

Growth Funnel of Church Evangelism

When I was in sales, my broker taught me about the sales funnel. It occurs to me there is great application for growing a church.

We sold commercial property. The steps to selling a property looked like this:

1. Get a listing
2. Develop a brochure
3. Place ads
4. Receive calls/ send brochures
5. Call back/ assess interest/ answer questions
6. Negotiate an offer
7. Sign a contract
8. Due diligence
9. Close sale
10. We get paid

The key point my broker wanted to communicate to me as he explained this was, you have to have a bunch of #4 if you ever expect to get any of #10. The mistake of the rookie salesman is assuming every inquiry is a paycheck.

Seen graphically, it might look like this:



The Growth Funnel

Just as salesmen have a sales funnel, churches have a growth funnel. (This is the idea behind the parable of the seed and the soil.) The Growth Funnel might look like this:

1. Pre-evangelism events
2. Visitors
3. Repeat visitors
4. People join
5. People get involved
6. People become disciples
7. The process repeats

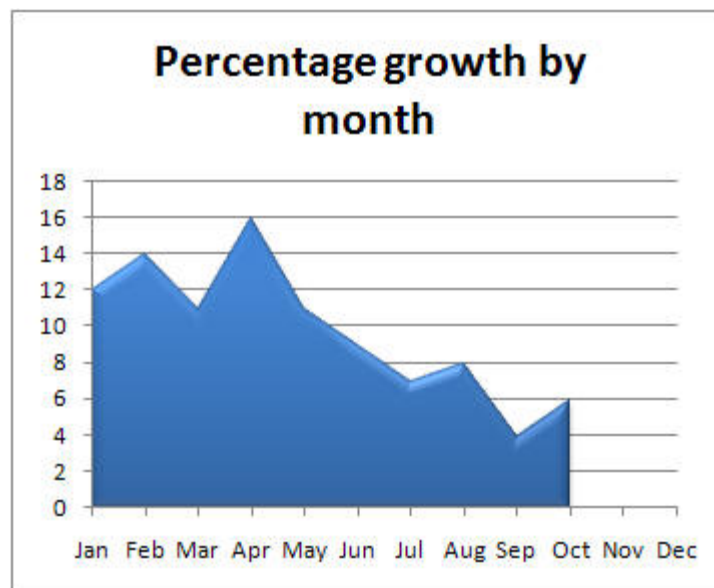
The usefulness of the growth funnel is in answering this question: where is the funnel blocked?

- Are we not getting enough visitors? (Do more pre-evangelism events)
- Are the visitors not coming back? Are they not joining? (Give Friday Nights to Jesus; Invite every member and every visitor to every fellowship every month.)
- Are we not making true disciples of the ones that attend? (Improve disciple-making process.)

Magnet Factor / Velcro Factor / Growth Rate

Let's say you set a goal of doubling your church in five years. This works out to 15% growth. I suggest you have someone actually keep up with this on a month by month basis. Each month we measure whether this month's attendance was above the same month a year ago. Tracking this month by month accounts for seasonal differences in attendance, and smoothes out weekly variations in attendance.

I suggest you create a graph each month that looks like this:



Clearly, the growth rate is slipping. The question is, Why? Are we failing to get visitors to visit, or are we failing to get people who are visiting to join? Or, is it something else?

So, the next step is to look at the Velcro factor. How sticky is our church, and is this number moving up or down?

We look at the number of visitors and it looks like this:



No big change in the number of visitors. When we look at the number of visitors joining as a percentage of number who visit, we find a problem:



The Velcro Factor is way down. That is our problem. We don't need to work on getting more visitors; we need to work on getting the visitors to stick around.

Bottom Line

In most cases, the problem is with the Velcro Factor, not the Magnet Factor. Most churches have plenty of visitors; the problem is, the visitors don't stick around.

But, this does vary from church to church and it is important that we know. The strategies for fixing the Velcro Factor are completely different than those for fixing the Magnet Factor. If we don't have enough Visitors we might do some advertising, hold a friend day, do a series of sermons on evangelism, or host some pre-evangelism events.

If the problem is the Velcro Factor, we might look at some different things. We would look first at the quality of our worship services. Then, we would get systematic and consistent about inviting every member and every prospect to every fellowship every month. My experience has been corroborated by the stories of many others--about 90% of the people we get into our homes and feed our coffee cake to join the church. Again, it is a good idea to track this--actually measure how many visitors we invite and how often they respond.

What does the Bible say?

This all may sound a little too business like for some. You might be wondering, "What does the Bible say?" Here are a couple of verses:

- Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; Proverbs 27:23 [NIV]
- Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts. Proverbs 24:3 [Living]

Jesus taught this concept in the parable of the four soils. The idea is you have to distribute a lot more seed than you expect to come to harvest. Some will be lost to the hard soil, some will be lost to the weeds, some will be lost to the birds. Only a small amount will make it to the harvest.

What is the process?

This is roughly the concept taught by Rick Warren in the Purpose Driven Church. Rick Warren's funnel looks like this:

1. Community
2. Crowd
3. Congregation
4. Committed
5. Core

The idea is move people through the funnel to become fully devoted followers of Christ.