

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

New Guest Connection Strategies for the 21st Century - Episode 104

What's Working, What's Not, and How to Use Texting to Be More Effective

It can feel like a losing battle. You want to help new guests feel welcome and decide to return, but how do you even identify them? The most common strategies don't work very well anymore. In this episode, Tony, Amy and Sean share the method we've seen some churches use that's working incredibly well, and how simple it is to bring your guest connection strategy into the 21st century.

Why Churches Struggle to Connect with New Guests

- They aren't creating experiences with new guests in mind. In other words, they're not *expecting* guests.
- They haven't clearly defined who they're trying to reach.
- They don't have an intentional plan to identify, welcome and follow up with new guests.
- If they do have a plan, it's too cumbersome for a new guest to engage.

Strategies That Aren't Working Very Well

- Waiting too long into the service to acknowledge first-time guests: This can make guests feel like they've walked into someone else's family dinner uninvited. It's awkward.
- Asking people to manually fill out a new guest information card and take it to a designated area, like an info or guest center, after the service to receive a gift.
- Not mentioning what the free gift is: just that they're getting something. Information isn't free anymore. Our culture is too aware of the dangers of other people having our information. People aren't willing to share their personal info for nothing in return. When they're underwhelmed with your gift it communicates the value that you've placed on knowing who they are.
- All in all, it's unlikely you will get first-time guests to do all of these things. Well-resourced and intentional churches are seeing less than 40% of their first-time guests return. If you don't have an effective strategy, you'll be lucky to see half that number.

- Gary MacIntosh and Charles Arn had some helpful data in their book [What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb For Leading Your Church](#). They found that the typical growing church will see 20% of their first-time guests become a part of your church. They'll see 40% of second-time guests become part of your church, and close to 60% will become part of your church after the third visit.

Where to Start with Text Messaging Strategy

- What do most people have in their hands the majority of the day? A smartphone. Texting is a more natural, 21st century way to connect with new guests in our churches. And, it's less invasive. People can respond to a text at their convenience, or not at all, if the message doesn't warrant a response.
- Keep the request for information via that first text minimal—just their name and email address. You're already captured their mobile number.
- Take that info, enter it into your database and send a follow-up text that same day—something like, *"We wanted to say thank you for joining us this morning. We hope your experience was great and that we will see you again next weekend. If you get a chance, stop by and say hi at the new guest center in our lobby."*
- Don't over-use this new communication method. Many churches wait until the following Friday to reconnect and invite them back. That seems to work well. Consider offering your incentive for stopping by the guest center on the *second* visit.
- We see many churches following this same pattern of Friday invite texts and guest center connections for the next 6-8 weeks. One of the churches we've worked with has a goal of seeing people 3 times in the first 8 weeks. They know if they do there's a 60% chance they'll stay to become a part of the church.

Next Steps

- **Google "texting in church" to find several solutions for getting started with a texting strategy.** Most are affordable and have an easy setup process. Many also offer automation so you can personalize your messaging and let the software do the texting work for you.
- **Interested in finding out what it's really like for a guest who attends your church for the first time?** Once you see what an unchurched person sees, you can't "unsee" it. Learn how we help churches get a feel for what first-time guests experience in the Ministry Health Assessment phase of the [Unstuck Process](#).

Listen to the episode on iTunes or at theunstuckgroup.com/episode104.