closer to the truth).

As you begin your ministry as a deacon, here are a few common errors to avoid for the sake of your ministry, your marriage and maybe even your sanity. The last thing that anyone wants to see happen here is for you to flame out in the first year. I've known a number of men that did and the following exhortations are the result. And by the way, I'm flamed out early on but found my stride a few months later. I wish I would have known about three of these errors back then.

1. Listening to Pastor Bashers. Once you become a deacon you enter a different perceived role. It is the role of sounding board for everyone who thinks your pastor in obtuse, lazy, overbearing, driven, long-winded, shallow, manipulative, disorganized, carnal, pharisaical, aloof, nosey, trite, over-analytical, under-educated, simple, complex, late, early, egregious, spineless, stubborn and/or incompetent. Do not listen to any of them. Ever.

2. Beast Mode. When I became a deacon I was uninformed of my physical, emotional, and spiritual limitations. I actually believed I could be on "beast mode." Beast mode, a term my kids used a few years ago, is that extra gear you have that let's you become insanely fast and unstoppable. It's a video game term. But you can only survive on beast mode for a day or two before you completely wear yourself out. Pace yourself in this first year. In the words of Spiderman's aunt: "You aren't

Superman, you know."

3. Desire for "Pixie Dust." There is no pixie dust that you can sprinkle over some messes that will make them look or smell better. You are going to have to get your hands dirty in other people's wreckage and there will be no "microwave" or "just add water" solutions. Usually it's a lot of hard, awkward, ugly work in ministry. There are times in ministry when all the axioms fall short.

4. Becoming a Solo-mission Specialist. A deacon is never a one man wrecking crew. It takes a tribe to do it. Going alone could have various consequences including:

- Gossip from a neighbor who sees you entering a widow's home by yourself.
- Anxiety from trying to accomplish tasks both great and small alone.
- Embarrassment from trying to fold that Lord's Supper table cloth alone in front of the congregation (impossible!).
- Danger from the generator as you try to reboot the church septic system.

Being a deacon without a wingman is a frustrating and lonely undertaking.

5. Going Full-On Gladiator. Deacons, avoid the temptation to be consumed in conflict. There will be conflict in church. Conflict is actually healthy, but left unchecked it grows like kudzu on a hot Georgia night. It will smother everything good that's happening in the church. Steve Davis, my pastor, reminded me that all deacons carry around two buckets. One filled with gas and the other with water. In every conflict deacons will throw one or the other at the flames. Choose the water please.

6. "Fake it 'til ya Make it." You can get away with this strategy from time to time but it's a whole lot easier to

learn *how* to do the work and ask questions when you're confused.

7. Anticipating the Ticker Tape Parade. It's an honor to serve but don't expected to be honored. Most of the important stuff you do will be things that only your Father in Heaven will see. There are also some exasperating moments. I often think about one phrase when I think about pastoring and being a deacon, "It's an early to rise, pride-swallowing onslaught!" Some days are like that and nobody gets a purple heart for those days.

8. Underestimating the Power of a 40-Year Member. They are out there and you might want to spend a little extra time getting to know them. Political move? Sometimes. Wise? More often than not. Listening and relating to them often makes connections and builds bridges that will reap benefits. They have a lot of experience and are often more open to change than you would imagine.

9. Trying to Speak When You Have No Words. Sometime I forget that listening and silence can be much more powerful and constructive that wagging my uninformed and mystified tongue. A deacon's presence at a funeral is more powerful than words. Trying to answer a question because you are embarrassed that you don't know the answer is downright dangerous.

10. And Finally … Forgetting the Pianist in the Lord's Supper Element Distribution. It's so easy to do! She isn't on a row. She's out in left field. She's busy doing something important and she's in full view of the congregation. Tie a string around your finger and then place the juice and wafer on the piano for her. Everybody watching will be glad you did!