

14. Working Together

Each person involved in the ministry should be here because they know this is where God has directed them to be. It does not matter if someone is here every day or just comes for an hour or two a week, we want to assist the growth in their conviction that they are here because God wants them here in this place at this time.

There are two criteria to be part of the thrift store ministry:

1. A growing conviction that this is where God wants me to be
2. A demonstrated willingness to
Learn,
Grow,
and Change!

The more responsibility a person has at the store, the more this criterion should hold true. The director should be the leader in this area and be able to state with conviction they know this is where God wants them, and demonstrate a continued desire to grow in their willingness to learn, grow and change.

As determinations are made to give someone more responsibility – paid or volunteer – the first qualification to look at is the person's level of conviction that this is where God wants them, and secondly, their consistent demonstrated willingness to learn, grow and change. There may be other qualifications that are looked at, however, if these two are not in place then we look elsewhere to fill the position.

Paid Positions

A few years ago we looked back and realized each employee had begun their association with the store ministry as a volunteer. We decided to make that a criterion for employment. To be considered for employment, a person must have volunteered for a period of time; that time may vary with each individual, our board recommended a period of up to three months. When a person commits themselves to follow God's direction, their conviction that they are where He wants them becomes even stronger as they see God providing for them as they are obedient.

This does not mean that just because someone volunteers they will automatically be hired. It means when God directs us to hire, it will be someone who has volunteered.

This approach gives a base to work from. In the future when issues arise, the director/manager as well as the employee can go back to the employees' conviction; if they are still convicted this is where God wants them, then we look at the issues at hand and allow God to give us a solution. If the person is sensing this is not where God wants them; then there are no hard feelings, it is time to allow God to show them where He would have them serve next.

Life's Situations

When people work together on a regular basis – because of our human nature – there are going to be issues that arise in dealing with each other. These issues are more easily dealt with when we understand that sanctification is a process, and realize God uses these times to transform our character.

Before God can change me, it is necessary for Him to reveal to me how I really am. The Holy Spirit uses the experiences of life to point out to me the unChristlike ways I respond to those around me, to make me aware of my unChristlike thoughts and actions. This process is not pleasant or pretty, in fact at times it can be very painful; however, it is essential.

When I become aware of God's gentle Spirit informing me of a place in my character He would like to renew, I have a choice; I can ignore His promptings or I can choose to yield my undesirable trait to Holy Spirit's changing power. When I yield, He removes a portion of that undesirable part of my character and replaces it with Jesus character.

God will not force my will; to make a change in my life He must have my consent. Unless I see my capability to think and act in an unChristlike way, I will not see the need of yielding that character trait to God.

When God uses these life situations to show me my selfishness and my unwillingness to put others first, and I acknowledge and yield my sinful nature to Him, He creates more of Jesus character in me.

Though there may be times I experience some unpleasant situations and interactions, I can rest assured God is using those experiences to transform me into His character, and because I know this is where God has placed me, I can have confidence that not only is God working in my life, He is also working in each life involved.

God Change Me

With the understanding that God is using life's situations to change our characters, we now have a better perspective when it comes to our interactions with each other. When I understand that God is in the process of transforming my character, I then understand He is also in the process of transforming **your** character. With this knowledge I gain a deeper tolerance for others as I see God taking them through the sanctification process. Not only does it give me more tolerance, it gives me tools to use in lifting my brother or sister up and encouraging them in this process of receiving the character and mind of Christ.

When we take into account – as we work together – that God is in the process of renewing my mind and yours, it gives me a more considerate attitude when you do something that 'hurts my feelings'. I can choose to become offended, or I can choose to trust that God is working in your life, and use the interaction as an opportunity to give God deeper access to change and renew my heart and mind.

God is the only One Who is able to affect a change in my heart and mind. I am powerless to provide the surgery necessary to remove any of my sinful tendencies and replace them with any of the characteristics of Christ.

“If God is the One Who changes our hearts, than I sure wish He would hurry up and change ‘Becky,’ she is getting on my last nerve.” The problem with that desire is that I am not responsible for ‘Becky,’ I am only responsible for yielding my heart to Christ.

As I understand that I cannot change myself, I begin to understand the truth, that I cannot change you either. If I am unable to change either of us, what can I do? To find an answer, we will look at 1 John 5:16;

“If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death...” 1 John 5:16 (KJV)

Placing this verse in the form of a prayer it might read;

“Father, I see (name of person) responding to life in an unChrist like fashion, and because I am human I am sure that characteristic is in me too. Jesus I yield my tendency of _____ to You, thank You for renewing my character in that area. I thank You for Your ability to use the work You are doing in my life, to give life to (name of person) and draw him/her closer to You.”

This verse is God's promise to me – as I yield what I am to Him – He changes my heart and character, and in that process, He is able to give my brother or sister life.

When I am willing to pray this prayer I am allowing God to perform His work in my life, with this prayer I become more Christ like, with this prayer I have God’s assurance He is providing ‘life’ to my brother or sister. With this prayer God continues teaching me to trust what He is doing in your life, because of the change I see Him accomplishing in mine. With this prayer I can rest life’s situations in the hands of my Creator, trusting that as I continue in my willingness to learn, grow and change, God is completing His good work in both of us.

Structure with Flexibility

There is a need for structure and guidelines in our life, as well as in the ministry of the store. Yet there needs to be a balance between ‘rules,’ and allowing people the freedom to grow as we allow God to transform our characters.

When we have hard and fast ‘rules,’ the created environment is less conducive to growth. Growth comes through the process of experiencing a life situation. God takes us through a life situation experience to allow our minds to become aware of how we think. We do not naturally see that the way we think is different than the way God would have us think.

With hard and fast ‘rules,’ we eliminate the varying situations of each individual. A hard and fast rule for clothes would be “you can only have five pieces of clothes per month, period.” The flexible guideline would be “how many clothes do you need? It would appear four to five outfits

per month would be plenty, however, we can take a look at your needs and see if we need to make some adjustments.”

The flexibility to work with each person on an individual basis is very important. When there are hard and fast ‘rules’ across the board, we take away the greater opportunity for God to work with each person as He sees best. One of the first responses to this line of thinking is, “it’s not fair” or “I’m not allowed to do that, so why is Sally?”

God deals with us on an individual personal basis, we are not saved by the choices of our parents or pastor, it is our own personal choice that determines where we spend eternity. God is leading each individual down their own personal path of sanctification. When we realize life’s situations are what God uses to further His work in our lives, we understand the wisdom in working with each person on an individual basis.

Our goal is to cooperate with God in the work He is accomplishing in you and me. This cooperation is strengthened when we provide an environment that gives room for a person to grow in making wise choices. When rules are set in stone, the opportunity for growth is greatly hindered.

Having no structure is not good either. When we do not know what is expected of us we flounder about not knowing what we are to do. There needs to be balance between a structured environment and being flexible as we relate to each individual. We need structure with flexibility.

This growth-conducive environment is more time consuming and challenging than a rules-set-in-stone environment. It is much easier to lay down the rules and then see that they are obeyed, than to deal with each situation as it arises on an individual basis. However, we have the assurance that God will give us wisdom in dealing with each opportunity, whether it is a new one, or one we have dealt with over and over again.

As humans we become frustrated when we have to deal with an individual for the umpteenth time on the same issue, we tend to think things like; “when is this person going to get it” or “I’m tired of dealing with this same issue, I’ll just lay down the law and that will be it” or “I am done with this.” When we change from a flexible environment to a “this is the way it’s going to be,” attitude, we have moved away from participating with God in what He is doing in a person’s life.

How long-suffering, unwearied, tolerant and enduring has God been with you? Should we not have the same attitude toward our fellow brothers and sisters? There are some behaviors that directly affect the safety of others and cannot be allowed to continue. However, once you have put a stop to the behavior, you continue to provide an environment that encourages growth in Christ.

This environment may take several forms, sometimes we may speak to a person directly regarding a behavioral issue, other times God wants us to leave it with Him. What joy there is in leaving an issue with God – not saying a word to the individual – and seeing God work a change in their behavior. When God has changed a heart, the results are further reaching than just a change in behavior. Our goal is for each of us to be taught by God through experience. God will

direct when a specific area of character development should be addressed, either casually or in a more direct and specific way.

Getting Comfortable

Though we say we need more help, when it comes down to it, there are times we would rather not have someone new join the team.

We get comfortable with who comes to serve each week and we gain a level of understanding and acceptance. When someone “new” comes into the picture it disrupts our “eco system” and brings a certain amount of change to our surroundings. As humans we do not like change, however, this is another avenue God uses to show us our selfishness.

We may be praying for help, however, when God sends them, we run them off. We may not tell them to leave to their face, however, we find ways to make it uncomfortable for them to be here. We justify our actions by coming up with a whole list of reasons why someone is not working out; “they don’t listen, they don’t do things the way we do, they don’t, they don’t...” Even if some or all of these things are true, we need to be reminded that God has asked us to be His agents. He is asking us to serve as we work side by side with someone who has not had training in how to work with other people, or has not been trained how to work in an efficient or tidy manner, or someone who thinks they know how to do everything...!

This part of our ministry is just as important as giving away clothes. We should be open to whomever God chooses to bring into our midst, knowing that first and foremost it is for our personal learning.

As we allow God to build in us a willingness to work together, and our first thought becomes ‘what does God want to change in me as I relate to this person?’ – instead of ‘I wish this person would go somewhere else’ – God will direct when it is appropriate to kindly ask someone to give of their time elsewhere. As long as a person is willing to learn, grow and change, they should be welcome to participate with us as we all continue to grow in Christ. My dislike in dealing with someone can be evidence to me that there is an area in my life God is working on, and if I am willing, and allow Him to do His work, I will benefit from the very interaction that seems so unpleasant at the time.

We have found that God brings us the people He would have us interact with, and when we think it is time for someone to move on, we recognize it as a continued opportunity for us to grow in Him, or God moves them on.

In each situation we come back to the criteria for being a part of the thrift store ministry; as long as an individual is willing to learn, grow and change, they are welcome. When someone is no longer willing to learn, grow and change, they are then choosing to ‘be a blessing’ somewhere else.

Who is Allowed to Serve?

Who do we allow to come and serve? Do we need to know their background, where they are from, why they are here?

Example:

A young lady walks into the store and says “Hi, I’m your new employee”. Where is she coming from, who sent her? What do we do? This young lady proceeded to tell us her story, how her mother had recently died, and her experience as a Christian attending a local church. She shared how she wanted to ‘give back to her community’ and volunteer at our store.

She wanted to work at the register. She caught on very fast, and had a pleasant way with the customers. However, the thoughts run wild – should we let just anyone off the street run the register? Where is she from, what is her motive?

What is our mission? ‘To allow God’s light to shine through us.’ Has God brought her to us? Does He have something He wants us to learn by her presence?

But what if she steals money from the register? What if she does? Does it belong to us?

Opportunity – how would God have us relate to her?

What feelings of possessiveness is the Holy Spirit pointing out in my life?

Are we too busy to be bothered to train and counsel?

Is it possible God wants her in a loving accepting environment?

God can use this experience to show us how possessive we are, the areas we feel are ours, and how we forget that it all belongs to God. The register is not the best place for everyone, however, as we are willing, God will make it clear to us when it would be best to ask someone to serve in another capacity.

Example:

A gentleman comes in one Sunday and offers to help check out our electrical items. As we become acquainted over the next few months, he confides in us that he is a convicted felon awaiting sentencing. He shares with us that the experiences he has gone through have changed his life, he has come to the realization that he was living his life for himself, excluding all others, especially his family. Regardless of what his future may be, he is choosing to place his life in God's hands and is praising God for the change in his life.

He has been a help in checking out the electrical items, but more importantly his friendship has been an encouragement and inspiration to us.

Volunteers from the community are not only valuable and a blessing to the store and the community, but part of our outreach mission. What better way to have a positive effect on a neighbor’s life than to work with them side by side and experience God together as we face the opportunities of each day.

Conclusion

With my choice to Learn, Grow and Change, God is able to use my interactions in His process of creating His character in me. As we each make that choice, God grows us together as a body that is 'healthy and full of love.'

“Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly.

As each part does its own special work,

it helps the other parts grow,

so that the

whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)

Further Study

“Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. **Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.**” Philippians 2:3 (NLT)

“...love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.” Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, (NavPress, P.O. Box 35001, Colorado Springs, Co 80935) Matthew 5:44.

“In His providence He brings these persons **into different positions and varied circumstances** that they may **discover in their character the defects** which have been **concealed from their own knowledge**. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.” Ministry of Healing, p. 471

“Men undertake the job of tinkering up the defective character of others, and only succeed in making the defects much worse. **They would better leave God to do His own work**, for He does not regard them as capable of reshaping character.” Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 191

“Many have a **vivid, unsanctified sensitiveness** which keeps them constantly on the alert for some word, some look, or some action which they can construe as a lack of respect and appreciation. All this must be overcome. Everyone should go forward in the fear of God, doing his best without being troubled by praise or offended by censure, serving God fervently, **and learning to place the most favorable interpretation upon whatever in others may seem offensive.**” Our High Calling, p. 240

Structure

“**There is order in heaven. There are rules and regulations which govern the whole heavenly host. All move in order.** All there is cleanly, all in perfect harmony. And everyone who will be counted worthy to enter heaven will be thoroughly disciplined and will be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” Our High Calling, p. 230

Flexibility

“**It is not by arbitrary law or rule that the graces of character are developed.** It is by dwelling in the atmosphere of the pure, the noble, the true. And wherever there is purity of heart and nobleness of character, it will be revealed in purity and nobleness of action and of speech.” Education, p. 237

“**There is need of laying aside these cast-iron rules**, of coming down from these stilts, to the humbleness of the child. Oh, that some of the spirit of severity may change to a spirit of love, that happiness and sunshine may take the place of discouragement and grief!” Testimonies Volume 5, p. 654

“**Instead of toiling to prepare set rules and regulations, you might better be praying and submitting your own will and your ways to Christ.**... The Lord Jesus loves His heritage, and if men will not think it their special prerogative to prescribe rules for their fellow laborers, but will bring Christ's rules into their life and copy His lessons, then each will be an example, and not a judge.--Manuscript 44, 1894” Evangelism, p. 117

15. Leadership Responsibilities

The director has the privilege of leading out in the ministry, providing guidance and direction to staff and volunteers. They give continuity and are the contact person for vendors. This person should maintain an overall knowledge of the ministry, what things are being accomplished and what things need to be done. They should have the authority to purchase supplies, oversee all departments and be able to make day to day decisions and delegate responsibilities. It is important that this person be familiar with all departments and be able to fill in when necessary, especially at the register.

This person should be a team leader and able to encourage each department in furthering the goals of the ministry. Their responsibility is not just to oversee; they should be willing to work in any department and may have a specific department they are responsible for.

To achieve this level of involvement requires full time participation. At least two people are needed who are 'obligated' to be in the store on a daily basis; by commitment or because they are being paid. These people are in addition to the volunteer base.

There are several titles that may be used.

Director – Assistant (Associate) Director

Manager – Assistant (Associate) Manager

Team Leader – Assistant (Associate) Team Leader

Store Manager – Assistant (Associate) Store Manager

The term director will be used in this section and applies to anyone who has been given leadership responsibilities, whether as the lead person or as an assistant.

Floor Manager

The main responsibility of the director is to serve as floor manager.

*See "Departments: Floor Manager"

Others should be trained to serve as floor manager also, to fill in when the director is not at the center, and to assist when the floor manager is serving a customer and another customer needs assistance. The assistant floor managers can be department managers who have been trained and have an understanding of all departments.

During the busy time it may take two or three floor managers to keep up. Our busiest times are usually from 11:00am to 2:00pm.

God Directed Leadership

Decisions should be made and carried out based on direction from God. The leader sets an example as they allow God to direct every aspect of the ministry. When decisions are based on God's will, we can rest in the assurance that God is working all things for good, regardless of what circumstances take place.

God is in the process of training us to listen and hear His voice. This training is integral to the relationship He desires to have with us. God uses the experiences of life to train us to listen. Is God interested in what price we put on a sofa? I believe He is, however, He is more interested in teaching me to hear His voice. He uses the need to price the sofa as an opportunity to teach me. Therefore, listening to God's voice can be our focus in all areas of interaction – employee, volunteer, customer, pricing, purchasing – God is prepared to use all circumstances to further our training.

When we deal with issues that involve others, we cannot know what is taking place in their mind, however, Holy Spirit does. As we learn to listen to the voice of our Shepherd, we more often say words that convey God's ideas, ideas He is able to use in the life of another.

When two or more persons come together in the unity of heaven on a particular decision, they are assured of God's direction and can move forward with confidence. Always being open for God to modify, fine tune, or give further instructions. When we understand God has a plan for us and the ministry, God gives us a willingness to lay aside our plans and accept His.

For an in-depth study of allowing God to direct our steps, see the chapter "Walking in God's Will"

Be An Example

The Director should set an example in all areas. They should be convicted this is where God wants them, they should demonstrate a willingness to Learn, Grow and Change. They should be growing in their willingness to allow God to fill them with the mind of Christ, the attitudes of heaven.

Attitude

The attitude of all who serve will be a reflection of the leadership. It should be the choice of each leader to allow God to transform their characters so that they are allowing God to shine through them to each team member.

“Those who desire to reform others must begin the reformation in their own hearts, and show that they have acquired kindness and humility of heart in the school of Christ. Those who have charge of others must learn first to master themselves, to refrain from blunt expressions and exaggerated censure. There are cutting words which are indulged in, which may offend, hurt, and leave upon a soul a scar which will remain. There are sharp words that fall as sparks upon an inflammable temper. There are biting words that bite like vipers.” The Upward Look, p. 59

It should be the active choice of leadership to allow God to transform their hearts, to give them the fruits of the Spirit, to learn how to deal with all situations in kindness and humility, allowing

God to give them a heart to serve. Our attitude should always be that of a servant, how can I help, how can I lift up those who come across my path this day? Jesus made it clear in what He said and through His example, that the way to lead is through being a servant.

“But among you it should be quite different. **Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant**, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here **not to be served but to serve others...**” Matthew 20:26-28 (NLT)

As director, our style of leadership should be patterned after Jesus and the way He led His disciples. Not in a hierarchical style, but with an attitude of servant hood. The servant leader is interested in the growth of each person in the organization and their goal should be to provide an environment that is conducive to experiencing the transforming power of God.

“**Don't lord it over** the people assigned to your care, but **lead them by your good example.**” 1 Peter 5:3 (NLT)

“The Lord will not accept the work of any man that is not done in tenderness and love and kindness. **He has not set us as rulers, to lord it over His heritage.** Let others **be moved by Christ**, just as we desire to be moved by Him.” The Upward Look, p. 267

As a leader you may be able to bring about an outward change in behavior, however, only God can bring about a change in the heart. He has given leaders the responsibility of giving support and encouragement to those placed in their charge to continue allowing God to renew their minds.

Servants Heart

As servants we are to esteem others better than ourselves, we are to be willing to give help wherever it is needed. The story is told of a time during the American Revolution when an officer in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers who were busy repairing a small defensive earthen barrier outside a fortress. Their commander was shouting instructions, but was making no attempt to help them. Asked why by the stranger on a horse, the commander replied with great dignity, "Sir, I am a Corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers himself. When the job was completed he turned to the corporal and said "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this, and not enough men to do it, go to your commander in chief, and I will come and help you again." Too late, the corporal recognized the stranger as General Washington. Today in the Word, March 6, 1991

Leaders are not able to do everything, therefore, they assign jobs to others. However, as a leader we are ultimately responsible and should always be willing to help when, and wherever there is a need. It may not be my job to sort clothes, however, if we are short handed and the clothes are piling up, then sort clothes is what I need to do. When I am willing to be a servant, God has promised to take care of all of my needs. Many times I have seen God work a miracle, though I spent time helping someone with their project, I am able to complete my responsibilities in less time than usual.

It is the responsibility of the director to set the tone for the day, to be an example through his/her interactions with each team member. The way we approach each situation will have an effect on

the entire ministry. I cannot be sour and expect the rest of the team to be in good spirits, it starts with me.

My choice each day should be a prayer to allow God to use the day to transform my character, to create in me the mind of Christ, a way of thinking that approaches each interaction with an attitude of acceptance and understanding, a willingness to be nonjudgmental, to show empathy, kindness and friendship, a life that allows God to shine His light through me.

When this is my prayer God will use me as an influence for good, and not only will my words be kind and gentle, but my visage will show the joy in my heart.

“It is impossible for any of us to live in such a way that we shall not cast an influence in the world. No member of the family can enclose himself within himself, where other members of the family shall not feel his influence and spirit. **The very expression of the countenance has an influence for good or evil.** His spirit, his words, his actions, his attitude toward others, are unmistakable. If he is living in selfishness, he surrounds his soul with a malarious atmosphere; while **if he is filled with the love of Christ, he will manifest courtesy, kindness, tender regard for the feelings of others** and will communicate to his associates, by his acts of love, a tender, grateful, happy feeling. It will be made manifest that he is living for Jesus and **daily learning lessons at His feet, receiving His light and His peace.**” The Adventist Home, p. 33

Rejoice Always

God is teaching us that He is our source for all things, physical and spiritual. Regardless of the circumstances that surround us, we are to give Him praise.

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, *(even if we have no beds or dressers, and the volunteers did no show up today)* yet **I will rejoice in the LORD!** I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. **The Sovereign LORD is my strength!** He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.” Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NLT)

“**Always be joyful....No matter what happens, always be thankful,** for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18 (NLT)

Much can be said on this topic. For an in-depth look at the subject of praise I recommend the book *Power of Praise* by Merlin R. Carothers, Escondido, California

Generosity

From those sorting clothes in the back to the person manning the register, the attitude of generosity should permeate the entire store. God is a generous God, a God of abundance. Being generous is an **attitude** that should color everything we say and do.

To promote an attitude of generosity, we can ask ourselves a few questions. What can we do to be different? What can we do to put a smile in someone's heart? What can we do that will give the customer a pleasant memory of their time with us? What can we do that will allow Jesus to shine through us? How can we put into action the following verse?

“Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Matthew 5:48 (The Message)

Here are a few ideas on being generous.

When negotiating with a customer, give extra. Here is something fun to do; when a customer makes an offer on an item, give them more than they were expecting. Example; an item is marked \$50.00, before they make an offer, you have in your mind that you would take \$30.00 (it has been there awhile, etc.), the customer makes an offer of \$40.00 and you say “no, we won't do \$40.00, (pause) but we will do \$30.00!!

When a customer is buying several items and there is an item that is not marked that would probably be priced \$0.25 to \$1.00; through it in at no charge.

One Sunday I was working the register and was consciously putting into practice the attitude of generosity – not charging people for a \$0.25 item here and a \$0.50 item there, throwing in a small piece of fabric that was not marked, etc. Towards the end of the day, a lady from out of town made a purchase that totaled less than \$2.00. As she was making her purchase, she asked a few questions about our ministry, when I told her the total, she handed me a twenty dollar bill and said ‘keep the change, I appreciate what you do here.’

When we have an attitude of generosity, God is able to use us to bless others, and in that blessing, we are blessed. We cannot out give God.

The attitude of generosity should be promoted, and everyone who is part of the team encouraged to put it into practice. Look for ways to give, do not just wait until someone asks.

I was working at the register when an older gentleman came up with a few items to purchase. In conversation he said, “I would have bought more, but they are priced too high.” I said “Show me what you were looking at.” He took me back to the nick knack shelf and showed me a bell he had been looking at. It was marked \$0.50. He showed me how it had a nick on the edge and we talked about his bell collection. After a few minutes I said “would you like this bell for your collection?” He said he would, I then said “you may have it, it is a gift!” He stared at me in disbelief and finally said “Are you serious? I shop at all the thrift stores, and I have **never** had anyone give me a gift. Thank you!” He continued thanking me as he left.

Fifty cents! Never underestimate the power of generosity. It does not necessarily have to be something major, which reminds us that true generosity is an attitude, a mind set of a willingness to give.

For an in-depth discussion on this subject, see “Lessons We Are Learning: Disinterested Giving.”

Awareness

An important aspect of leading a team is awareness. It is easy to become engrossed with a project and fail to realize what is happening around us. It is important to be aware of many things; our surroundings, who needs help (customer/volunteer), the mood of the day, what things need to be accomplished, which volunteers are here today.

Learn to be aware of your surroundings as you go about your duties. Does the cashier need assistance? Are there any new items on the floor in need of pricing? Does someone need help bringing in donations? Be aware of who the customers are. Does anyone need help? Is there a familiar face to greet? Is there someone with a burden to be prayed with? Be aware of the volunteers and their needs. Have they filled a trash can that needs emptying? Do they need full boxes brought to them for sorting? Do they need an encouraging word?

When you are out on the floor, anticipate the customer's needs. If you see someone giving the organs more than a passing glance, inquire if they would like for you to plug one in so they can play it. Look for opportunities to be of service. Sometimes you will overhear a discussion. In a polite way, answer their question. Wife to husband, “How are we going to get this home?” You, “I couldn't help overhearing, do you know we have delivery available?”

When you see a need, move forward to resolve it. If you see a long line forming at the register, you do not need to ask the cashier if they need help, just step in and help. Bag, answer questions, take exact change, or show something in the display case. Even if there is not something specific you can do, your presence alone lets your customers know you care.

Awareness is also an important skill for the cashier. Encourage them to grow in this skill. They should be aware of who is coming in, who needs help, is the line growing (call for assistance)?

Awareness is the beginning of a chain reaction; when you are aware of your surroundings, you can more easily anticipate needs. When needs are anticipated, you can meet them more quickly. When needs are met swiftly, you are building loyal customers, and happy volunteers.

Delegation

When there is a task to be done, the director does it or finds someone to do it. Some may have the tendency to do everything themselves, because “if you want something done right, you do it yourself”, there are others who like to sit back and supervise everyone else, “I'm the Manager, I have someone to do that.” There should be a balance between the do everything yourself mentality and always delegating.

The director should be familiar with all departments and be able to fill in wherever needed.

Etiquette

The customer comes first

Always keep in mind that the customer/client comes first. We can get busy in any number of areas, but without the customer/client there is no need for us to be open.

When you receive a call on the radio, you should respond as quickly as possible. If you are needed to talk with a customer, remember, they come first, meet them as quickly as possible. If you are on the phone or for whatever reason it is going to be a couple of minutes before you will be able to speak with them, respond on the radio with that information.

Eating/Drinking

There should not be any eating or drinking out on the floor or behind the register. The exception to this would be if you are the only one at the store. If you have to eat behind the register it should be done as discreetly as possible.

Phone

It is very discouraging for a customer needing help, to find the manager on the phone. If you are the one working the floor and the one answering the phone this is unavoidable; the key is to be aware of your surroundings even while you are on the phone. When it happens, acknowledge the customer, this lets them know you are aware of their need and you will be with them as soon as you are able. If available, call for assistance.

When you need to make calls, make them out of sight of the customers whenever possible, this is especially true for personal calls.

When you answer the phone, do so cheerfully and with an expectation of being of service in your voice.

Disagreements

If you have a disagreement with an employee or volunteer, move to a location that is out of sight and hearing of the public.

When there is a question or disagreement with a customer, our goal is to find a way to resolve the issue so the customer feels good about themselves and their experience in our store. Remember the old saying “the customer is always right”? Well, it’s not true, the customer is not always right. But it is not a matter of who is right or who is wrong; it is a matter of reflecting Jesus love, it is a matter of being a servant. If the customer is mistaken, what can I do to demonstrate the love of God and serve them? If I am mistaken, what can I do to make it right?

Interrupted Conversations

You can be so busy that it is difficult for an employee or volunteer to find a moment to ask you a question or talk with you. When they see you and have something on their mind, they want to talk to you about it right now before they lose you.

This is not easy when you are in the middle of helping a customer. Be aware of the situation and decide when it is appropriate to take a moment and answer the question of a volunteer and when to let the volunteer know you are with a customer and will be with them as soon as you get a chance.

If the volunteer is letting you know of a customer who needs help, or of a situation that you need to know about, they can quickly give you that update. If they want to talk with you about the ‘weather’ then they need to wait until you are available. The key is to remember there is someone waiting to talk, and get back with them when you are free, even if it is to just talk about the weather.

If you are having a pleasant conversation with staff about life, everyone should understand that when a customer comes up, our conversation should be put on ‘pause’ and we tend to the needs of the customer. After the customer is served, if there is another lull, we can resume our conversation. All should understand we are not being rude to each other, that while the store is open, the customer should always be served.

*See “Customer Loyalty”

People are Watching

We have an influence on those around us, whether we realize it or not. They are taking note; they are affected by how we relate to life and each other.

One day I was running the register, I was having fun, greeting each customer as they came in, and talking with them when they checked out. I said hello to a lady as she came in, and noticed her as she was shopping in the clothes area, however, beyond that, nothing set her apart from the other shoppers. When she finished shopping, she paid for her purchase, as she started to walk out she stopped and said “I’ve been watching you, you have a nice way with people.” We never know who may be watching and what impression we are making on their heart as God uses us to further His work in their life.

“He who loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself will work with the **constant realization** that he is **a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.** Making God's will his will, **he will reveal in his life the transforming power of the grace of Christ.**”
Selected Messages Book 1, p. 86

Dress

Personal appearance and how we dress can be a touchy subject, however, it is important to the furtherance of the ministry. How we carry ourselves, how we are groomed and dressed has a bearing on our effectiveness and the ability of God to use us as His light bearers.

“As those who claim to believe the truth **give expression to the truth in appropriate dress** and in their words and conduct, they **are living epistles for God**, known and read by all who behold them.” Manuscript Releases Volume Six, p. 161

Our personal appearance speaks to those with whom we come in contact. As a Christian organization we should be well groomed and promote decency in the way we dress.

What we wear should be modest, neat, clean, comfortable, and well-fitting. It should convey our attitude of placing Christ first in our life and not drawing attention to ourselves. It does not have

to be the latest style, but should be representative of good taste and show a knowledge of color coordination.

The director should set an example and observe the guidelines expected of the staff and volunteers.

As we dress appropriately God is able to more readily shine through us His light of joy and peace.

Focus

It is the responsibility of the director to keep the focus of the ministry on track. Remind those who serve why we are here, why we do what we do each day. Encourage those who work behind the scenes – clothes, toys, miscellaneous – reminding them that they are part of the team, without them there would be no moving forward.

Morning worship is a great time to encourage each member of the team, to remind us of God's purpose in our life. To praise Him for the evidences we see of God's creative power in our lives and those we serve.

Customer Ministry

Become acquainted with people, build rapport with the customers who come in on a regular basis. When you notice someone down in the dumps, encourage them, pray with them, let them know you care.

“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.”
James 5:16 (NLT)

As you build friendships, customers who are going through a struggle, will more readily share their life circumstances with you. As they confide in you, you are able to offer a listening, sympathetic ear, you are able to pray with them and point them to the only Source of peace.

* See “Lessons We Are Learning: Success By God's Standards”

Volunteer Ministry

Church Members

The thrift store ministry is an avenue for the children of God to serve. Many would like to serve their fellowman, however, they have not had an opportunity or the training to put into practice God's directives.

“Every church member should be engaged in some line of service for the Master....Many would be willing to work if they were taught how to begin. They need to be instructed and encouraged.” The Ministry of Healing, p. 149

It is the responsibility of the director to support and train the volunteers in the out reach aspect of the ministry. This takes place over time and is best taught through example.

Community Members

It is a privilege to work side by side with community members who are not members of an Adventist church. God will use our interactions on a daily/weekly basis as we work, study and pray together to encourage each other in our walk with Christ.

Training

When someone has a desire to serve at the store, they should come and get acquainted with the ministry. As they become familiar with the different departments they will gain a sense of where they would like to serve. Let people know where you have a need, however, you will gain the most benefit when you allow people to serve where they feel most comfortable. If they are not sure, assign them a specific job and as they participate in the ministry, they will naturally gravitate to the area that 'fits' their personality.

Utilize the department manager to train new people. This allows the new person to learn how a specific department is run and gives consistency in the way items are priced and stocked.

*See "Department Manager Responsibilities"

Most of the volunteers will be happy to work in a specific department, however, there will be some who are willing to learn more. This is an important value and should be encouraged. If you have someone who is willing and capable of learning to serve in other departments, utilize them when you have a need. This is especially true for the register. When the register person needs lunch or a break – if you have others trained – they can step in for a short time. This gives you more freedom.

Those who are willing to become familiar with other departments, are those you can train to take on more responsibility as a general or floor manager. The best way to learn is by doing, and as they become familiar with all departments, you are equipping them for a wider range of service.

Encourage the volunteers to come and serve when it is best for them. Most volunteers will settle into a schedule. If you have specific needs for certain days, let the volunteers know, so they can adjust their schedules if possible.

Safety

Safety does not happen by itself, it takes a continuous conscious effort. Staff and volunteers should be educated regarding safety procedures. Remind those who lift on a regular basis, to do so properly. Everyone should be on the lookout for dangerous situations; spilled drink, broken furniture, stacked items that may fall, items sticking out into a walk way. When noticed, these things should be taken care of immediately.

When moving a heavy item, discuss before hand how it will be done and make sure each person involved understands the plan. If you question the way something is going to be done, find another way. If you realize you are in a hurry, slow down.

Talk with both staff and volunteers about safety on a regular basis. Give praise when you see something being done in a safe manner.

It is a good idea to have at least two people in the store at all times who have been trained in CPR and First Aid. Have a small First Aid kit available (hydrogen peroxide, band aids,

antibacterial cream.) If there is an emergency, call 911, do not try to transport. If someone needs medical care, follow the procedure as outlined under “Operational Procedures: Insurance.”

Order and Cleanliness

Even though this is a thrift store, we should strive to have cleanliness and order – it is not going to happen all the time – but it should be our goal.

“Order and cleanliness is the law of heaven; and in order to come into harmony with the divine arrangement, it is our duty to be neat and tasty.” The Adventist Home, p. 254

Even in the areas that are continually fluctuating, we should be aware of order. When new items are placed on the sales floor, it should be done so in an orderly fashion, there is no need to just throw something. The item should be placed appropriately, if it is not in the correct location or needs to be set up, keep that in mind and get back to finish the job when time allows.

On the other hand, we do not want to go to the opposite extreme of requiring absolute cleanliness and neatness at all times; it is not going to happen, and when it is required, all involved will be stressed to the max.

“Cleanliness and order are Christian duties, yet even these may be carried too far and made the one essential, while matters of greater importance are neglected.” Child Guidance, p. 109

The shelves will not always be neat and in order, however, when we are aware of their condition – when we have the time and personnel – they can be straightened. When we have a spare moment we remember an area that needs sweeping. It is when we do not care, or do not have an eye for what needs to be cleaned, that things can be neglected for so long, you need a *bulldozer* to come in to take care of the mess.

God is able to grow in us an awareness and balance in this area. He is teaching us to be aware of and willing to clean and straighten as time allows, however, if we have not been able to get to a certain area, to understand that it is ok, we will get to it when we can. Solomon reminds us that:

“An empty stable stays clean, but no income comes from an empty stable.”
Proverbs 14:4 (NLT)

If we had an empty store, we could keep it clean, however, you cannot sell or minister from an empty store. Because of the nature of our business – used stuff – our merchandise does not come in neat boxes and packaging. Therefore, it is an ongoing quest to keep it organized.

This verse also speaks to our anguish when we have just cleared an area and then we get more donations that fill it up again. Our goal is not to see an empty bin, though there is satisfaction in getting a bin empty, which we can delight in. The key is to not despair when it fills right back up, realizing it is the continuous flow of stuff that keeps the ministry functioning.

Possessiveness

Humans are naturally possessive, however, as we yield our selfishness to God, He changes our way of thinking and places in us a willingness to live with open hands. When we have the mind set that the items in the store belong to us, we become irritated when something is stolen or when someone switches price tags and purchases a \$65 stereo receiver for \$20. This is when God reminds us that all we have belongs to Him.

There needs to be a balance between being over protective, and not caring what happens. God will guide in ways to not tempt people to be dishonest, however, when that is done, we need to leave all we have in His care, trusting He is working on their heart to draw them to Christ. We can also know God will see to it that we always have what we need.

Our possessive nature is also manifested when we are perturbed when customers ‘mess up our store.’ God wants to teach us a balance between a desire to have the store clean and well stocked, with an understanding that the items are there to sell and in that process things will become disorganized. It is a cycle; we place items on the shelf neatly, customers shop, we come back later to straighten.

Another way we may see our possessiveness is when someone new comes to help us. We have our own way of doing things and it is difficult to accept new ideas. We should be willing to listen to ideas, on the other hand a ‘new’ person should understand and respect the established protocol of each area.

As the leader you will have opportunity to interact with the managers of specific areas. It should be your goal to follow the structure of each specific department, but when that does not happen the department manager needs to be aware of the big picture. If the store is overloaded with books on Monday and there is someone available who can put them out, the book department manager should not expect you to wait for them to come in on Thursday, even if the books may not be put out exactly the way the book department manager would like.

Extravagance vs. Penuriousness

When it comes to spending money, each individual has their own background and unique way of deciding what and how much. Again this is an area that we grow in as we allow God to give us His way of thinking. There is no need to buy the most expensive items, yet we should not be so cheap that what we buy does not last. We do not need to buy things just because there is money available, on the other hand if there are funds available we do not need to go without those things that would further the ministry, there needs to be a balance.

In the following quote Mrs. White is addressing the issue of clothing, but I believe it is applicable to this discussion.

“Your ideas upon this subject are perverted. While condemning the extravagance and vanity of the world, you fall into the error of stretching economy into penuriousness. You deny yourself that which it is right and proper that you should have, and which God has furnished you means to procure. You do not suitably clothe yourself or your children. Our outward appearance should not dishonor the One we profess to follow, but should reflect credit upon His cause.” Testimonies for the Church Volume Four, p. 142

We should not be so tight with God's money that we become unwilling to spend it. On the other hand we should be good stewards and not spend God's money needlessly. There is no need for extravagance, however, we should present ourselves as children and heirs of the King of the Universe.

“You are not to be penurious; you are to be honest with yourself and your brethren. Penuriousness is an abuse of God's bounties. Lavishness is also an abuse.” The Adventist Home, p. 379

As we learn to allow God to direct us, and place each decision for a new purchase at His feet, He will guide us in the right path. The following are a few examples of situations we have experienced as we have chosen to be good stewards.

Provide the necessary equipment to do the job right.

We need print capabilities. The purchase of a copier instead of using a computer printer all the time will be of great benefit to us, we realized we did not need a **color** copier at four times the cost.

We need a tow vehicle, we can purchase a closeout end of the year model for not much more than a good used one.

We need shopping buggies – we could purchase used rusty ones, or spend a little more and get nice looking, great functioning ones that make our customers happy.

The clothes department needs a steam iron, we can purchase one for \$60 that is a pain to use, or we can purchase one for \$250 that will do the job right.

Not being stingy also applies when dealing with contractors and vendors, we should be willing to pay for services rendered and not become known as “cheap.”

“In trading with the merchants at ----, Brother and Sister I do not take a course which is pleasing to God. **They will dicker to get things as cheap as they possibly can, and linger over a difference of a few pennies,** and talk in regard to it as though money was their all--their god. If they could only be brought back, unobserved, to hear the remarks that are made after they leave, they would get a clearer idea of the influence of penuriousness. Our faith is brought into disrepute, and **God is blasphemed by some on account of this close, penny dealing.** Angels turn away in disgust. **Everything in heaven is noble and elevated.”** Testimonies for the Church Volume Two, p. 238

There is nothing wrong in shopping for a fair price, however, we should not feel like we need to dicker with someone until we draw blood.

Allowing for Individuality

For people to grow, we must allow them to make mistakes. This is difficult, we may have already been through the same experience, and we know the outcome. However, allowing people to make mistakes is important for several reasons. 1) It shows you are open to new ideas, 2) sometimes things have changed and the idea may work this time, 3) when we learn by doing, it has a deeper impact on us and gives us a better understanding for future decisions, 4) the idea may not work, but it may lead to one that does.

It is important to not shoot down someone's idea as soon as they share it with you. If this is done often they will give up and quit sharing. When someone shares an idea you have tried in the past, let them down gently. Let them know that you appreciate them and value their opinion.

A few ways to respond:

Let them know you will consider their idea.

Respond with a question – “If we did that, how could we solve this other problem that would be created?” (They may have an answer.)

Remind them of when it was done in the past and what took place.

Let them know that it sounds like a great idea and you will see if there is anything that would prevent it from taking place.

Help them look at the ramifications of their idea. Many times all I can see is my space, I do not realize that if something is changed in my area it will effect others.

Refuge

Our goal should always be to promote a peaceful environment where the cares of the world may be left behind. The center is a refuge, a sanctuary from the distress of the world, a safe place where the peace of God may be found. This refuge is experienced by those who come to shop, as well as those who come to serve.

This environment of peace is encouraged by our calm actions, our peaceful tone of voice and our unhurried attention to who we are serving at the present time. Allow God to build in you the ability to stop and listen even though you may be going in several different directions at the moment.

Interpersonal Relationships

People are what we are about, however, it is people who cause us the most frustration. When dealing with folk it is important to remember that God is in the business of changing lives, and He uses the experiences of life to point out to me the things He is changing in my life. When I approach each situation with the desire and willingness for God to use it to change me, I have Christ's assurance that change is taking place.

For some thoughts regarding management and working together as a team with a common goal, see – “Working Together”.

Staff Disagreements

When there is disagreement between staff, take them to a private place to discuss the situation.

Remind each other that our purpose in being at the store is to allow God to transform our minds through the experiences of life, and claim God's promise that He is using this situation to create more of His likeness in each one.

We should also be reminded we are here because of our conviction that this is where God has placed us, therefore, He is working all things for good. That 'good' will be multiplied as we each yield our hearts to God's creative power.

Begin the process of resolution by allowing each person to speak; to express their opinion of what was said and their interpretation of what was meant. All those involved have their own opinion of what took place and why. Regardless of what you said to me or what you meant by it, my perception is how I received it. This open expression provides an understanding of what the other person might have meant.

It is possible that I misunderstood the feelings you were trying to convey. This misunderstanding becomes clear as I express what I understood, and you are allowed to clarify what you meant, we can then move on to the real issue.

On the other hand, it is possible that I understood you perfectly – the words you said were meant to be unkind – if this is the case, we need to get to the real issue that has brought you to the place of letting off steam, we need to deal with the real concern and not let the superficial issue disguise what is really bugging you.

It is important to moderate this conversation, to guide in the discussion so that each person is given opportunity to speak and not be interrupted. You are the third party, able to give insight into the view from the other side.

“Can you see that when Mary said what she did she was reacting to her feelings that you were trying to take over?” “Do you see that when you used Mary's end of the sorting table when you had other space to use, it could have looked like you were trying to take over?”

“Mary, do you see how it was possible for Jan to feel like you were trying to dictate what she does when you told her she could not use the table?”

When dealing with outburst of emotion it is important to remember that we do not condemn what someone has done, on the other hand, we do not condone it. We realize God is using this situation to show us our selfishness and give us opportunity to yield what we are to Him for transformation. These situations are often looked at negatively; however, we can take the positive approach when we realize that as each person chooses to allow God to grow them, we have His promise that He is making us more like Him through the process.

Take Responsibility

When issues arise, take responsibility, do not blame it on the church or the board or the weather. As the leader, the buck stops with you. When you are willing to take responsibility, you are testifying that you are willing to not only acknowledge the praise when things are going well, but are also willing to take the blame when things are unpleasant. When you make yourself accountable, you gain the respect and trust of those who serve with you.

Customer

If a customer is irritated, do not blame their irritation on someone else. Take responsibility for what took place (even if you were not directly involved), as the leader you are ultimately responsible; take the heat. When you take full responsibility, you set the customer at ease, they feel you are on their side and that you will do what is necessary to make things right.

Often a customer just wants to get 'it' off their chest, they want someone to listen, to sympathize with their plight. When you take full responsibility, they feel they are confiding with the person who can do something about it, and it gives them comfort to know they have been heard. Many times, being heard is all that is required.

Staff/Volunteers

Take responsibility when dealing with other staff and volunteers. If you forgot to give instructions to a new community service worker and an area manager comes to you unhappy with what they have done to their department, take responsibility, do not just brush it off and tell them not to worry about. It is important to them, therefore it should be important to you. Apologize to the area manager and take steps to make amends (you fix what has been done incorrectly). The area manager needs to know you care. Many times when they see you care and that it was an honest mistake, they are willing, and offer to take care of the situation themselves.

Have Fun

We can become busy and harried as the demands of the day progress, but it is important to remember to cast all our cares upon God, to enjoy life, to have fun. Joy and laughter lifts our mood and brings us together as a team.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.”
Proverbs 17:22 (NLT)

Have fun, but never at another's expense. We need to lift each other up, lighten each others burdens, not put others down. Laughter and fun help promote a feeling of belonging, of being part of a family who care about each other.

The idea of family brings strength and commitment to the ministry. We are working for a common goal, and each part played is of vital importance. Just as in a family there is no insignificant job or trivial responsibility.

Success

God will provide and give guidance in all areas as you allow Him to change your heart. As you continue in your willingness to learn, grow and change, the ministry is a success.

16. Department Manager Responsibilities

Purpose

A manager gives stability to a department. They provide consistency in how items are priced, tagged and placed out on the shelf or rack. It is their responsibility to train new people and oversee the performance of their area.

Definition

A department manager has accepted accountability for a specific area, they are responsible for keeping an area stocked, clean and the merchandise rotated. This responsibility is given to paid staff as well as volunteers. When this task is given to a volunteer, they gain a sense of ownership and satisfaction in knowing they are an integral part of the ministry.

The responsibilities of a specific department should be given to someone who has experience in the area and has demonstrated a conviction that this ministry is where God would have them serve.

Departments that benefit from a manager:

Clothes Toys Household Linens Books Electrical

The management of each department is dependent on many variables, including; size of store, size of department, time commitment of volunteers, volume of donations, etc. There are a few departments that may require only one person (electronics, computers).

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Department Manager Responsibilities

Definition

A department manager is someone who has accepted accountability for a specific area, they are responsible for keeping an area stocked, clean, and the merchandise rotated. This responsibility is given to those who have experience in a specific area and have demonstrated a conviction that this ministry is where God would have them serve.

Training

When a new person desires to serve in a specific department they should learn from, and respect the wishes of, the person who has taken the responsibility for that department. On the other hand the one who has taken responsibility should understand that not everyone is going to do things exactly the same and learn to be flexible in how things are accomplished. There is a balance between having things done a certain way and learning to allow for differences.

For people to grow, we must allow them to make mistakes. This is difficult, we may have already been through the same experience, and we know the outcome. Allowing people to make mistakes is important for several reasons. 1) It shows you are open to new ideas. 2) Sometimes things have changed and the idea may work this time. 3) When we learn by doing, it has a deeper impact on us and gives us a better understanding for future decisions. 4) The idea may not work, but it may lead to one that does.

Possessiveness

Humans are naturally possessive, we may think things like, 'It's my department and I don't want anyone messing it up.' God wants to teach us a balance between a desire to have our department clean and well stocked, with an understanding that the items are there to sell and will become disorganized in the process. It is a cycle; we place items on the shelf neatly, customers shop, we come back later to straighten.

Another way we may see our possessiveness is when someone new comes to help us. We have our own way of doing things and it is difficult to accept new ideas. The department manager should be willing to listen to ideas, on the other hand a 'new' person should understand and respect the established protocol of each department.

Management will try to follow the structure of each specific department, but when that does not happen the department manager needs to be aware of the big picture. If the book sorting area is overloaded with books on Monday and there is someone available who can put them out, the book department manager should not expect management to wait for them to come in on Thursday, even if the books may not be put out exactly the way the book department manager would like.

Ministry

One of the major reasons we are here is to be used of God to reach out to those He brings across our path, to give them an encouraging word, a smile to lift their spirits, a prayer to bring them comfort. As we grow in Christ, we become more willing for Him to use us as His agents.

Look for ways to become acquainted with people, to build rapport with the customers who come in on a regular basis. When you notice someone down in the dumps, encourage them, pray with them, let them know you care.

As you build friendships, customers who are going through a struggle will more readily share their life circumstances with you. As they confide in you, you are able to offer a listening, sympathetic ear, you are able to pray with them and point them to the only Source of peace.

People are Watching

We have an influence on those around us, whether we realize it or not. They are taking note; they are affected by how we relate to life and each other. We should be aware that our outlook on life, the peace we are allowing God to give us, the kind and loving interactions we have with each other and with customers tell a story that words are not able to convey.

Order and Cleanliness

Even though this is a thrift store, we should strive to have cleanliness and order, it is not going to happen all the time, but it should be our goal.

Even in the areas that are continually fluctuating, we should be aware of order. When new items are placed, it should be done so in an orderly fashion, there is no need to just throw something. It is a wiser use of time to place the item correctly the first time instead of coming back to straighten it later.

Yet we do not want to go to the opposite extreme, requiring absolute cleanliness and neatness at all times; it is not going to happen, and when it is required, all involved will be stressed to the max.

The shelves will not always be neat and in order, however, when we are aware of their condition – when we have the time – they can be straightened. It is not possible for the sorting area to always be spic and span, but a good cleaning every so often shows an awareness. It is when we do not care, or do not have an eye for what needs to be cleaned, that things can be neglected so long that you need a *bulldozer* to come in to take care of the mess.

God is able to grow in us an awareness and balance in this area. He is teaching us to be aware of and willing to clean and straighten as time allows, but if we have not been able to get to it, we are to understand that it is ok, we will get to it when we can. Solomon reminds us that:

“An empty stable stays clean, but no income comes from an empty stable.”

Proverbs 14:4 (NLT)

He is telling us we could keep an empty store clean, however, we cannot sell from an empty store. Because of the nature of our business – used stuff – our merchandise does not come in neat boxes and packaging. Therefore, it is an ongoing quest to keep it organized.

This verse also speaks to our anguish when we have just cleared an area and then we get more donations that fill it up again.

Our goal is not to see an empty bin, though there is satisfaction in getting a bin empty, which we can delight in. The key is to not despair when it fills right back up, realizing it takes the continues flow of stuff to keep the ministry functioning.

Safety

Safety does not happen by itself, it takes a continuous conscious effort. Remind those who lift on a regular basis, to do so properly. Always be on the lookout for dangerous situations; spilled drink, broken furniture, stacked items that may fall, items sticking out into a walk way. When noticed, these things should be taken care of immediately.

When moving a heavy item, discuss before hand how it will be done and make sure each person involved understands the plan. If you question the way something is going to be done, find another way. If you realize you are in a hurry, slow down.

If there is an emergency, call 911, do not try to transport. If a someone needs medical care, they should seek it and the proper forms should be completed and mailed.

Refuge

The center is a place of refuge, a haven to experience the peace of God, to be refreshed from the distress of the world. This refuge is experienced by those who come to shop, as well as those who come to serve. Our goal should always be to promote a peaceful environment, with our attitude, tone of voice and willingness for God to fill us with His peace.

Generosity/Shining God's Love

Our God is a generous God. Therefore, as we are generous we are portraying the ways of God to the world. As we allow Jesus to create His nature in us, we grow in our ability to be generous, liberal, and openhanded. The Holy Spirit will give us words to say that put a smile in someone's heart, things we can do that give the customer a pleasant memory of their time with us, ways we can allow Jesus to shine through us, ideas of how to put the following verse into action.

“Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Matthew 5:48 (The Message)

Here are a couple of ideas to get you started in thinking of ways to put a generous heart into practice. If you are stocking in the book department and you see someone interested in a book and God impresses you to give it to them; be obedient. You may comment on the book they are looking at, and as the conversation progresses, you could say “may I give you this book as a gift?” Or “I have enjoyed our conversation, I would like to give you this book as a gift.” You may be working in the toy department and say to a mother, “I sure appreciate you not allowing your children to make a mess in the toy department. Would it be ok with you if I let them each pick out a toy as a gift?” Or, “I know it is difficult to raise kids these days, would you mind if I gave your child a toy as a gift?”

We are Jesus arms of love; showing kindness, building friendships, portraying His generosity.

Conclusion

Our ministry purpose is to allow God to use the experiences of life to change our hearts as we become more and more willing to learn, grow, and change. With our changed heart, God is able to shine His light to those He brings across our path.