

# CEOs in the Church?

A new church had just started in our area. A team from the church took the local telephone directory and started calling people, beginning with the the A's. It did not take long to get to the B's, so I had little time to think about how I would respond. They wanted to know if I were active in a local church. When the caller learned that I was a minister in a local church, he stammered around a bit and then said, "W-w-ell, we don't want to take people away from your church." The caller had taken time to tell me about the "exciting" programs their church offered, including contemporary music and worship services, and of course community activities. Theirs was an "inclusive church" that reached out to everyone in "love" and not criticism.

I have since learned about still other techniques used by many churches to drum up enthusiasm and attendance. They sponsor events such as bake sales, softball leagues, bluegrass concerts, and drives to contact everyone in the community. They have borrowed much from the world of advertising and mass marketing. Besides preaching and visitation, the pastor of many a church has taken on the role of a CEO (chief executive officer). Such officers, through the latest marketing techniques, are out to promote a product. The exciting programs are the products many churches offer. Hopefully, they would also promote Jesus Christ. But is Jesus Christ really a product the church has to offer?

Some would say the church should use any means available, including the latest marketing techniques, telemarketing, even hi-tech sales techniques to win people to Christ. They argue that Jesus and Paul used the latest means available to them to spread the Gospel—Roman roads, letters, and appeals to Caesar. There is no evidence, however, that Jesus or Paul used every means available. We do not hear of the early church using drama, sponsoring gladiatorial games, going to the Roman baths to get better acquainted. Christianity was basically spread by word of mouth and the preaching of the Gospel. Christians stood against these things.

Obviously we would recognize that some advertising or promotion could be in order to expose people to the Gospel. Christian literature can speak to the needs of the heart. Visiting people and even calling them is certainly appropriate at times. The real danger, however, is in watering down the Gospel message or altering it in the name of promotion. What does the promotion of fun, entertainment, and gimmicks, just to get a crowd or attain a high profile in the community, do to the Christian message? Will music that has the sound and rhythm of Satan's music really promote Christ, or will it merely make people feel good or temporarily stir their emotions? Will sales techniques patterned after a greedy business world show people we have a genuine love for them? Will they realize that Christianity rises above greed and covetousness to offer them a different lifestyle that meets their deepest needs?

Will the pastor or the leader that more and more functions as a CEO neglect the essence of the Gospel—to preach Christ without compromise and show genuine love and concern, meeting spiritual needs? Can he do this when his main focus is on bolstering attendance? Who likes to be used as a statistic, just to meet someone's attendance goals?

Every technique, every method, must be tested in light of the truth of the Gospel, and whether or not it demonstrates Jesus Christ and His love, and whether or not it meets spiritual needs. Does it really promote the Christian's calling: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen"*?

~Roger Berry