

Church, is your slip showing? Because I am often on the road in ministry, I spend many nights away from home in hotels and motels. My first impression is a good indication of how I will be treated as a guest. If the parking lot is littered, the glass on the front doors dirty, the lobby cluttered and not clean, I know my stay will not be the best. **These are indicators of how much I am valued as a guest and customer.**



I sometimes find the same indicators in the churches I visit. When I drive onto a church parking lot for the first time, that first impression generally indicates the leadership of the church. When the parking lot is clean, the grass mowed, the shrubs trimmed, the building painted and attractive, I have a strong sense that someone is giving this congregation leadership. On the other hand, when things are cluttered, the parking lot hasn't been swept, striping for the parking stalls is dull and the general appearance of the building and lawn is unkempt, I know that leadership is needed to model the value

of every guest, visitor, and member!

One of my favorite authors dealing with church growth is Lyle E. Schaller. Some months ago I read his book, *"Twenty-One Bridges to the Twenty-First Century."* The twenty-one bridges that he shares are must reading for any pastor who wants to address issues that are relevant in our culture.

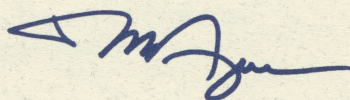
Schaller has studied churches like Willow Creek, pastored by Bill Hybels, Saddleback Community Church, pastored by Rick Warren, and many others that are realizing great success in reaching their communities. Schaller has identified four common characteristics of churches that are reaching large numbers of people born after 1945:

- The pastor has a strong commitment to excellence.
- The ministry focus is not on the institutional agenda of the congregation or denomination, but rather on meaningful responses to contemporary religious needs.
- The leaders project high expectations of people.
- Membership is not viewed as a destination, but rather as a pilgrimage that leads one to unreserved discipleship and a higher level of religious commitment.

In this day of consumerism, anything less than going beyond what is expected will come up short. Visiting a new church can be a traumatic experience for anyone. We need to provide a warm, secure and edifying welcome; **all of which begins in the parking lot.**

Pastor, when you have a free Sunday, visit another church. Carefully note how they welcome visitors, assist with parking, the appearance of the foyer, the condition of the hallways, the cleanliness of the restroom, and how the building, lawns and grounds are maintained.

Church, is your slip showing?



POINTS of Argue *meant*

Here are some of the books that I have been recommending to Christian Leaders:

You can find links to these resources at **Argue *meants* -online**
www.nwcollege.edu/argue

Twenty-One Bridges to the Twenty-First Century by Lyle E. Schaller. Pastor, if you are challenged to reach those who were born after 1945, this book is a practical handbook and a must read!

Amazing Faith by Michael Richardson. This is the authorized biography of Dr. Bill Bright who has been used of God in a most significant way. It is excellent! Over the years I have worked with Bill Bright on a personal basis and I have found him to be a person of deep commitment to Christ and unquestionable integrity. His leadership in Campus Crusade for Christ speaks for itself.

In Pursuit of His Glory by Gerald Fry, (foreword by Jack Hayford). This book is a must read for every pastor who hungers for true revival and is concerned with the effects of false revival. Pastor Fry, the former pastor of a church in Northern California of 5,000, speaks with much experience on this subject.

Managing Editors Choice: The Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage by Alfred Lansing, (foreword by Dr. James Dobson). The book traces the 1914 Expedition of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his ship *Endurance*. The expedition sought to cross Antarctica by dog-sledge, but became trapped in the ice and was crushed. The book highlights lessons on **leadership, team building, and determination**, in the face of uncontrollable circumstances.

Customer Service in the Church

Nordstrom. Microsoft. Starbucks. Speedy Auto Glass. Eagle Hardware & Garden. What do these companies all have in common? Total Customer Service! There is much that the Church can learn from these and other companies like them. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your local church was known around your community as the "Nordstrom of Churches", a place where the visitor, the unchurched and even the lifelong member is treated like a customer? Well, the fact of the matter is, in today's consumer driven economy, they are customers. People expect a lot more for their money when it comes to products, services, and especially customer service. Never assume that they aren't looking for it in the church. To assume that visitors aren't looking for excellence, cleanliness, and genuine care and concern is to make one of the most dangerous assumptions that any organization can make – **taking the customer for granted.** Eagle Hardware states, "If we don't service the customer, someone else will!" Given the current spiritual hunger in America, could this be part of the reason why so many people are turning away from the Institutional Church and toward churches that are relevant, caring and service oriented?

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"If we don't service the customer, someone else will!"*

Servicing the Customer

While it is true that the basis for a successful relationship with a customer is **common sense** and a **helpful attitude**, these alone are no longer enough. Why? Because, as the Dodge Truck commercial states, "The rules have changed." Now buyers (visitors) *assume* that products and services will meet their needs. Thus, today's buyer's (potential church members) decisions are based on two things:

1. **Trust in the people that serve them.**
2. **Value added service** - Total customer satisfaction with the assumed right to replace or return a product - without hassle.

The statistics speak for themselves. The average company loses about 17% of its customers each year. However, of the 17% who are lost, 67% take their business elsewhere. This last finding is especially important to patrons. They take their business elsewhere because **they feel they are no longer important to the seller.** Brad Young, Vice President of Speedy Auto Glass reports, "Companies lose 68% of their customers to competitors because customers detect an **attitude of indifference** on the part of that business."

Doing the Little Things Well

In serving customers, those who are highly successful are not markedly better than their competition. Rather, they consistently perform critical skills with just slightly greater finesse. Slightly improved skills will cause a big increase in your effectiveness, self-confidence and attitude.

Doing the little things (the things that a community expects from the local church) and doing them well will promote good will, respect and confidence on the part of the community when they think of you and your church. When there are needs and that unexpected crisis that comes to so many families, your church will be the first place they will turn for help.

Here are just some of the **little things?** (Or critical skills)

1. Greeting, caring and following up on visitors.
2. An organized and vibrant children's program.
3. A relevant, cutting-edge youth focus.
4. A professional and qualified counseling ministry.
5. Availability of facility for weddings and funerals (even to non-members).
6. Aggressive community outreach.
7. Follow-up on those in the hospital, shut-ins, and senior citizens.

Who is the "Customer Service Representative?"

Every year my wife and I have the pleasure of spending a week at my brother's town house at the Mount Bachelor Village in Bend, Oregon. When you check-in, you notice the mission statement for the resort hanging on the wall behind the front desk. It says, "Quality is never an accident; it is the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution. It represents the wise choice of many alternatives."

Our whole experience at Mount Bachelor exemplifies this theme. Quality, excellence and customer care are never an accident. They are the result of a mission, which is focused on every person within the organization understanding, that if there are no longer customers, there is no longer an organization!

How often we have forgotten in the church that we do not exist for our creeds, our traditions or our buildings. We exist for our customers-the lost men and women of the world for whom Jesus died.

You and every other person in the congregation who calls your church home is a customer service representative of your church. Instilling this vision is important to the overall success of the church and your mission in the community as a pastor.

During a transition period, before I came to Northwest College, I worked at Eagle Hardware and Garden for a short period. One valuable lesson I learned about customer service is called "The Ten-Foot Rule." This rule means that as an Eagle employee I was trained to greet and inquire of any customer, within a ten-foot radius, if they needed help. If the customer couldn't find something, we were to walk with them (across the entire store if necessary) to find that item. If we could not help the customer, we immediately called for a manager.

What if every local church applied "The Ten-Foot Rule?" Imagine a first time visitor who enters your church doors-anxious of their experience, burdened with the cares of life, and who has not been in a church for 20 years-if ever. The idea of even asking for help to find a drinking fountain, a Sunday School Class or the restroom causes their palms to break out in a cold sweat.

At that moment a member of your church (any member) walks across the foyer, having spotted an unfamiliar face who looks a little frightened, and simply, with warmth and genuine concern, asks, "May I help you?" And then, if necessary, takes them to the appropriate place.

This is just one of the critical skills that will make a visitor and the unchurched want to return again and again, until they are no longer a guest - but a member!

Customer Service and Christian Love

It is critical that the local church adopt, communicate, and train every member, greeter, usher, Sunday School teacher, board member, office staff, and pastoral team the *art* of customer service.

Many companies and organizations' customer service mottos have greatly inspired me. But none so much as Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, which states, "*Facing the Issues That Face Our Customers.*"

Imagine all of the ministry possibilities in this one statement. What if every local church, every para-church organization and every believer began to adopt this motto in their everyday life and practiced this ideal of, "Facing the issues that face the hurting and lonely of our communities." Jesus taught this same ideal when He said, "...love your neighbor as yourself." When strangers become neighbors, no one faces an issue of life alone!

What if we made this commitment to the struggling single parent, the shut-in senior citizen or the person dying of AIDS? We would reap the harvest that we have all prayed and longed for!

Customer service in the church is the art of Christian love, from one human being to another, in the name of Christ.

US vs. Canada Debate

Top debaters from the University of British Columbia will challenge the top ranking college debaters of Washington State in a public demonstration debate that will be the first broadcasted via the Internet in history.

The debate will take place in mid-September in Millard Hall on the Northwest College campus in Kirkland, Washington, two of Canada's best debaters will be matched against two United States champions for a debate on a current event issue to be announced. Students at the two institutions are still negotiating the topic, which could be gun control, capital punishment, world trade, information age or environmental protection.

The debate will end with the audience voting on who they think did the better job of debating the assigned topic. Then there will be a brief time for audience questioning. About 100 people are expected to attend. Admission is free.

The international debate will help prepare Northwest College debaters — Megan Calkins and Autumn Donnell — for the World Debating Championships to be held in Glasgow, Scotland the end of December. More than 300 colleges and universities from all over the world will send teams to the World Championship tournament.

For information about the Northwest College debate team, contact Associate Professor Gary Gillespie at 425.889.9418, gary.gillespie@ncag.edu, or on line at www.nwcollege.edu/debate.

Alumni & Friends Weekend 2000 September 28-30

Events include: The dedication of the Mark and Huldah Buntain School of Nursing on Friday the 28th at 10:00 AM in the Butterfield Chapel and The Alumni & Friends Banquet that evening, 7:00 PM at the Double Tree Plaza Hotel in Bellevue. Mrs. Buntain will be speaking at both events. The cost of the banquet is \$25.00 and tickets may be purchased through the Alumni Department.

Buntain School of Nursing Receives Major Financial Boosts

In July, President Argue received word of two significant pledges of support. Separate donors, who have asked to remain anonymous, have pledged support of \$50,000.00 and \$1 million toward a new building that will house the nursing school as well as other programs. Dr. Argue states, "These gifts not only begin to meet a definite need, they are an incredible vote of confidence! They underscore an axiom that has been proven in my life over and over again...Where God guides, He provides."

Northwest Arguemants

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First, every company must stand for something...
Second, you

don't just give customers what they ask for.

If you offer them something they're not accustomed to,
something so far superior that it takes a while
to develop their palates,

you can create a sense of

discovery and **excitement** and **loyalty**

that will **bond them** to you.

It may take longer, but if you have a **great product**,

you can **educate your customers** to like it

rather than kowtowing to mass-market appeal.

HOWARD SCHULTZ, CHAIRMAN & CEO, STARBUCKS

Rob Vatter, Director for Church Relations, is available to respond to questions and needs related to the local church. He is available to represent Northwest College to churches, missions conventions, and conferences. You can reach him at 425.889.5205 or rob.vatter@ncag.edu



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