



The Friendliness Factor

by Thom Rainer 6/25/2010

Performance evaluations are commonplace in most companies. Employees are normally reviewed on an annual basis and a critique is done of their productivity, attitude and overall performance. LifeWay is no different. Beginning with my very first year, however, I surprised my direct reports by having them evaluate me. It was important to me that I get honest feedback on how I was perceived by others in the company. It is very hard, if not impossible, to evaluate yourself and receive an honest appraisal.

I have found this to be true, as I have served as a consultant for many churches over the years. No matter the size, worship style, age, or location of the church, they tend to have one thing in common: They all believe they are friendly churches. Some believe they are the friendliest church in town. However, if they could see themselves through the eyes of a visitor, they may find that they are not perceived that way at all.

Genuineness is obvious

It is a part of every service. At some point, during the welcome, the pastor will ask everyone to stand and greet those around them. This is a great opportunity to make a visitor feel welcomed into worship. The danger, however, is that this can also come across as forced or awkward. The visitor receives an obligatory handshake and is not acknowledged for the rest of the service.

People are drawn to genuineness. They can spot manufactured friendliness a mile away. Make eye contact. Get their name. Spend a minute with them. We've all heard the saying that kids spell love t-i-m-e. Well, so do grown-ups. Spend some time getting to know them. Often, unchurched individuals find themselves at church for the first time because of a personal crisis. Genuine friendliness can be a huge factor in them returning to the church and, ultimately, accepting Christ as Savior.

Friendliness leads to evangelism

Friendliness and evangelistic effectiveness tend to go together. When church members are truly excited about evangelism there is a natural friendliness toward non-Christians. There is a genuine desire to welcome them into worship. Unchurched individuals often enter a church building expecting to be judged for their appearance, their

past, or their lack of church knowledge. However, when a church is full of people who truly embrace the command to love one another, the result is friendliness.

Of the hundreds of interviews I have conducted, an overwhelming majority listed the friendliness of the people as a major attraction to the particular church they eventually joined.

We are called to love

The leader of the church sets the tone. The pastor's modeling of friendliness is critical. Ultimately, however, it comes down to love. One of the characteristics of breakout church leaders is their unconditional love for the people in their church. The pastor expresses an intense love for the members of his congregation. The members then show love to non-Christians who are visiting their church. The visitors take note of the genuineness, friendliness, and love being exhibited. They feel comfortable and welcomed. The door is then open for them to hear about the One who loves them more than anyone else.

Most churches believe they are friendly. Periodically, however, an honest evaluation is necessary.

A first time visitor may arrive at your church this week. Will anyone greet them? Will they know where to sit? Will they feel genuinely welcome in the service?

Or will they slip in and out, unnoticed and never to return?

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