

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

**AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE, &
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS**

TOTALLY THERE

Chuck Swindoll's wife, Cynthia, says that one of her husband's greatest assets is his ability to be "totally there," regardless of what he is doing. This capacity to concentrate on the present is one of the great needs of a pastor. Whether at a wedding, nursing care center, prison, intensive care unit, counseling session, or in an informal conversation—a pastor needs to learn to be totally there.

Recently I spent the afternoon with my mother who was temporarily in a nursing home while recovering from medical treatment. The pastor of a local church came in. He was there for four minutes. He stood the entire time, at the foot of her bed, jangling his car keys. It was obvious that his mind was on his next appointment (or maybe his golf game) rather than on her. He was, and wasn't, there.

Limited Attention Span

The head of a large TV ministry invited me into his office after I was a guest on his program. He wanted to talk about personal problems. However, the moment I began to get specific in my counsel, he moved around behind his desk and began opening his mail. His attention span in our conversation was the same as it had been before the camera—about three minutes and 45 seconds; then it was on to the next segment of the show.

Most people can spot the phony pastor who says with his mouth, "I care," but with his body language says, "I wish I were somewhere else," or worse, "I wish you were someone else." Jesus had the ability to be real in every situation. At a wedding He probably joined in with the merriment, drinking wine and dancing the Jewish dances. When His friends were sad, He wept with them. He was "totally there" in every situation. It's difficult to even imagine Him talking to a needy person and letting His mind wander at the same time.

Making Me Feel Important

This same principle must apply at home as well as on the job. How easy to be at home in the body but somewhere else in your mind and spirit. The whole person knows how to play. He knows how to laugh uproariously, how to listen intently to a child or grandchild, empathizing with every joy and sorrow. He knows when a wife says one thing but means something else—because he is listening. He refuses to be interrupted if he is in conversation with his child or wife. He learns to look his child in the eye while listening rather than reading the paper at the same time. As he would in an intense counseling situation, he learns to give himself totally to

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every situation and to every person who is important to him.

Perhaps the greatest compliment anyone can pay a pastor is this: "When I talk to him he makes me feel like I am the only person in the world." Cultivate the capacity for being "totally there."



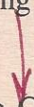
SALES AND SERVICE

Last year my 21-year-old daughter got a form letter from State Farm Insurance saying they were not going to renew her policy. The reason: she had had two accidents over the last three years. The first accident was a hit-and-run. Someone had smacked her fender while her car was parked and unattended at the mall. The second accident came when the tie-rod on her new Nissan dropped off while she was driving home one evening, causing her to bang against a curb and destroy a wheel. Neither accident was caused by faulty driving, but since she filed for an insurance claim and was a 21-year-old unmarried, the computer told State Farm she was a poor risk.

I've had all of my insurance with State Farm for 20 years. When I took out my first policies I did it because the agent was a friendly, caring, church-going fellow who stopped by my house and literally sold me on himself and State Farm. He took me out to lunch, expressed interest in our new little church and showed me the pictures of his children. He was a good insurance evangelist and I was proud to call him "my agent."

Naturally, with an approach like this, his agency grew. But there was no continuing "pastoral" service. Soon I could no longer get hold of the agent when I had a question about my insurance. I was forced to talk with his associate. Later the associate began to refer me to a secretary. Then one day, when I finally did get through to the agent on the phone, he called me Jim. It was obvious he was reading my legal name, James, from the form in front of him and was trying to act personal. Instead he came across as phony.

Inwardly, I was burning. Over the years I'd put an awful lot of money into State Farm. I'd only filed five claims—the most expensive was less than \$800. On three occasions, like the time the hurricane blew down my big TV antenna, I didn't even file a claim. In turn, I felt I deserved a bit more than being sloughed off to a junior grade employee and then being called by someone else's name when I finally did get through to the boss. Gone were the days when he would call just to say, "How're you doing?" or to suggest I make some changes in my policies. He was too busy enlisting new clients. Now all I got were premium notices.




It's Time to Change

So, when the form letter arrived saying that they were not going to renew my daughter's insurance, I reacted. I cancelled all of my policies (seven of them) and started all over with an independent agent who is a personal friend and a member of my church. His prices are not quite as good as State Farm's, but he's my friend.

There are times when we miss the familiar. Over and over my wife has said, "State Farm's bills were so easy to understand. These new premium notices are confusing." But the one thing we have with our new agent is friendly service.

That's what I want from my insurance agent. It's the same thing I want from my family doctor and my automobile mechanic. I want to do business with someone who cares about me, who

knows my name, who knows the names of my children and will not send me a computerized letter saying my precious daughter is *persona non grata*.



Personalized Pastoring

Sound familiar? As I was going through all of this, I suddenly realized this is exactly what most church members expect of their pastor. I thought about the tither who gives faithfully, who comes every Sunday, who loves and appreciates the church for all its ministries, who supports special causes, who never makes demands on the pastor and staff, and then one day gets a computerized letter from the church office saying that his car was parked in a "staff only" slot last Sunday and if it happens again they'll call the police and give him a ticket.

No wonder people leave large churches—and change insurance companies.

Some churches are great on sales. They do a splendid job of evangelism but have no concept of service—i.e., pastoral care. Others major in personalized service. They really take care of the flock with excellent pastoral care, but they have little concept of how to enlist people into the kingdom. The ideal church is a balance between sales and service. They have a warm-hearted evangelism program, but it doesn't stop with obstetrics. They move on to pediatrics with a caring pastoral ministry.

State Farm is an outstanding insurance company. I miss their rates, their efficiency in billing and their excellent claim procedures. But I want more in an insurance company. I want personal care. I want the agent to know me by name.

Should a church member expect any less from his pastor?

TAX-FREE HOUSING

The Internal Revenue Service has ruled that ministers who use their own funds to acquire a home cannot also receive a tax-free housing allowance.

The ruling came after Jimmy Swaggart and his wife built their home with their own funds and never mortgaged it. Later, his church—the Jimmy Swaggart Evangelistic Association—granted him a monthly "parsonage allowance," in addition to paying "operating and maintenance costs." The IRS challenged the Swaggart's exclusion of the monthly housing allowance, holding that the law permits such an exclusion only "to the extent used...to rent or provide a home." Since the Swaggarts had paid for their home and owed nothing, the IRS said they were not eligible to receive a tax-free parsonage allowance. The Swaggarts protested in court, saying the rule discriminates against ministers who choose to stay out of debt by saving their money in order to pay cash. The tax court agreed that Swaggart's argument had "some surface appeal," but ruled against them just the same.

In other words: Your housing allowance is tax-free ONLY if you have a debt on your home. However, you may still have a portion of your salary designated as a "living allowance" or "operating and maintenance allowance" to cover everything except house payments. Even though you must justify how that money was spent when you file your tax return, it does not have to be shown as earned income.

TRAVEL TIPS

My friend John French had his pocket picked last year on his way home from Israel. During a Paris stopover he found himself in the middle of a group of laughing kids who were running down the sidewalk. One of them bumped against him. After they had run on he felt his pocket and realized his wallet had been lifted by experts. Fortunately he carried his cash and important stuff in another pocket so that all he lost were credit cards. He was able to notify the credit card companies, averting what could have been a major disaster.

The Lesson: When overseas (or in any crowded urban situation) watch out for pickpockets. Don't put all your valuables in one pocket. When overseas it's best to carry cash in a money clip in a side pocket. (Foreign money is odd-sized anyway, and doesn't fit well in a billfold.) Keep all your spare cash in travelers' checks—with the check numbers in your briefcase.

Note: Last year I was in the airport in Bogota, Columbia, and noticed a big sign on the wall that said "Watch Out for Pickpockets. Check Your Wallet." Everyone who saw the sign immediately reached to see if his wallet was in place. I later learned the pickpockets had placed the sign. By observing those feeling for their wallets they knew exactly which pocket to pick. The pickpockets in Bogota are in a class by themselves.

SYMPATHY OR EMPATHY

□ A secretary comes into the pastor's office Friday morning to discuss a personal problem. The church has installed a new computer and she had volunteered to be the operator. The new job, she says, is causing a serious strain on her marriage. The pastor says he would like to think about the situation over the weekend. But for the rest of the day he can think of nothing else. In fact, he is unable to concentrate on his sermon preparation. Is he sympathizing or empathizing with the secretary?

If you say he's sympathizing, you're right. Most people think a pastor should be a sympathetic person. But, in the case of staff relations, this can get in the way of helpful support. The sympathetic person is affected by whatever affects the other person. The empathetic person, on the other hand, understands another's feelings without emotional involvement.

It is impossible to be objective if you let another person's problems become your own. Empathy allows you to understand both the nature of the problem and the full range of possible solutions.

In this issue I'm SPOTLIGHTING. . .

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Our need for encouragement is legitimate. It is not a consequence of modern society's preoccupation with self. In fact, the Bible recognizes encouragement as a human need which we are to fill for one another. No one needs this more than a staff member, a lay worker in the church or a struggling Christian who is trying to live for Jesus.

William Barclay described the family of Greek words to which encouragement belongs as denoting "that kind of comfort and consolation in distress which keeps a man on his feet, when, left to himself, he would collapse. It is the comfort which enables a man to pass the breaking point and not break."

Nowhere is this more needed than in the relationship between pastor and staff.

Speers?

According to Maurice Thomas, manager of Plant Human Resources Development for Armstrong World Industries, the key to managing people is knowing how to encourage desirable behavior and discourage undesirable behavior (*Innovations*, Fall 1984). Thomas says the way to apply this is by using what he calls "positive reinforcement," which is a fancy way of saying you ought to reward people for jobs well done.

The reward, however, is not looked upon as an enticement, but encouragement.

While many leaders use punishment as the best means for producing results, Thomas says this means of behavior modification is ineffective because it (1) is temporary, (2) causes counter-productive emotional reactions, and (3) produces a negative impact on performance.

On the other hand, encouragement causes people to gravitate toward behaviors that produce good positive rewards. Positive reinforcement maintains and enhances the self-esteem of the staff member.

Here are Thomas' guidelines for encouragement:

- Begin reinforcement at the first sign of desirable behavior. Don't just give one comment for an accumulation of good performances.
- Reinforce your staff members after their good behavior, not before it. Compliments received before the job is completed lose their value.
- The closer the reinforcement is to the behavior, the greater its impact. The pastor who waits three weeks to show appreciation to a staff member who has worked hard on a completed project has missed his chance to reinforce adequately.
- Reinforce the slightest increase in good performance. Don't wait until a person makes a substantial advance. Comments on small progress make bigger progresses easier.
- Correlate the relationship between positive behavior and its reinforcement. The reward offered should be clearly associated with the performance given. Make your reinforcement comments specific—and heartfelt.

How do you reinforce good behavior?

1. Describe the person's good performance to him or her.
2. Explain how the performance made you feel and how it helps others.
3. Ask the person how you can help him continue his performance.
4. Identify what you want to do to help him.
5. Thank the person and express your confidence.

Writing in the March issue of *The Small Group Letter*, published by The Navigators, Fran Sciacca, a teacher at Colorado Springs Christian School, quotes actress Celeste Holm. "We live

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by encouragement, and we die without it—sadly, slowly and angrily.”

She's right! Throughout the Bible, God emphasizes the importance of giving recognition to those who deserve it. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this is in Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:21). To each of the productive servants the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." It was a clear commendation.

In *Management: A Biblical Approach* (Victor Books, 1982), Myron Rush points out that this passage expresses an important principle of leadership and management: Give credit and recognition to people for their accomplishments. Giving recognition costs nothing. Yet it is one of the most overlooked tools of motivation a leader has at his disposal.

Peters and Waterman, writing in *In Search of Excellence* (Harper and Row, 1982), warn of the danger of too much reinforcement. They point out that regular commendation loses impact because it comes to be expected. That is, if the pastor commends each staff member at every staff meeting, or brags on the associate pastor every Sunday morning when the associate comes to the platform to lead in prayer, or says after every offertory, "Don't we have a wonderful organist!"—the encouragement loses its punch. Furthermore, if it's accidentally withheld the staff member often takes it personally.

Unpredictable and intermittent reinforcements work better, say Peters and Waterman. Moreover, small rewards are frequently more effective than large ones. Big bonuses often become political, and they discourage legions of workers who don't get them but think they deserve them. The small reward then becomes a cause for positive celebration.

The pastor/leader who "gushes" is also ineffective. Sometimes his public commendations are so sticky they become an embarrassment to the very ones he wants to encourage.

Take the pastor who insists on marching the kitchen help out into the dining room after every church supper so the group can "show their appreciation." A far better way to show appreciation would be for the diners to scrape their plates and fold the tables at the end of the meal.

The same is true of the pastor who insists on leading the applause at a worship service after a musician has finished singing or playing. Often the finest way to show appreciation would be to give an altar call, to lead the people in prayer, or to launch directly into the sermon without mention of what has just transpired, building on the spirit generated by the musician. Instead, insensitive pastors and people often quench the Spirit by applauding when a far better way to show appreciation would be to use the gift just offered as a springboard to what comes next. Then, after the service, at the weekly staff meeting in front of others, or in a personal note, voice heartfelt appreciation for a job well done.

Group applause is perhaps the poorest (yet the most frequently used) method of showing appreciation.

It was said of Job, "Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees" (Job 4:4). What about it, Pastor? Does that describe your relationship with those working with and under you?

