

THE COME BACK EFFECT

HOW HOSPITALITY CAN COMPEL
YOUR CHURCH'S GUESTS TO RETURN

JASON YOUNG AND JONATHAN MALM



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2018 by Jason Young and Jonathan Malm

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Young, Jason, 1978– author. | Malm, Jonathan, author.

Title: The come back effect : how hospitality can compel your church’s guests to return / Jason Young and Jonathan Malm.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017059999 | ISBN 9780801075780 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Hospitality—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Church. | Church attendance.

Classification: LCC BV4647.H67 Y68 2018 | DDC 253/.7—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017059999>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

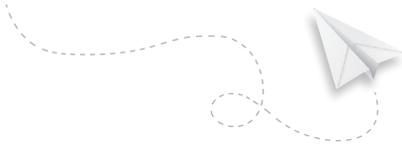
The authors are represented by the literary agency of The Blythe Daniel Agency, Inc.

Some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.





For the guests coming to your church this weekend.
They're about to feel loved like never before.

Contents

Foreword by Andy Stanley	9
Acknowledgments	13
Authors' Note	15
1. Focus on Feeling as Much as Function	17
2. Create a Culture, Not a Job Title	33
3. Know the Guest	49
4. Be Fully Present	67
5. Think Scene by Scene	83
6. Recover Quickly	97
7. Observe Details, Because Everything Communicates	115
8. Reject “Just Okay”	129
9. Choose Values over Policies	145
10. Reach for Significance	161
Appendix: Example Psychographic Sheet	179
Notes	183

Foreword

I recently read a letter from a woman who had been so persistent in inviting her children to attend our church that her husband asked her to stop pressuring them to come. They were adults who had developed a strong distaste for church and for Christians. When she finally leveraged all of her influence to get them to attend with her for Christmas, it was under the stipulation that she would have to sit through lunch afterward and listen to *their* thoughts on faith.

In her letter, she described in great detail their experience at one of our campuses. She remembered names, hand gestures, and even the facial expressions of our guest services volunteers and the people onstage. She noticed all those things because she was extra sensitive to the experience. It wasn't just her perspective that mattered this time; she was seeing the service through the eyes of her family. After the service, the verdict came in. *The experience was excellent.* One of her children even commented that the “customer service” was better than at the Hyatt.

The end result was a completely different conversation at lunch. Instead of a religious debate, they discussed the excellence they had just experienced. They felt like the experience had been tailored

to them. One of her children—known to be a cynic, debater, and atheist—described what he experienced at church that day as a “10”!

When I was asked to write the foreword for this book, I thought about that letter. What this woman experienced isn’t uncommon for those who attend a North Point Ministries church. Her children had felt pressure from their mom because of their differing views toward church and Christians. But instead of the experience adding to that pressure, it actually alleviated it. It began to change their feelings about church and maybe even God. *That’s the “come back effect.”* Guests want to come back because of what they experience during their first visit. How to make that happen is what Jason and Jonathan share in this book.

I have the privilege of working personally with Jason as he focuses on instilling the come back effect in our guest services staff and volunteers. He gets it. He feels what our guests feel, and he brings that awareness to our weekend experiences. I’ve also seen how he invests in our volunteers. How he cares for them affects how they care for our guests.

Jason and Jonathan both see that what can become routine for us is extremely personal to our guests. There’s no “typical Sunday,” because each Sunday is important to the people who are visiting that week.

We’ve seen these principles at work throughout North Point Ministries. They don’t just impact one team; they impact the entire organization. As Jason has tested these principles and shared his expertise with our other guest services directors, his ideas have become further refined at all our campuses.

I recommend you take this opportunity to get a glimpse into the “why” behind *The Come Back Effect*. This book isn’t just a series of nice ideas. We’ve seen firsthand how the principles within

Foreword

open the hearts of our guests to Jesus and transform their lives.
And that's why we do this, right?

Andy Stanley
Author, communicator, and founder
of North Point Ministries

Acknowledgments

Jason would like to thank:

Andy Stanley, for being a leader worth following.

North Point Ministries, for being a place that cares for guests and volunteers and yet still tries to learn new ways to become remarkable.

Buckhead Church Guest Services volunteers, for being a team who prioritizes elevating the dignity of the guest.

Lance Martin, for being a close friend and someone who tells me like it is. You are in my corner and there have been many days I've needed it.

Jeff Jackson, Brooklynn Warren, Rhonda Hinrichs, Rebecca Parrish, and Patrick Riesenberg, for being a team that believes in what we do seven days a week. I'm proud of you.

Chris Green, for being a leader who believed in me and trusted me from the beginning.

My wife, Stacy, for giving me the space to dream and write. If people only knew how much you support me.

My parents, for being voices who cheer me on.

Acknowledgments

Debbie Miller, for being a prayer warrior more days than I can even count.

Pastor Johnny Hunt, for being the first person to invite me in and trust me at FBC Woodstock to create remarkable environments for volunteers and guests.

Jonathan would like to thank:

Grace Avenue Church, for being our guinea pig and letting us test the material on your leadership team.

Blythe Daniel, for “getting” this project when others in the industry didn’t. You approached the product with creativity and optimism.

Authors' Note

We come from pretty different organizational backgrounds but share a similar passion. Jason works at North Point Ministries as well as with some of the largest churches and businesses helping them achieve this thing called “the come back effect.” Meanwhile, Jonathan works with smaller to medium-sized ministries doing the same.

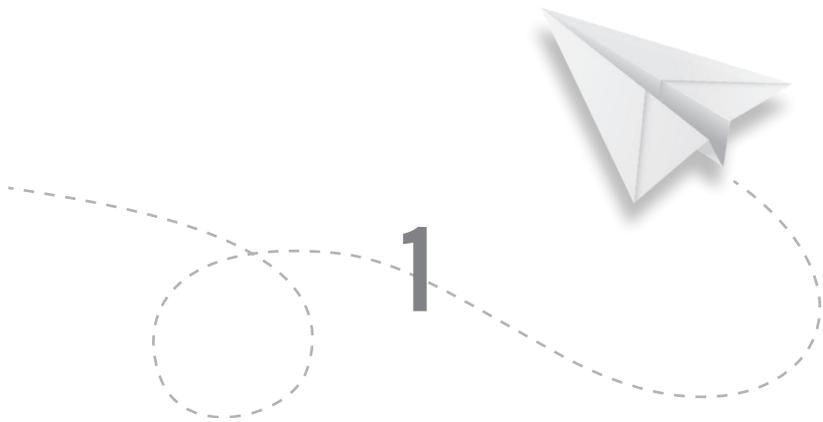
When we first started brainstorming this project, it was a blast to see how the principles we planned to cover worked in almost any environment—whether small or large, and even ministry or for-profit. We believe the ten big ideas in this book will help you create an environment where guests will feel compelled to come back.

1. Focus on Feeling as Much as Function
2. Create a Culture, Not a Job Title
3. Know the Guest
4. Be Fully Present
5. Think Scene by Scene
6. Recover Quickly

7. Observe Details, Because Everything Communicates
8. Reject “Just Okay”
9. Choose Values over Policies
10. Reach for Significance

When we talk about a “guest,” we’re primarily referring to a first-time visitor to your church. But the way you treat the “guest” shouldn’t be that much different depending on whether it’s their first or fiftieth time. These principles can be applied to first-timers, volunteers, or even lifelong members of your organization. Whether they attend your church, shop with your business, or attend your small group, applying these principles to the way you deal with guests can give you the come back effect.

Throughout the book we’ll share personal stories to help illustrate the principles. To keep things clear, we’ll make sure you know whose story is whose. But regardless of which stories belong to which person, we hope you’ll start seeing your own ministry (or even business) environment in the narrative. Your organization can become the type that’s magnetic—reaching new guests and creating that sticking point where they ultimately return and find their home.



Focus on Feeling as Much as Function

► JASON

There's only one thing I regret about my wedding. It was the wedding reception.

I got married in my hometown. My wife, Stacy, is from Oklahoma City. So obviously, we hosted many more of my friends and family at the wedding than hers. And because of that, I was so focused on serving everybody at the reception that I left my wife standing there by herself. I was worried about greeting and hosting everyone, and I neglected to enjoy time with her. I let my service overwhelm what the whole event was all about. To this day, that's the one thing Stacy says she wishes I'd done differently—simply been “with her” at the reception.

I was so focused on the task in front of me that I didn't focus on the person.



In many ministries, the guest experiences what Stacy experienced. The service was excellent; not a single task was left incomplete. But the guest feels neglected. They feel *served*, but they don't feel *hospitality*.

Churches love to talk about serving. It's a huge idea that Jesus epitomized. It encapsulates the concepts of humility, compassion, and going the extra mile. Serving is so action oriented. When you hear "serving," it's all about doing something.

Unfortunately, churches have used the term so much that we never really hear about hospitality. We don't ever talk about the feeling. Serving is about doing more and completing tasks. But what happens when serving actually hurts someone's experience?

The quintessential story of Jesus's servant heart was when he washed his disciples' feet. We love to tell that story because that's service at its finest. But we don't really think about the cultural context or what it really meant to the disciples. Foot washing was either something intimate between a husband and wife, or it was something reserved for the lowest servants to do for their masters. It wasn't a normal thing you would see your authority figure doing for you.

Imagine a church that instituted foot washing in their services for first-time guests. The service element would be strong! People would talk about that church! But every single guest who visited the church would feel uncomfortable. How awkward would it be to visit a place for the first time and have a complete stranger wash your feet—bunions, fungus, and all? The church would be serving their guests, but they wouldn't be hospitable about it.

No matter how over-the-top your service, if it doesn't connect with the emotions of the guest, it isn't hospitality. Hospitality is about the feeling.

This can be an uncomfortable concept for many modern churches. *Aren't feelings bad? Don't they lie?* Yes, they do lie. That's the point. A business, for instance, wants a product that the customer will love. However, even if the product is perfect, the experience of the store, or the shipping, or the ordering process can all ruin the product—even though they have very little to do with the actual product. Thus, great customer service for a business removes negative emotions from the periphery of their product.

As a church, though, we want to remove the negative emotions that might get in the way of ministry. We aren't trying to manipulate some happy feeling in the hopes someone will come back to our ministry. We're trying to care enough for our guests to replace their negative emotions so real ministry can happen. That's when you start seeing the come back effect—when you care enough about your guests to create an atmosphere where real ministry can take place.

► JASON

There's a man who works at the Walmart by my house. He perfectly illustrates this idea of service without hospitality. The first time my wife and I encountered him, I had a simple question about the location of an item in the frozen foods section. He cheerily offered to escort me to the item. But once we found it, he didn't leave. He stood a bit too close to me and started talking to me about completely unrelated topics. His gestures while talking to me felt like an octopus wriggling into my personal space. He didn't simply solve our problem then ask, "Is there anything else?" He overstayed his welcome in an attempt to be over-the-top friendly.

I remember telling my wife as we walked away, "That dude takes his job for real. And I don't mean that in a good way."

Now when we visit that Walmart, we don't ask this guy for help, because he goes so above and beyond that it actually ruins the experience.



Hospitality is about caring for the emotions of the guest just as much as it is about serving them, if not even more. That means knowing when it's time to go above and beyond the call of duty or when it's time to walk away. Hospitality is about merging the function—the tasks—and the feeling.

Every time a guest experiences us, we should honor them enough to deliver the same level of hospitality in every experience. But that same level of hospitality might mean responding differently each time, because the experience is about the guest. It's not about making ourselves feel good about the service we provided. It's making the guest feel good about the hospitality we showed.

Many ministries have been “doing” this serving thing for so long that all they worry about is “doing.” We need to reimagine what it means to be the guest and what it means to add feeling back into it. This means prioritizing the feelings of the guest over the tasks we perform for them.

There's a story in Luke 10 where Jesus visits the house of a woman named Martha. She invited Jesus into her home and, being the good hostess, was busy preparing a dinner in the kitchen. Meanwhile, her sister, Mary, was simply sitting with Jesus and conversing with him.

Martha complained to Jesus about this. “Can you tell my lazy sister to help me prepare the meal instead of lounging out here with you?”

She expected Jesus to have her back and instruct Mary to help with the tasks. But he reminded Martha of the value of being with

someone. Martha was so busy *servicing* Jesus that she neglected to *be with* Jesus. How many of our team members are so busy *servicing* our guests that they neglect to simply *be with* our guests? Imagine if Martha had spent more time with Jesus. Imagine if she had merged the function and the feeling of what she was doing. She might have brought the bowls and ingredients into the room where Jesus was sitting. She might have even explained what she was doing, bringing the relationship into the function.

How does this play out in our ministries?

Parking attendants can get so busy simply parking cars that they forget there's a real person behind that driver's-side window or a family experiencing their own stresses. When parking cars becomes a service, you might see the attendant talking to a friend while gesturing to the nearest open spot. Or the attendant might look a bit uncomfortable in the heat of the summer day. You can tell it's more about the function than about hospitality for the parking lot attendant.

Hospitality looks different. It acknowledges feelings. As a person looks for a parking spot, they are experiencing feelings. They might be feeling anxious, confused, or overwhelmed in this new place. A parking lot attendant who gets what the guest is feeling will make subtle changes to his approach. He'll still park the cars, but he might make the following changes:

- His gestures will be slower.
- He'll be more patient when people don't quickly make it to the spot he's guiding them to.
- He won't be as sharp.
- He'll make eye contact with the driver.
- He'll notice the children in the back seat and wave at them with a smile.

THE COME BACK EFFECT

- His facial expressions will be gentle and warm.
- He'll notice the tire pressure is low and offer to fill the tire or change it for the guest during the service.

He'll realize that the feeling he can give the guest is even more important than the task he's performing. He realizes that people respond to feeling and that feeling is memorable. His job is not to park cars; it's to show hospitality to the guest through the act of parking cars. To be honest, the guest could probably find their own parking spot. But if the parking lot attendant is able to ease the stress the driver is feeling, then he performed a valuable function. He (or she) delivered hospitality.

Think of a time you visited a new church or a business. You probably had an impression of the place, and you formed a decision to stay away from the place or visit again. There are times we can pinpoint why we like a church or a business. But there are other times we aren't sure *why* we liked or disliked a place. It's just something we felt.

There will be people who will return to your church and won't know why. They simply felt good there. And there will be others who won't be coming back. They can't explain to someone who asks why they decided not to return; it was just a feeling.

Feelings are important—often even more important than the function. That's why we must merge the two.

The question to ask when faced with this information is obvious: Do we simply let the tasks go in exchange for the feeling? No. This idea of merging function and feeling is about a perspective shift more than anything. It's not strictly a behavioral change, though this *will* affect your behavior. It's about focusing on the feeling of the task—not simply the task itself.

► JONATHAN

There's a coffee shop I visit frequently. I'm a bit of a regular there; they always make my coffee right. I respect that they do their job well. But one of the things that made this particular coffee shop my favorite was one simple thing. At some point, each of the baristas moved beyond merely making my coffee to becoming my friend. They began asking my name and asking about my job. In the moment they ask details about me, it feels like they're stepping outside of their role and making a personal connection with me. It's that feeling they've injected into my visit.

Don't get me wrong; if they continually messed up my drink order, it wouldn't matter how personal our connection. I probably wouldn't keep coming back. The function has to be there. But the merging of the feeling and the function makes the coffee shop excellent.



When the emotion is there, it doesn't feel like someone's doing their job. It's like they're your friend. It feels like they're rooting for you and that doing their job is a way to support you—not just a means to perform a task.

Connecting with the Existing Feeling

Empathy is one of the most important elements of hospitality—understanding and acknowledging what the guest is feeling. A typical guest experiences many feelings during a visit to a church or business, and many of them are not good. Understanding those feelings is vital to a successful guest experience. But understanding is not enough. Excellence in hospitality means replacing those existing negative feelings.

THE COME BACK EFFECT

A guest who is visiting a church may already be feeling anxious, nervous, confused, agitated . . . Maybe the traffic was bad. Maybe they feel overwhelmed by the large size of the building. Maybe they feel like all eyes are on them because of the small size of the building. Maybe they've had a bad experience in the past with church—so they're already coming out fighting.

If we remember those possibilities, what we deliver has the opportunity to replace that emotion. We could replace a bad emotion with a positive emotion.

Imagine a first-time guest who arrives to the service a little bit late. Now, an usher's default task is to fill the auditorium seats from the front to the back. It looks good on camera and makes the pastor feel good about the room. So the usher spots the first-timer and ushers them all the way to the front row and seats them (because all the regulars sat in the back instead of pushing their way to the front).

How do you think the first-time guest feels? They could probably die of embarrassment! People are staring at them. They feel stupid that they're late. And nobody understands they're late because their young child threw up on them that morning right before getting into the car.

Because the usher didn't connect with the current emotion the guest was experiencing, he further compounded the bad feeling the guest had. He missed out on the opportunity to replace it with a positive emotion.

What if, instead, the usher approached it a different way? He could ask, "Would you like to sit in the front or the back? I have an amazing spot up front if you want, or I could get you a prime seat in the back." Because the usher is on top of his function, he's identified all the empty seats. But because the usher has connected

with what the guest might be feeling, he's taken their preference into account. Then, if possible, he gets them to their preferred seat. That acknowledges the emotion of the first-time guest.

Then, if the usher wanted to replace that emotion the guest was experiencing, he would take it a step further. He'd usher them to their seat in a relaxed manner—matching the pace of the guest—and introduce the first-time guest to the individual they'd be sitting by. Even if no names were exchanged, a simple “enjoy the service” to both of them would help break the tension the guest and the person they're sitting by might be feeling. It would be like a seal of approval on this guest that they shouldn't be embarrassed for arriving late—a nonverbal welcome: “We value the fact that you took time out of your day to be with us. We're honored you are here.”

The original emotion was embarrassment and urgency. The replacement emotion was dignity and peace. You can bet the guest would remember that feeling when they thought back on whether they wanted to visit the church for a second time.

The role of hospitality is to protect how the guest feels and to give them the best possible experience.

Becoming a Broker

We're all familiar with the idea of a bodyguard. In fact, you've probably seen a dramatic scene in a movie where a gunshot rings out. The film speed slows down as the brave bodyguard hurls himself in front of the person he's protecting. His body inches in front of the bullet, which then makes its impact. The film speeds up, chaos ensues, and you see the relief on the protected person's face. The bodyguard saved their life by taking the bullet. The brave protector considered the life of their client more important than their own.

THE COME BACK EFFECT

While it's not going to be quite so dramatic, that's essentially the role our teams should take for their guest. They are a shield—a bodyguard for the guest. They broker bad experiences so the guest doesn't have to experience them. For example, when a team member sees themselves as a broker:

- The guest doesn't have to feel lost when they can't find their car. The parking lot attendant takes that emotion on themselves and finds it for them.
- The guest doesn't have to feel embarrassed when their child throws up in the children's room. The childcare worker takes that emotion on themselves and cleans it up.
- The guest doesn't have to feel confused when they're trying to find out the time of a support group that meets at the church. The greeter takes that feeling, absorbs it, and does the legwork to find out for the guest.

Brokering the experience for the guest is about sheltering them from the emotion. It's jumping in front of the uncomfortable bullet and absorbing that so the guest doesn't have to experience it.

► JASON

A single mother came into our services looking for a seat. She requested a seat at the end of a row so she could quickly slip out in the event that her child needed attention during the service. An usher found a row where this might be possible and asked a woman who was already seated, “Ma’am, would it be possible for you to scoot down? This lady needs an aisle seat this morning.”

The woman in the seat looked down, then back up and said, “She can walk around me.”

The usher apologetically looked at the guest, walked her away from the seat, and said, “I’m sorry, ma’am. If you would like to sit in an aisle seat, you don’t have to sit there because that doesn’t feel like the most enjoyable place to sit.” Then he escorted her to another seating area.

If the usher had said nothing or seated her next to the inconsiderate lady, the guest would have been left feeling the embarrassment and shame of the situation. But because he acknowledged the situation and protected the guest, she felt empowered again. She felt comfortable and respected.



What a powerful thing when we can broker the experience for our guests! When we acknowledge what they’re feeling and work to protect them from that, we make a guest feel truly honored.

In fact, you can even use language like that. It disarms a guest when you say something like:

- “I’ll keep you from feeling embarrassed.”
- “I don’t want you to feel lost.”
- “You got here at the perfect time!”

We never want to reinforce a guest’s insecurities. Instead, we want to reinforce their security. Their comfort. Their confidence. Those emotions are memorable and will stick with the guest long after their visit is over.

Brokering the guest’s feelings is our way in the small scale to reflect what Christ did for us on the large scale. In Isaiah 53:4, the Bible describes Jesus as having borne our sorrows and anxieties. He took them on himself so we no longer had to. While we could

never match the sacrifice Jesus made for us, the come back effect is one small way we can follow Jesus's example—to shoulder our guests' burdens for them.

What a Guest Should Feel

Each day, ask yourself two questions to get this idea of hospitality stirring around in your head.

1. **Today, how do you want your guests to feel?** Then ask, in the moment, how you can encourage a guest to feel the way you've decided you want them to feel.
2. **How do you want your team members to feel today?** Understand that the way a team member feels directly affects how they will make the guest feel. You shouldn't expect your team to take care of a guest if they don't feel cared for by the church or the team. Put wind in the sails of your teammates—because that's what they're going to do for the guest.

What do you want your guests to feel? What do you want them to *not* feel? Determine in your heart and with your team how you will get the guest to feel the good feelings and stay away from the bad feelings. For instance, if you're a small group leader, figure out what you want your guests to feel as they enter the classroom or your home. Do you have enough seats; will it be obvious to the guest you were expecting them and prepared? Is it clear where your guest needs to go—easy to identify the classroom or house?

If you're a team leader, expose your team both to the good and to the negative feelings so they can know what good feelings to deliver in order to replace the negative emotion. Train

your team to become experts on intentionally delivering positive feelings in a manner similar to how bankers are trained to deal with counterfeit money: know the fake exists, but only deal with the real so you know when you see and feel the fake. In other words, know that negative feelings happen, but show the team what's possible.

Check out this list below and highlight the positive feelings that stick out to you. Then underline the negative feelings you've experienced in guest services environments.

You want your guests to feel

- confident
- safe
- satisfied
- accepted
- hopeful
- acknowledged
- empowered
- educated
- pleased
- comfortable
- excited
- interested
- valued
- relaxed
- welcomed
- familiar
- included
- refreshed
- challenged
- secure
- in control
- delighted

You don't want your guests to feel

- confused
- unsafe
- skeptical
- cynical
- suspicious
- ignored
- annoyed
- doubtful
- angry
- hurt
- distrustful
- processed
- rushed
- uneasy
- frustrated
- uninitiated
- overwhelmed
- uncomfortable
- out of control
- helpless

► JASON

One Sunday, there was a woman standing by guest services. A volunteer, Tracy, took the opportunity to engage her in a conversation. “Are you waiting for family members? Friends?”

The woman replied, “No, I just lost my three-month-old baby. I had no other place to go, so I came to church. But my husband wouldn’t come with me.”

Tracy knew another guest services volunteer named Carter who had also lost his son. She took the woman over to the man and introduced her. She didn’t tell her that Carter had also experienced a similar loss, but she knew that he would have empathy that was needed for the situation.

Carter then invited the lady to sit with him in the service. “I’m not sure I’ll be able to make it through the service,” she said.

Carter replied, “That’s okay. I’ll be here as long as you want to stay.”

She stayed the entire time. Afterward, she talked to one of our team members and joined a women’s group.



The function of these volunteers wasn’t any extra than normal. But because they focused on the feeling as much as the function, it made all the difference in this lady’s life. She could feel the empathy through their interactions.

Life is so hurried. It’s so hectic. What if church could be the place where a guest feels the least hurried? Where the relational moments could provide a safe environment—safe to process through the most difficult moments in our life? Hospitality—connecting feeling and function—is the first step in creating the come back effect.

KEY POINTS and TAKEAWAYS

1. Serving is task oriented; hospitality is feeling oriented. Simply performing tasks is not enough to compel a guest to come back.
2. Hospitality should change the way we perform our tasks. Tasks are important, but it's the intangible feelings we transmit that turn them into moments of hospitality.
3. People *will* be feeling something when they arrive to your ministry (stress, nervousness, or confusion). Our job in the come back effect is to replace those negative emotions with positive ones.
4. Great hospitality is shielding the guest from negative experiences by throwing ourselves in front of the situation—like a bodyguard takes a bullet for the one they're protecting.
5. Decide proactively what you want your guests to feel, then look for ways to create environments that will help them experience that.
6. Imagine if your ministry was the least-hurried moment of your guest's week. That could be the ultimate thing to compel them to return.