

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Increasing First-Time Guests

## Episode 97

### *How Connexus Church Created a Culture for Inviting New Guests*

When it comes to indicators of a post-Christian culture, Canada is at least a decade ahead of the U.S. Yet Connexus Church in Barrie, ON is seeing more first-time guests than they've ever seen as a church—and overall attendance is growing faster than ever, too. Would it surprise you to know that a few years ago they realized they had a “front door” problem? In this episode, Tony Morgan interviews lead pastor Jeff Brodie to share the story of what changed.

### *Assessing the Problem*

Connexus Church invited The Unstuck Group in about four years ago to help with strategic planning. At the time, they were sensing they had a “back door” problem—that is, they were concerned they weren't engaging and connecting people in the life of the church.

- During the Ministry Health Assessment portion of the [Unstuck Process](#), the team learned that a healthy new guests number needs to be equivalent over the course of a year to what a church sees on an average Sunday.
- *“We were growing, but not at the pace we wanted to. We thought it was a back door problem and realized, no, we actually have a front door problem. We needed to be seeing probably at least twice the number of new guests that we were seeing. And so it was a sobering moment for us because we said, ‘Wow, we're creating a church that unchurched people love to attend. We're excited. We're talking about inviting all the time. It's not that we don't talk about it, and it's not that it isn't happening, but it isn't happening at the level that it should be if we're going to grow at the pace that we would like to.’” -- Jeff Brodie*

### *Closing the Vision Gap*

- When you realize you have a front-door problem, everybody immediately jumps for the tools and programs. But Jeff and team recognized it wasn't about creating better invite opportunities or more things that people can invite the community to attend.
- *“There was a vision gap around a true passion for people in our community. We realized that as a community we had to grow when it comes to our passion for reaching the people who live next door to us and around us.”*

- How did they begin to close that vision gap? They started to pray about how to respond, and ultimately launched something they called *For the City*. They knew they had already been doing a good job being *for* people when they arrived at church (creating a church unchurched people loved to attend), but they started casting vision for what it looks like to be *for* people as they lived life out in the community.
- *"We were very clear: This isn't about turning people into projects; it's about changing the posture of our heart towards people."*

## *Intentional Strategy Changes*

- Connexus rolled out the *For the City* vision in concentric circles, starting with a smaller group of highly invested people first, and then gradually rolling it out to the congregation.
- *"People had the opportunity to identify who they were going to be 'for' and put that on a card for themselves. Then they could subscribe to an email list where I would send a regular email to share stories about how to be for people and give them tips."*
- A big learning: People in our modern culture have forgotten how to be social. We don't actually know how to build a relationship.
- *"What I realized was this was about teaching people how to be social, not about how to share their faith. We had to lower the bar way, way down."*
- Celebrating stories of investing AND inviting: Churches use the language of "invest and invite." But we don't tend to celebrate any of the investing, just the inviting. Jesus did tons of investing. Investing grows our heart towards people. That's how we are disciplined.

Over the first year that Connexus made this shift, the "invites" went up by 50%. Between 2017 and 2018, it went up 68%. To reiterate Jeff's main point: The hardest part of this turnaround was the heart work. The leadership renewed their passion for the people in the community, and were able to cast vision with integrity that people caught. It became contagious.

## *Next Steps*

- Read [The Art of Neighboring](#) by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon
- Curious about some of the data The Unstuck Group provided that helped Connexus get clarity on the real issue they were facing? Learn how we could help your church get unstuck with the [Unstuck Process](#).

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