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To Serve or Not to Serve, That is the Question

By Denver Severt
UCF Forum columnist
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I am in the business of service – I teach it, after all – but sometimes there are people you are just unable to serve for one reason or another.

As a recent example, I taught a workshop for ministers on dealing with difficult people. They were seeking solutions about “service recovery,” or how to fix problems with other individuals in an acceptable manner.

During the workshop there is a point where an obvious truth must be mentioned.

I said: “Some people cannot be satisfied. You need to tell them you cannot satisfy them, and to essentially remove you from their list. And you need to suspend or remove them from your list.”

It is always at this point during the workshop when the regular group of bored conference attendees show interest. It was the same with the pastors.

They suddenly seemed intrigued and invigorated. Smiles began to appear, chatter broke out, and a simple message of relief showed on their faces. I read the clear message as: “God, what if I could get rid of this person?”

We practiced using an example from the audience. I gave them two qualifying statements: Is the problem person a first-time occurrence or recurring situation? With those who are problematic, firing decisions always meet the second condition. When I asked for an example from the audience, many hands flew up.

I chose an older pastor with what I interpreted as the most sweet, but bewildered look.

“I have a secretary at the church who has been there 20 years. Everything is in clutter,” he said. “I cannot function. What should I do?”

I asked him, “Did you tell her it needs to change?”

He answered, “Yes, time and time again. She says she can’t.”

I said, “You should fire the secretary.”

He seemed ecstatic. I asked the audience whether they agreed. Unanimously: “Yes.”

The other examples shared were all similarly simple solutions. As we left the workshop, I suggested the pastors:

- Make a list of the top 10 most difficult, recurring relationships
- Add the cost of the dollars and energy spent on trying to help these individuals
- Have a threshold for which to decide to minimize the relationship with them
- At the appropriate time, act on the top three in the list of 10

I suggest everyone take a note of those who don’t serve their team, such as those who deplete our energy and make us want to run the other way when we see them coming. Although you try to help them, you simply cannot.

Save your and their time and energy by releasing them from interacting with you.

Whether you are pastor, an administrator, a hotel manager, a student group leader, or simply a person with a long list of friends who irritate you, sometimes those you are drained by simply have no place in your life.

Serving others is also getting rid of those who are not serving you and your team.

How many people are letting the unforgivable deeds of other people stand in the way of progress or goals simply because they are too nice to confront those people? Repeated cases indicate that some people are fully aware and may be even proud of their defiance. They will smile when they talk about those deeds to others. They also suspect the person they report to is unlikely to fire them.

Every relationship problem cannot be solved. Being fed up with others is a natural way to feel, but sometimes the answer is to not interact with them at all. This is a service to them and to you.

The lessons of “service” sometimes can be harsh.

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