

Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle backgrounder. This session is really all about attitude and approach. And as a leader, I think this one starts in your heart and my heart. So I'll be honest with you. I've had over 20 years experience in church world and when people stopped attending, it would really bother me. It really bothered me. And my old approach was kind of frustration, cynicism, and resentment. I just wasn't very happy about it when people left or people stopped giving and you feel that sometimes. I've been to stores where the owner greets you and he's like, "Oh, you haven't been here in a long time." Almost like, "Who else have you been visiting?" And that's never a good feeling. Now, there's a couple of things about leadership that are really important and nuance. So I'm going to be talking about embracing the people who are attending less frequently.

Maybe people who used to be with you every week are with you once a month. How do you approach them? I'm going to suggest you take a path of embrace and kindness and humility, but I also want to nuance that a little bit. One of the other things I learned is I would kind of treat everybody with a blanket approach in the past. I'll give you an example out of taking up the offering, the offering talk on Sunday. I used to say things like, "Thank you everybody for being so generous." And then I had a consultant come in one day and he said, "Carey, everybody is not generous." I'm like, "Yeah, but what do you say?" And he said, "So you nuance your language. And you want to thank people who are being generous for being generous. So instead of saying, 'Thank you, everybody, you're so generous,' you might say something, 'Man, many of you are being so sacrificial right now and I just want to let you know, I really noticed that and I want to thank you for that.'" So that does two things.

Number one, it doesn't beat up the people who aren't being generous. But secondly, it really acknowledges that, "Hey, I know you're making a sacrifice right now and I just want to thank you for that." And then it kind of draws in people who are like, "Well, maybe I should be a little more generous," right? So there's some nuance to this. I'm going to run through the five ways to approach people in this video, but just know as a leader, your attitude leaks. So what I would do before you share this with your team is really honestly audit your attitude. Are you cynical and frustrated and resentful of the people who aren't embracing your ministry or your mission as much as they used to? If so, it probably starts with an attitude check in your heart. And when I privately behind the scenes and publicly in what I do, I'm kind to the people who aren't giving me what I hoped that they would give, I then model for my team how that works. So, anyway, with all that said, let's jump in to this month's Leader's Circle.

Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle. In this session, I want to talk to you about how to treat or embrace infrequent customers or attenders. Okay? This is a challenge. How do you interact with people who just don't show up or aren't embracing your mission the way you hope they would? It's simple. You actually embrace them anyway. Now, this is a real challenge for all of us who are leaders, right? Because you signed up a volunteer and it's like that volunteer said, "I'm going to be there all the time," and then they don't show up. Or you have a customer who says, "You are the best ever," and then you don't see them for six months, right? Or what about church attenders who only show up at Christmas and Easter and go, "But I love your church," and you're thinking on the inside, "Then why do you only show up twice a year if you love our church so much?" Or, "I love what we can do in the community," but you're like, "Well, then why don't you give because we could do more in the community if you actually gave some money."

It's hard not to be a cynic when you're in leadership for a little while, but here's the reality of the world we live in. Infrequency is on the rise. Brand loyalties are shifting, infrequent visitation is on the rise, and people just aren't as committed because they have a million options. You don't like this product? Great, return it, you're a swipe away from the next one. You didn't like this restaurant? Fine. I'm checking out the reviews on the next one. You don't like this church? Great. I've been watching another one online.

And people's attention is scattered. And so this is what this means, right? If people aren't around for six months in the old days, that meant they left. Now, it means no, they just haven't been.

I remember when I started out in leadership and I would go down the grocery aisle at the grocery store and I'd see someone from our church I hadn't seen in six months. And it was almost always that they had left, right? And so it gets super awkward. You're trying to, "Do I engage with them? Do I not?" They're a little embarrassed, their head's down. And you're thinking, "Do I really need cereal this badly?" You're thinking about even going to another aisle. And then it's like, "Hey, how you doing?" And they're like, "Fine. Yeah. You may have noticed we haven't been in church much. Yeah. I know." "Well, you find a new one?" "Yeah. We found a new church." It's like, "Oh! Good for you," but it's kind of awkward.

Now, when I run into people I haven't seen in six months, they're like, "Carey! How you doing man? We love your church." And I'm like, "If you love our church so much, why don't you come? It's been six months since we've seen you." But the culture has shifted. And so you have people who come out once every two months or if you're in retail, people who are buying less frequently. They're not upgrading their phones the way they used to, or they're cooking from home more so they're not at your restaurant or they bought kettlebells during the pandemic and they're not going to be at your gym as often as they used to be. So the question then becomes, how do you interact with infrequent attendees who don't seem to be embracing the mission of your organization the way you hope they would?

So here's the answer. It's simple. You embrace them anyway. Okay? For those of us who are faith leaders, that's exactly a reflection of how God treats us. I also think it's what emotionally intelligent people do. That also means if you're like me, you got to fight your inner cynic. Because my inner cynic wants me to dismiss the people who are not as committed as I am, to write them off, or roll my eyes, or kind of make fun of them behind their back. And that's not good. So I chose the word embrace on purpose because I know there's something deep-seated in many of us that wants to reject people if we sense that they're rejecting us. And when people don't show up frequently, it can feel like rejection to me. You don't like my preaching, you don't like my writing, you don't like my speaking, really? And I realized that one of the biggest journeys as a leader for me is I've got to get past my own insecurity and my own dysfunction.

And most people who haven't visited you for a few weeks or a few months aren't actually rejecting you. They're busy. They got on to other things. So what do you do? How do you respond in a great way? There's at least five ways you can respond and I want to share those with you in turn. First is, develop some empathy. Many of today's leaders over 40 remember at least in their parents' generation, when brand loyalty was a thing. Your grandfather was a GM guy or a Ford guy, or your mom used a certain kind of flour in her baking, or your grandparents were Episcopalians or Baptists. But people today don't think that way. It's like, "Well, last time I bought a Hyundai and this time I bought a Toyota. Next time I might buy a Honda. I don't know." And you probably toggle through car brand, shampoo brands, clothing based on all kinds of factors, right? Like price and style, delivery date, what your friends are doing, what your friends are into.

So more than any time in history, loyalties are fickle. And so customers have kind of taken control. That's what the internet has done. It's democratized power and knowledge. As a leader though, you are fiercely loyal to your brand. I hope you are, because you think you're leading the best thing in the world, right? And you want everyone else to be as deeply passionate in your mission as you do. Now, that means that you and I can get judgy when people don't, and that's the danger. If you start judging people for not seeing it your way, you almost certainly turn them off. People, especially teens and young adults, can smell judgment a mile away. And judgment creates barriers. So, what do you do? Instead of judging people, you empathize, you empathize. It's like, "You know what? I understand, life is busy. The kids are

at a really active stage. I'm sorry to hear that your mother was sick." Or, "Hey, I get it. Work was really, really busy."

It's not that hard to do, to empathize if you realize people probably have an attitude about other organizations similar to their attitude toward the church, like take going to the gym for example. When I had a gym membership, I would often not go for a month or two in the summer, truthfully. I wouldn't have been there in two months. I was spinning on my bike trainer, I was out on the road, I was running, I was walking, I was doing pushups, I was hiking, and I'd rather be outside. So for months at a time, I wouldn't go to the gym. Now, if I go back to the gym and the trainers there just kind of look up, one side me down to the other and they're like, "Wow, you're not making next month's Muscle Magazine, are you?"

Well, I wasn't trying for that in the first place, obviously, but no, I don't want to be judged. I want to be embraced. It's like, "Carey, it's good to see you." And if that's the attitude at the gym, every time you go, people are like, "Man, we missed you. It's so good to see you. Welcome back. Is there anything I can help with?" I'm probably more likely to go back to the gym in the future.

So, many people think the same way about your organization especially if you're reaching new people. If a person who's never been to your church, never been to your business, never been to your organization, shows up 12 times a year, that is far more than they have ever been before. And they might think they're doing great. They're like, "Wow, I've been working out. I've been to church more times in the last year than in my entire life," but they may not be measuring up to your standards.

So rather than judging them for it, tell them they're doing great. Invite them into a deeper conversation about faith and life. But if you stand there with a scowl on your face every time an infrequent attendee shows up, you know what? They're not coming back. If you're always angry about empty seats, why would anybody want to sit in one? So, empathize. Try to understand, you behave this way in other spheres of your life, cut them some slack. Second thing is, separate the mission from the method. If you have a lot of infrequent people, maybe the problem is your method, not your mission. I assume you got a great mission, but too many leaders mix up the method and the mission. That's one of the things that for example happened to Kodak and is happening in journalism. And it's a bit of an epidemic in the church world. The mistake is so easy to make in leadership.

A method is simply a current approach that helps you accomplish the mission. It's how you do what you do. The mission is why you exist. So the problem in most organizations is people including leaders get very fond of their methods. You get rewarded for great methods, right? Like the kind of service you offer, the programming your church does, or whatever else you become good at. And you get rewarded by results and sometimes become known for how well you do things. "Nobody does music better than this church," or, "Oh my goodness. Have you had the creme brulee for dessert at this restaurant?" Or, "This gym has more ellipticals than any other gym in the city." So, that is a good thing but it's got an Achilles heel. Because nobody was better at film photography for almost a century than Kodak. And no one had a more prestigious paper in America than The New York Times. The method was printed photographs, the mission was capturing memories. The method was newspapers, the mission is delivering the news.

See, this is all over the place. The method was taxi cabs, the mission is moving people. The method was hotels, the mission is giving people a place to stay. So taxi cabs are really struggling because Uber and ride sharing came along. Hotels, they're doing okay, but they've had a real hit from Airbnb. And so you've got to start thinking through, okay, Kodak didn't make it, The New York times is sort of making it and some papers are sort of making it right now. But you got to think about how this applies to you, right?

So the method for a lot of churches was Sunday services at set times. The mission is leading people into a relationship with Christ. Chances are the people you lead love your methods as much as they love their mission. Otherwise, they wouldn't be there. They love going, "I'd never miss a Sunday. I don't know what's wrong with everybody else," which is also why so difficult to change your methods. Sometimes when your methods have made you successful, you come to see them as sacred and you're so reluctant to change. But the methods are never sacred, the mission is sacred.

When you refuse to change the method, you eventually kill the mission. So if you're having real trouble attracting people on a regular basis, you got to ask yourself the question, "Is it the mission, or is it the method?" It's probably the method.

Okay. Number three, use technology to connect more frequently. We've done whole units on this and I won't belabor it. But leaders today have an advantage that we simply didn't have even a decade ago. Social media, YouTube, email, they're great ways to help people deepen their journey with you, with Christ, and not just sell your latest programs. What if you started viewing your social media channels in your email list as an opportunity to come alongside people and help them grow in their faith? They're growing in whatever mission you're trying to accomplish, right? If you said, "Hey, rather than just when you're with us in the building, we can connect on a regular basis," you will begin to see a much deeper level of engagement. So, you want to encourage them, you want to inspire them, you want to challenge them and help them. If you show up as a positive force on their social feed, in their inbox, they're going to be so glad you did. Now, how do you do that? It's simple. Be helpful. You really want to help people.

If you run your social media and your email content through a helpful filter, people will be thrilled to hear from you. And it will deepen the bond you have with infrequent attendees and might even make them more frequent attendees. They'll come to see you as a friend, they're thinking about you every day. So, be the favorite person on their social media feed, be the favorite person in their inbox, and never underestimate what being helpful does for everyone involved. Okay. That's point number three.

Number four, start measuring outputs, not inputs. So leaders are programmed to measure inputs, not outputs. We measure how many people showed up, what they spent, or what they gave, whether they brought friends or even the volume of online traffic or views to your website or social. But rarely do we measure outputs. What if your organization became as much a sending organization as a receiving organization, a connecting organization rather than just a gathering.

We used to measure by tracking how many people would show up in a physical building, Home Depot used to do a similar thing. And there was a debate in Home Depot about 15, 20 years ago that said, "You know what? We should not have a strong internet presence because then we'll lose people who shop in stores." But what Home Depot learned like a lot of others is that clicks lead to bricks. That if you've got all your lawnmowers online and people can see the options, they might say, "Well, I can see it online, but I really want to see it in person. I want to push it myself before I buy." And what they learned is the better they did with their digital strategy, the better they did with their in-store sales.

Clicks lead to bricks. So you can get people engaging from home, shopping from home, telling their friends from home. Another thing you can do, another output you can do is celebrate the life change that's happening. A really fun follow for me is Dave Ramsey on social media and his whole team. They have a great way of measuring outputs because it's not about, "Here's what Ramsey is doing." It's about people who use their products and the impact in their lives. So, you'll see this regularly, if you look at any of their feeds, is there's person after person, family after family, holding up a little sign that says, "Hey, I paid off \$96,000 in 18 months," and they do this debt-free scream, right? Dave Ramsey and his team celebrate that. They're measuring the outputs in the lives of people. So leaders get passionate about what they measure so measure thoughtfully.

And then finally, celebrate wins. It's kind of weird, right? When a little child takes her first steps, we applaud wildly, "Way to go!" We film it. But when adults take their first steps, we call them immature or not committed. Just because someone engages with you once in a while doesn't mean they won't engage with you more, so again, rather than judging them, why not love them? When somebody makes a first gift, even if it's \$1 or \$5, celebrate wildly. When somebody shows up for the first time, really warmly greet them. When they come back a second time, really celebrate that. Send a handwritten note or a thank you to each first time attender, or a personal email, or a video message. Just shoot them a quick video and say, "Man, Carey, we're so glad you showed up. Thank you so much." It goes a long, long way.

So, bottom line, how do you interact with infrequent customers or attenders who don't seem to be embracing the mission the way you hope they would? It's simple. You embrace them anyway. I would love for you to jump into the team application guide, figure out what you can do to create a more inviting, less judgemental, more celebratory culture. And then I'd love to see the results you're getting three or four months down the road.

Okay. So that's this month's training. And I got to say, just an attitude and a heart check for you. I know for me, I still have to watch that, I can get cynical. I just had another personality assessment done. It's like, "Sometimes you're a little cynical, you're a little critical." I got to be so careful. I try to not let that leak out and it's something that personally, I try to surrender in prayer. An abundant mindset really wins at the end of the day. And if you start to look at even your competitors as people you can cooperate with, it's amazing how things grow.

And then the other thing I would really encourage you to double-click on just in your own personal study, is your methods are probably what's killing you. If you've got a real problem with infrequency, you probably really want to look into your methods. We're in the midst of a big revolution right now. And as much as 2021 is a really interesting year, I think the next five years are going to have unprecedented change. Digital is the future. And so it might be a question of you just got to rethink your strategy to really prepare yourself for the digital age. And we've talked about this before at different times and at different sessions.

But when you think about digital, people are always afraid that digital is a backdoor. I think increasingly digital is a front door and a side door. It's a front door to people who are new. People never do anything now without checking it out online first, that's true of your church, your business, your organization. But it's also a side door for other people who would normally be there but aren't this week. Now they can still engage with you, they can still follow you, they can still interact with you.

So if you start to think of digital as a complement to what you're doing, or a part, an integral part of your strategy, I think you'll get a lot of progress. So, hope this backgrounder helps and I hope this session of Leader's Circle with your team really helps you make progress with the people who are perhaps a little less frequent than you'd like.