

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Simple Changes

**TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH MORE
UNCHURCHED FRIENDLY**

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You got into the ministry to reach people with the timeless message of Jesus. At some time in your journey, you've probably shed tears over the fact that there are people in your community who don't follow him. You didn't get in this to keep the people who are already "saved" but you feel called to seek people who need him deeply. **You want to echo the story of the scripture that shows a loving God pursuing humanity.** You want to reach unchurched people.

But where do you begin? What are the simple things that each of us could do to make our churches more open to unchurched people? There are literally thousands of changes you could undertake, but here are five that I believe your church could implement in the coming months to make a huge difference:

Double Down on Big Days

There are a handful of days during the year that unchurched people are more likely to attend. Although they vary slightly from context to context, they include Christmas Eve, Easter, Mother's Day, "First Sunday Back in the Fall", and somewhere around the start of the calendar year. You and your leadership team needs to be placing an extra effort on these days to ensure that three things happen with extra intensity during these special days:

- **Invite More People** // Too many churches spend too much time worrying about what is happening during the service on these "big days" that they forget to focus their efforts on ensuring that their people invite their friends! You need to pull out all the stops to ensure that your people are going out of their way to bring their friends to this service. Unchurched people are more willing to attend on these days and so we need our people to take some efforts and invite their friends!
- **Welcome Them Warmly** // Again, so much time and effort is put into the special music or maybe the message on these days that leaders forget that most unchurched people have formed their opinions of your church long before they sit in their seat. Ensure your guest services' team is on point and ready to greet people warmly (not creepily!) on these days. Take time to think through every step, from the moment they arrive at your location all the way through until they leave at the end of the day.
- **Follow up & Invite Back** // Finally, you've worked so hard to get them to come to your church, you've provided an incredibly engaging experience, and you had an amazing message mixed in there somewhere... but what next!?

The momentum and weight of the service now needs to be pushed towards your guests coming back. Big days are all about earning a compliment in the mind of the guests to say “hmm, I’d try that again some time.” Don’t bombard them with a 1,000 messages and don’t talk about everything your church does. All you need to do is, three or four times during the big day invite them to come back next week... that’s it!

Make Your Teaching More Visual

Compelling teaching is at the core of every church that is reaching unchurched people. There is a lot of coaching that could be done to help your teaching connect more with unchurched people, but if there was one thing that we all should do, it would be making our services more visual in that aspect of services. A lot of communicators are still just standing behind a podium of some sort and delivering a “talk”, which has become an outmoded form of communication in the broader culture. Check out these facts about the importance of visual communication:

- The brain processes visual information 60,000 faster than text.
 - 3M Corporation, 2001
- 90 percent of the information that comes to the brain is visual.
 - Hyerle, 2000
- Visual aids in the classroom improve learning by up to 400 percent.
 - 3M Corporation, 2001
- Approximately 65 percent of the population are visual learners.
 - Mind Tools, 1998



Here are some easy ways to add a visual element to your messages going forward:

- **Props** // So many of the passages we teach from have a visual hook at the center of them; why not bring one of those objects with you to show during your message. In fact, when you read the teachings of Jesus, it seems like he was constantly finding objects around him and using those to tell a bigger story. (For example: lost coin, lost sheep, budding or barren fig tree, lamps under bushels or baskets, wine skins, and sheep & goats, etc.)
- **Engage a Graphic Designer** // In most churches, there will be a volunteer or two who would love to help the church in improving its visuals. What if you reached out to them and asked them to partner with you for an upcoming series to develop something in such a way that the graphics are core to the message and not just window-dressings? What if your slides were more than just black background and white text?
- **What does your “stage” look like?** // Have you taken a step back and seen what your stage looks like? Does it communicate that something that is of importance to your listeners is happening here? Has the “look” been updated since the 1980s? If you’re looking for ideas on what to do with your stage [watch a few of the leading TED Talks](#) and notice the environments those speakers are in. Most churches stages are cluttered and unfocused, but you want yours to look contemporary and clean!

Slow Down to Explain Everything.

We are guilty of “too much jargon” in our churches. We have a lot of “insidery” language that we need to eliminate at all costs. Consider this representative list of “Christian jargon” from [Tim Keller’s book Preaching](#):

- “Lukewarm”
- “Backsliding”
- “Seeing fruit”
- “Spiritual warfare”
- “...in my walk with the Lord”
- “I’m praying for an open door”
- “I’ve been released from that”

- “That was such a blessing”
- “That preacher really brought the word”
- “It was a total God thing”



More than just removing useless language that mostly just confuses people who are new to the church, we need to slow down and take nothing for granted when we communicate as a church. This includes giving definitions of words that are not used in everyday conversations. It means slowing down to give the context of what our various sub-brands are as a church and who they are for. (It’s not self-evident that WonderLand is the ministry for preschoolers!) As well, it means taking time to walk through the Bible in a way that seeks to be clear over being clever, through helping people understand the passages we’re talking about in a way that drives towards life change rather than just trivial knowledge acquisition.

Robust “New Here” Process

What are unchurched people suppose to “do” when they arrive at your church? You can’t make the “next steps” you want each guest to take when they arrive too obvious. In fact, your team should regularly audit this process to ensure that it’s as clear as it possibly can be. You want to reduce every piece of potential friction towards helping people get connected to your community when they arrive.

Here are five questions to ask about what happens when people arrive at your church:

- How are people supposed to “self-identify” that they are new to our church?
- Why would I want to let the church know that I’m new to the church?

- What happens within 24 hours of a guest visiting our church? (72 hours? one week? one month?)
- If someone asked the question “I want to get connected to your church... what do I do?” What percentage of our team would give the same answer? (Plus, would it be the right answer?)
- What do we need to stop doing to make our new process clearer to our guests?

Be Remarkable.



“Be genuine. Be remarkable. Be worth connecting with.”
- Seth Godin (Marketer and Author, Purple Cow & Liar)

94% of churches are losing ground against the population growth of the communities they serve. [ref] At its core, you need to do something that no one else is doing to reach people. As we look around, the vast majority of churches aren’t doing anything that is worth their people talking to their friends about. Change that! Try something that sounds just a little nutty and see what happens. At this point, I would normally give you some examples but I’m going to resist doing that. What I want to do is give you permission to try it! We need to stop playing it safe and do something that gets people talking to each other. You know that thing you’ve been wondering about if it’s worth the risk to do it... do it! Double points if you sense it would appeal to people who don’t attend church on a regular basis.

I love that quote from Seth Godin because it’s the heart of how viral movements grow. They are led by leaders who are themselves...

leading from their area of gifting! (Sounds familiar?) They try stuff that people talk to their friends... they are literally remarkable. At their core, they are communities and people worth building a connection with... and we all want that in our churches!

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