

# **Assimilating Dropouts–**

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\*made hundreds of home visits of inactive/dropouts.

None returned as a result of his visits; in fact, they seemed more determined than before to stay away. He always said to himself: "They are the problem, not me."

\*read 125 studies on "dropouts."

Found no answer as to how to change his behavior, as minister to dropouts, to make them want to return. So, he decided to conduct his own research.

Four congregations in United Methodist Church. Did in-depth interviews. (one-on-one) — Results:

1. Heard things I didn't like.
  2. Learned ways he (and any visitor to dropouts) should change behavior that he didn't like.
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\*Findings

## ***Zone A –Active Members***

Definition:

participate in worship 75% or more of time (excluding summers) has one/more commitments (choir, usher, teacher, etc.) makes a pledge, and pays at least 80% of it has a positive attitude regarding the church can articulate the faith he/she holds (though not always in an orthodox manner)

## ***Zone B –FAith in Spasm (Transitional Stage)***

Definition

definition: [decrease in the components of active membership as defined above]

[promoted (for 95% by an Anxiety Provoking Event)]

\*anxiety= internal alarm clock telling you that something is going wrong. - 4 kinds of anxiety:

1. Reality - Provoked Anxiety

\*produced by a historical event; something happened that was witnessed by self/others.

\*egs. "You' re the worst minister we' ve ever had."  
"We had to replace you because you did a bad job teaching Sunday School."

## 2. Morality - Provoked Anxiety

\*The #1 issue that produces dropouts. \*Comes on two levels:

- a. denominational [Denomination makes decisions that create conflict/anxiety]  
e.g. new rules
- b. local [Local issue -- inside /outside church produces conflict/anxiety] e.g.  
leader's affair

## 3. Neurotic - Provoked Anxiety

- a. \*psychic pain caused by imagination/ fantasy.  
\*E. G. of how minister might promote it:  
Shower a potential member with attention (many visits), so that he concludes that pastor is warm / responsive. Then, after he joins. move - on to give attention to other potentials -- neglecting the one who has joined.
- b. fact: No person can be intimately close with more than 12 persons simultaneously. Jesus knew it, and pastors should learn it. (Pastors should concentrate on rotating that group rapidly.)

## 4. Existential - Provoked Anxiety

\*what Tillich terms "awareness of nonbeing, " which implies:

1. loss of meaning for living; or,
2. awareness of the inevitability of death.

\*EGS. "God took my friend, so can' t believe in Hid goodness " "100 years form now I'll be dead."

**Note:** All of these produce "faith in spasm, " which trigger the doubt-mechanism.  
Next, the person issues a Cry For Help.

\* At first, the language is subtle egs. "worship has lost its meaning"  
"if you treat people this way, I' m leaving"

\* Typically , the local congregation decides it doesn't want such a person —and develops screening systems. [Often members are unaware of the systems.]

\*Good idea: post individuals to respond Immedaitely to cries for help —which occur 6-10 times each Sunday in the church of 100.

Rule: If you respond immediately, you will retain an average of 98%.

How to respond:

- A. perception check (read body language and say: "I wonder if you feel uncomfortable regarding...?")
- B. listen to person's pain

- C. do something immediate to e help -- even if it is very little (communicates that somebody really does care).
- D. reveal own humanity

e. g. "I' ve felt that way too."

\*Cries for help intensify...as it becomes clear that nobody is listening.

When there is no response to the cry for help: **anxiety** turns to **anger**.

## **\*Conclusions**

- 1. Nobody does help
- 2. Nobody will help

[i.e. The deep desires. intentions are ignored.]

\*At first such anger is covered and in ambivalent language. Then, things regress to outright hostility.

\*After becoming angry, behavior changes.

Leave church in stages:

- A. less worship service attendance (first indicator)
- B. less Sunday School attendance
- C. less work on committees/choir
- D. letter(s) of resignation

[note:] Often there is one final and desperate cry for help. When, again, there' s no response, the person stops coming completely —except the neurotic... who doesn't recognize the lack of response.

After the person stops coming completely, several thing occur:

\*He ceases speaking in theological language (secularizes); but then the theological returns.

[After returning, such language is better articulated than that of active members —as a rule.]

\*There is a period of limbo (6-8 weeks) when he waits for a visit. If no visit, he Reinvests his time/energy in another direction.

**Type #1** Skunky-Oriented (external blame bias):

Blames external items for his dropout status. Helpless

egs. carpet wrong color; choir sings off-key;

minister's sermons are bad.

Exhibits aggression and criticism.

**Type #2** Turtle-Oriented (internal blame bias):

Blames self for his dropout status. Hopeless

[note:] Skunks tend marry turtles. Sometimes turtles marry turtles, but infrequently do skunks marry skunks. Turtles have more power, for they are good at producing guilt in others —whereas skunks produce anger in others. Most ministers are turtles —and that's why they hesitate to call on dropouts (don't want guilt).

Zone C — Crossing of the Dropout Line

i.e. They seal-off emotion for the church.

Reinvestment of time/energy has become habitual.

66% into family (100% of turtles turn to family)

[note:] before sang " Oh For Thousand Tongues"; now sings "My God and I: We walk the Fields Together."

i.e. de-institutionalized christian — through hasn't; usually lost his faith.

33% into other institutions — e.g. PTA, Rotary, etc.

By this time, they have one of two reactions toward the church:

- A. apathy (suppressed feelings of helplessness)
- B. boredom (suppressed feelings of hopelessness)

Once this occurs...and the line has been crossed for a period of 2-4 months... the job of getting them to return becomes more difficult.

63.3% do return with one call -- if skilled listener calls, drops

22% if period of absence is 5 years or more.

## **Calling**

- Recognize that dropouts frequently have family problems
- Don't go to tell, but to hear.
- Develop listening skills
- Remember it must be a gradual process of rebuilding confidence.

How do sheep get lost? Blade by blade. They nibble themselves lost. They must return the same way home.

But, go looking for lost anyhow...just like in Parable of Lost Sheep. This shows the extravagance of God' s love, and should reveal the same about us.

- If you' re no longer willing to risk the life of the church for one member, you' ve lost the sensitivity.
- If you haven' t dealt with the screening behavior of the congregation, you' ll lose all who return.

