

When love doesn't sell

LAY PASTORS LOVE THEIR ASSIGNED PEOPLE BY BEING THERE FOR THEM AND CARING ABOUT THEM. BUT, AS EVERY LOVERS KNOWS, LOVE REQUIRES BOTH A GIVER AND RECEIVER. SO WHAT ARE YOU DO WHEN THE GIVER GIVES BUT THE RECEIVER DOESN'T RECEIVE? OR, AT BEST, WHEN THE RECEIVER IS POLITE BUT INDIFFERENT TO YOUR INITIATIVES?

LOVING A NON-RECEIVER RAISES SIX HARD QUESTIONS:

HOW DO YOU HANDLE REJECTION?

HOW DO YOU REACT TO INDIFFERENCE?

WHAT DO YOU WITH A COLD SHOULDER?

HOW LONG CAN YOU CARE FOR A PERSON WHO DOESN'T CARE ABOUT YOU?

WHY CONTINUE LOVING WHEN LOVE ISN'T SELLING?

Lay Pastors are not the only ones struggling with these had questions? America's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, has struggled with them since entering the German market in 1997. Their bottom line in Germany is showing a loss of between \$200 million and \$300 million a year. Such a loss pressures them to find a way around potential shoppers' resistance. What does a corporation do about its bottom line in a market in which its friendly and helpful service doesn't sell?

What does a Lay Pastors Ministry do about its "bottom line" when its service of "love given" doesn't sell? To have a successful "bottom line" – love received – lay pastors must also, like Wal-Mart, find a way around people's resistance.

What can we learn from Wal-Mart's challenge in Germany that is useful to lay pastors? The one who said, "My kingdom is not of this world," commended *the people of this world* for being more shrewd than *the people of light* (Luke 16:8). Jesus' insightful statement tells ius to use Wal-Mart's strategy to fulfill His assignment to us – "Take care of my sheep" (John 21:16). So, let's see wat we can learn.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES is the first entry to our learning list. German resistance has nothing to do with Wal-Mart's merchandise, but has everything to do with Wal-Mart's corporate culture of friendliness and helpfulness.

Simply stated, the root of the problem is German shopping culture versus Wal-Mart's

business culture. The German shopping culture is entrenched and conservative. People are used to things the way they are. To them, Wal-Mart's friendliness culture smells like a sales pitch. Helpfulness feels intrusive. As a rule, they don't like it when other people touch their things.

Specially, Wal-Mart's corporative culture of friendliness and helpfulness produced culture shock for prospective German customers. In America, this same corporate culture produced great success. The Knight Ridder Foreign Service described the surprise reaction like this: "Grumpy Teutonic shoppers recoiled when employees greeted them in the aisles. Customers, used to finding for themselves, resisted when cashiers tried to pack their purchases in free plastic bags.....Them marriage of American hominess and German frostiness has been rocky so far for Wal-Mart."

This culture conflict is causing more than financial losses. It is also triggering government intrusion, union and materials-supplier problems, and the downsizing of their expansion plans.

The clash between Wal-Mart's business culture and the German shopping culture helps lay pastors understand why some church members resist their caring initiatives. Often, resistance is due to the culture clash between belief in pastoral care by laypeople and the congregation's deeply entrenched belief in pastoral care by clergy only. What about resistance in congregations which believe in lay ministry? In churches where lay pastoral care is widely accepted, resistance can be due to a church member's individual culture. He or she has not yet bought into the ministry culture of lay pastoral care.

Whether resistance is due to church culture, individual culture, or both, in many churches, giving and receiving pastoral care is like pouring "new wine into old wine skins." Some people say the old wine is better, they prefer things as they were. (Luke 5:37-39).

So, what do we learn from culture differences? We learn that people's "frostiness" has nothing to do with the merchandise of loving care, but everything to do with the biblical culture of every-member ministry.

To say it plainly, resistance is due to traditional culture versus biblical culture – the appeal in I Peter 5:1-4 "ordinary people" to be shepherd's of God's flock versus the centuries-old belief that only ordained clergy qualify.

SHREWD STRATEGY is the second entry to our learning list. Wal-Mart is moving ahead on three shrewd-strategy tracks. Assessment, Evaluation, and Studying the

German culture.

The first track: They are assessing the situation. "We have a societal problem, not a service problem," one of their consultants said. She attributes the trouble to the social revolution of the late 1960s when politeness was deemed "a bourgeois relic." This is the root of cashiers scowling at customers and even ignoring them. Shoppers perceive friendliness as hypocrisy or currying favor. They don't trust human warmth in business.

Lay pastors, assessing a frosty situation, can know it is likely a "societal problem, not a service problem." In other words, it is cultural problem, not a lay pastoral care problem. *And especially, it is not the fault of the lay pastor.* I emphasize this latter point, that it is not the fault of the lay pastor, because many lay pastors rush to judgement in blaming themselves when they are not accepted. They hastily conclude that the resister would respond favorably to another person, that they themselves are deficient. The problem is ordinarily *not* with the giver, *but* with the receiver.

Again, the problem could be the culture – people holding fast to the myth that only clergy are capable of giving pastoral care. This is a frost-producing tradition. The people holding to this myth are uncomfortable with the idea of receiving care from other laypeople even though they are called, equipped, commissioned and assigned to love them by their presence, prayer and care.

The personal culture of some church members (1) makes them skeptical of true Christian love and warmth, (2) causes them to be suspicious of the motive of Christian brothers and sisters who truly care about them, and (3) makes them cynical about lay pastoral care. Their indifference or outright rejection may be due to some deep heart from church people in the past, betrayal by people they trusted, or just plain unbelief that laypeople can be called gifted by God to be lay pastors.

The second track: They are evaluating what they are doing. "We screwed up in Germany," Wal-Mart's international head, John Memzer, told Economist magazine. They identified errors and admitted to them. For example, they slapped their logo on the new stores and imported the practices that had made the worldwide retailer a success. But Germany was not impressed. Wal-Mart's assumptions were wrong. Service wasn't selling.

Lay pastors and ministry leaders who evaluate what they are doing may discover their assumptions, like Wal-Mart's, are faulty. Six erroneous assumptions could be:

1. People are just waiting for a lay pastor's attention.

2. Everyone will respond favorably to pastoral love in the form of presence and care by an "ordinary member."
3. You can relate to everyone in the same way.
4. Because the Lay Pastors Ministry is a church program, every member will go for it.
5. All members are as gung-ho about the lay pastoral care ministry as lay pastors are.
6. Some people don't need a lay pastor.

It is imperative that lay pastors and leaders alike evaluate *what* they are doing, *how* well they are doing what they are doing, *how* what they are doing is being received, and *why* they are doing what they are doing. When called for, say, "We screwed up. Our biggest mistake is _____." Then, proceed to learn from the mistakes.

The third track: They are studying the German shopping culture so they can adapt to it or change it. Wal-Mart is on this track as of January 2002. At the present, it is "a work in process." They have their work cut out for them and they are committed to meeting the challenge with success rather than to give up and abandon their mission.

Analyze the culture of your church. If it has not transitioned from the clergy-only practice of ministry to every-member ministry, you know what you have to do – change the culture to the Moses-Jethro model in Exodus 18 and indoctrinate the people with the every-member- a-minister" teachings from Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4:11-12. How one church changed its clergy-only culture in a year is detailed in chapter 12 of my book, *The Lay Driven Church*. You can imagine the impossibility of laypeople trying to pastor the individuals of a congregation who believe only professional pastors are qualified, even though the laypeople have been called by God and equipped by the pastor.

What can you do when love doesn't sell? The significance of the mission – "Take care of my sheep" – and the importance of the One who mandated this mission compels lay pastors and ministry leaders alike to find a way around the problems so as to bring God's Love to even the frosty people by praying for them, caring about them, and being there for them.

When love doesn't sell, what do you do? Back out? Falsely assume that some people

don't need a lay pastor? Only care about those who make it known they want a lay pastor? Quit the ministry? Our Lord encourages us who are people of light to be as shrewd as people of the world; not only by dropping out but by (1) assessing, (2) evaluating, (3) studying, and (4) continuing to love, even though the receiver doesn't receive, until we can find ways to adapt to or change the culture. As Christ's servants, let's be like Him by loving even when love doesn't sell!