
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Put Everyone on Your Research Team

After you've defined your publics (see the November 2020 Issue) put everyone on your research team. Ask key leaders in your church to start listening to what they hear others say about your church. Suggest they ask a barber or hair dresser, a mechanic or shop owner, what they know about your church.

Walk around your church's neighborhood. Stop and casually talk with people you meet, and ask them what they know about your church. The answers may surprise you, even alarm you, but they also may open your eyes to what your church has been communicating to the larger community over the years. Look at your church's communication through the non-churched person's eyes.

Make a list of the people who have visited in the last twelve months but not stayed. Send them a brief survey and ask them to share why they chose not to attend on a regular basis. You may only hear from a small number (usually about 10%), but what they say is oftentimes informative.

Interview a selection of volunteers, staff, members, attendees, parents, employees, and others to learn what their thoughts are

about your church. Where are they confused, informed, misguided, or annoyed? What information do they feel is needed for them to do their work or ministry in an excellent way? Use open-ended questions, such as, "Tell me about it," "Give me the details," or "Please explain."

Take three months to dig into the facts. List the key words your team heard pop up all the time. Summarize your research into a statement of the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of your overall communication to all your publics. Whom do you communicate to well? To whom not so well?

Remember: the place to measure the opinions of your publics is in the marketplace, among your employees, and in conversations with those outside your church. You cannot gauge the attitudes and opinions of your publics while sitting in your desk chair in the pastor's office.

Put Dr. Gary L. McIntosh on your church's research team.

Email cgnet@earthlink.net for full details.

Communicate with Your Publics

Aristotle offered some sound advice for communicating well: “Think like a wise man, but communicate in the language of the people.”

The best language of the people is that which is used while talking informally on a face-to-face basis. No matter how busy you are as a pastor, it's best to talk personally with your publics, especially when big changes are in the works. Whenever you have a large change or adjustment to ministry coming in the future, make it a point to stroll through the office or meet with some volunteers, members, attendees, etc., to discuss the subject. This sort of edge-of-the-desk discussion will provide keen insight. When you're sitting on the edge of the desk talking with others, it gives you immediate knowledge of whether they are with you or not, whether they understand or not, and whether they need additional information or not.

Make everyone in your church a public relations person. Getting as many people as possible to disseminate your church's message is something you must encourage at every opportunity. It's called word of mouth advertising. When you have a PR staff of hundreds or thousands, depending on

the size of your church, your message is empowered along numerous networks. Simple steps, such as, providing sharp, business-type cards to everyone in attendance with, say, an inspirational Scripture and the church's website information on it, and then encouraging people to distribute them to those they meet, can do wonders to spread a positive flow of communication to the community. Every preaching series should be backed up with supportive materials that your people are proud to display and share.

Tell your church's story to the community. While you think about your church all the time, it's surprising to discover that people in the larger community rarely think about your church. People who live only a block or two away from church property busily drive by without so much as an afterthought of your church. This happens most efficiently through a well-designed website and regular mailings to the homes of people in your community.

Run from glibness. It never pays to substitute glib announcements for words, ideas, and honest communication. The best advice is to communicate to your publics the way you'd like to be communicated to—clearly. Communicating clearly and honestly to your internal publics is the beginning. It's not always what you say that counts but what they hear and absorb.

***Growth Points* is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$25 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.**

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