
GROWTH POINTS

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

Care for Others

If you visit your local bank or credit union, you may run into the president in the lobby. She will shake your hand, welcome you, and say how happy she is to have you as a client. You'll be appropriately impressed and go away thinking it's a great bank. If the president doesn't take your money, it won't bother you; that's the teller's job. If she doesn't help you fill out a loan application, it won't matter; that's the loan officer's job. Indeed, if you don't see the president again for a couple of years, you really won't care. You have been favorably disposed to the bank because of that short meeting with the president.

Similarly, average church attendees today don't expect as much personal care from a pastor as they did in the past. As a pastor, however, you should cultivate a strategic presence.

Here are some ideas on how to do so.

First, walk slowly through the lobby.

Some pastors hide out before, between, and after worship services. Being in the green room may be comfortable, but you'll have a more strategic presence if you walk through the lobby, taking time to greet and speak with people. You don't need to engage in long conversations; just take time to speak with a few. Not everyone will get to talk with you, but everyone will know that you are there.

Second, listen and ask questions.

Focus on the person you're talking to, and resist looking past them to the next

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person. Learn to say, “I’m sorry,” “I don’t know,” “I’m happy for you,” “How can the church help,” “Will you forgive me,” and “I forgive you.”

Third, thank people for their concern, but don’t promise results.

When people share a criticism, nicely explain that you can’t do anything about the issue. Encourage them to talk to the right person or department. If they share a need, point them to the right ministry, or have them call the office and make an appointment to talk to you later. Resist the urge to jump right to an answer or provide a solution in the moment.

Fourth, thank people for their service to Jesus and your church.

A few words of appreciation will empower most people for a long time. Small, hand-written notes carry powerful aromas of care in today’s digital world.

Fifth, make strategic appearances.

Be present with people at key moments. Remember: funerals are mandatory; weddings are optional. Know your people and culture, and show up at key times.

Sixth, make pastoral phone calls.

Make one phone call a day to a randomly selected person who attends your church. Keep the conversation short, ask how he or she is doing, let him/her know you care about him/her, and thank him/her for being part of the church. Talk to whomever answers the phone. If it’s a little child, teenager, or other family member, talk with him or her.

Seventh, get out of the office.

Book at least one or two appointments a week with people to talk about real-world issues. Meet near places where people work. Don’t talk about the church or church issues, but discuss life in the real world. Focus on what is pressing in on their lives. Ask what they cry about, what they rejoice about, their work, families, and friends.

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