

More Service Please

by Don Klaassen

For a West Coast Canadian enduring a cool wet winter day, it seemed too good to be true! Listen to a 90-minute time-share sales presentation and be served by a free, three-day trip to sunny Las Vegas, no obligation! Our winsome sales representative started out as warm as Nevada sunshine. My rigid posture betrayed my inner resistance, but he coaxed me into relaxing by showing great interest in our family and our dreams of spending quality time together. He really seemed to care about us. My defenses weakened slightly and he closed in for the sale, but I stood my ground and did not sign the deal.

Suddenly he became cool and resentful. He abruptly left the room and the building, leaving us to sheepishly pick up the trip coupon on our own. The free trip turned out to have numerous restrictions which required the purchase of an expensive upgrade to make it anywhere near enjoyable. The nearly worthless trip coupon only confirmed my suspicions of the questionable motives for the salesman's concern and the poor quality of his product. I was inoculated against ever listening to a time-share presentation again. Without quality service it is impossible to build lasting relationships, successful businesses, or mission agencies!

A Crisis of Trust

The pastor I met with today said he receives 20-30 unsolicited offers of ministry helps and products every month. The motivation behind these offers is difficult to determine at first, and in most cases these offers turn out to be thinly disguised sales pitches for something that is not helpful.

My graduate thesis research project indicated that even denominational mission representatives are often mistrusted in their own denominations. Agency mobilizers' offers of "service" or "partnership" sound like catch phrases for "let me sell you something" or "what can you give me?"

What would happen if our ministries were built around service of the local church with no strings attached? Genuine, helpful service builds trust when it delivers over and above what was promised with no gimmicks or disappointing surprises. By serving well, the service provider proves that

she/he is trustworthy and has integrity. Those qualities seem rare these days.

Biblical Service

The New Testament is laced with references to service like: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to **serve**" (Matt. 20:28), "**Serve** one another in love" (Gal. 5:1), "**Serve** wholeheartedly, as if you were **servicing** the Lord, not men" (Eph. 6:7), "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve** others, faithfully" (1 Pet. 4:10), and "not greedy for money, but eager to **serve**" (1 Pet. 5:2) NIV, emphasis added.

Service motivated out of pure love is a sign of God's presence among His people. It is so shocking to experience, in and outside the church, that people take notice.

A program called "Love Abbotsford" has made a big impact in this area for years. It has now spread to many other Canadian cities. Annually Christians band together to serve their community with no strings attached. Pastors clean gas station toilets, youth give free car washes (no donations accepted), and everyone serves. This

brings incredible joy to the server and unites the church in the community while building trust with recipients.

Mission agency personnel who serve well demonstrate love for the church and church leaders. Praying for specific needs in the church, sending quality thank-you gifts, and encouraging an attitude of service in their missionaries are all ways that biblical service can be cultivated by agencies. As a denominational agency representative, I showed a simple thank-you PowerPoint® to donors and supporters of our missionaries. It often brought tears to the eyes of the viewers and in some cases unsolicited donations. Biblical service breaks down barriers and allows the body of Christ to be what it was meant to be.

Requested Service

I gladly open the door for a requested service person but close the door on unsolicited sales representatives. Glossy sales-type brochures and cold calls are increasingly ineffective. Mission agencies need to learn what types of services churches are requesting and try to provide those.

***Genuine, helpful service
builds trust when it
delivers over and above
what was promised with
no gimmicks or
disappointing surprises.***

Churches are often looking for help with focusing their mission endeavors, running effective conferences, involving their people, reaching their diverse neighbors, and training their short-term teams.

No two churches are alike, so service packages need to be adapted to meet the needs of congregations. Ellen Livingood's *Postings* article entitled "Real Listening" www.catalystservices.org/resources/index.shtml is an excellent primer in developing a listening ear and discerning what is really being requested.

Focused and Cooperative Service

I have never requested the services of someone whose advertisement in the local paper says "Will do anything." My concern is that the advertiser may know a little about a lot of things but is unable to do anything properly. An agency I worked in encouraged us to answer every request for service from churches affirmatively. This directive was well meaning but resulted in a scattered and unfocused service level. Agencies need to define what needed services they can provide and then do them well with personnel who are competent and professional in their approach.

I am impressed when service providers know their limits and refer me to someone else. Churches are impressed when agencies cooperate and complement one another. Frontiers Canada has a formalized partnership with four Canadian denominational mission agencies to send workers into restricted access countries, and the benefits are widespread. A partnership facilitator for Frontiers confided in me that it is certainly a lot of work to make these partnerships successful, but it is well worth the time and effort. He said that one denomination in the partnership is now rapidly deploying workers in areas where they had none a few years ago.

Appreciating Value of Service

The value of a new vehicle begins to depreciate as soon as the sale is finalized and it leaves the lot. On the contrary, quality service usually appreciates in value over time. When I find a mechanic I can trust and who knows what he is doing, I hate to lose him even if the cost of the service goes up over time. Building a reputation for good service is well worth it in the long run. Consumers of good service stay loyal, and they pass on recommendations through word of mouth.

Church leaders will more readily encourage their mission candidates towards agencies that have a reputation for good service. Hungry for Life International is a relatively young agency that is a growing ministry with a service attitude. They provide free strategic planning services to churches and make a commitment to send 100% of funds raised for approved projects. Administrative costs are funded separately as explained under the FAQs section of their web site (www.hungryforlife.org). Churches are responding so enthusiastically that the agency can hardly keep up. The Executive Director Dave Blundell says, "By serving churches, we remove many obstacles for local congregations to have a

direct and lasting international impact. Reversing the conventional model, we exist to serve the local church's international purpose; the local church doesn't exist to serve ours."

Practical Service

Every one of us has a sad story of buying an attractive electronic gadget that does not really work as advertised, only to discover that the manufacturer's service is poor or nonexistent. Good companies back up their products with service that actually makes the product practical and useful.

Churches have sad stories of mission agency programs they bought into which did not work and made little difference in the church or the world. Because of time restrictions, churches are often looking for flexible "plug and play" solutions to their mission education needs or short-term training. The problem with most agency media products that I have seen is that they are so filled with agency references and promotion that they cannot be used in a more generic setting. Millions of media budget dollars are being spent on presentations which are so agency specific that they are almost useless to anyone else.

*Agencies need to
define what needed
services they can
provide and then do
them well...*

Recently I received permission to adapt and use an educational tool called "24hr Blackout" developed by Canadian Baptist Ministries (www.24hrblackout.com/CBM). Using ideas from this program, our church conducted an entire Sunday morning program using no power or running water. Youth group members ran a bucket brigade from an outside water tank to flush the toilets. People remember not only that Sunday but the theme of connecting global mission and the wise use of resources. Canadian Baptist Ministries served our Mennonite Brethren congregation in a very practical way by allowing us to use their resource.

Relational Service

In offices across our nations, the competent photocopier service technician is far more popular than the photocopier sales representative. We tend to build relationships with those we value and need on an ongoing basis. We speak of "my hairdresser," "my mechanic" or "my lawyer." Christmas gifts and special tokens of appreciation are common among people who need and appreciate one another's service. Friendships are often based on a shared common experience or meeting one another's needs.

Agency leaders who invite pastors on overseas trips build relationships and lay the foundation for a trust relationship. Traveling together in an unfamiliar culture can build lasting friendships and camaraderie.

A denomination leader once gave me wise advice about approaching pastors. He reminded me that most pastors are barely able to tread water fast enough to keep their nostrils above the water line. If we come in and create waves by suggesting more things they should do, we may be tolerated but not welcomed. The mission mobilizer who can lower the water level by being a friend and a servant is the one who will gain a hearing in the long run.

Falling in Love with Service

It may sound odd, but I think I am in love with Toyota. I've driven Toyotas for years, and the company has served me well. My 1991 Previa van has logged 455,000 km, demanded little maintenance along the way, and is still in great shape. This afternoon just before I finished writing this article, I walked through an auto mall where my Corolla was being serviced, and I wasn't even tempted to look at any other vehicles. That's got to be love! Quality service made me a very loyal customer of this Japanese car maker.

These last weeks I have pondered what it is that motivates us to love God. I'm concluding that our love grows when we fathom what God has done for us in Christ. It is God's demonstrated love that draws us to him. We in turn are to

demonstrate our love for one another by serving as Christ did, even to the point of washing one another's feet.

Everybody loves a good servant when there is work to be done. Discipling the nations is a job that will only get done when we do it the way the Master did, by serving.



As ACMC Canada's British Columbia Director, Don serves as a church consultant with a global mission focus. He loves to listen to, encourage, and resource church leaders so that they can lead their congregations in discipling the nations.

ANALYSING OUR SERVICE TO CHURCHES

1. Our agency has objectives it feels called by God to achieve, and these include goals for church involvement. Is it possible to serve without strings attached as Don suggests in this article? How?
2. Do we tell churches that our organization exists to serve the church's global purposes? Is that a "face value" statement, or does our agency actually restrict our interpretation of such statements? Are there any integrity issues in our claims vs. intention?
3. Have we directly asked some pastors or other church leaders to evaluate our agency's statements about service to churches? Could we request them to be transparently honest about what they hear when we communicate our desire to serve? Do they feel we have a hidden agenda?
4. Do we have one level of service offered to all churches and other assistance exclusively for those who buy into our program? If so, are we honest about this with churches? Is there agreement on the part of our agency's leaders about where that line is drawn?
5. Don says that good service involves demonstrated love for the church and church leaders. Do we really love the church? One test: When we refer to the church, is it "they" or "we"?
6. Do we really understand what type of help churches want and need? How are our skills at defining the service that would best benefit any particular congregation?
7. What needed services can we provide really well? Is some of our service frankly second class? If so, what could we do to make it excellent, or do we need to eliminate some types of service to concentrate on what we can offer with highest quality? Are churches and our missionaries/staff clearly aware of our toolbox of quality services?
8. As we look at our media resources, how many are generic rather than self promotional? Could we better serve the Kingdom by producing more materials applicable to a broad spectrum of churches?
9. Is our approach to pastors creating waves or lowering the water level, to use Don's analogy? Are there additional ways we could make the pastor's task easier?
10. Does our staff have enough margin to be servants to churches or are they so pressured to produce agency-related results that they have little or no time to serve without strings?

To subscribe to future issues of **Interchange Postings**, go to www.catalystservices.org/resources/. Past issues are also available from this webpage.

To ask questions, suggest future topics, change your email address, or unsubscribe to this monthly publication, email info@catalystservices.org.

© 2007 Catalyst Service, Inc.