

selling the invisible a field guide to modern marketing

With a name like *Selling the Invisible*, maybe this marketing book has something to say to youth workers. Or maybe the suggestion that a business book can apply to the church will just make you mad.

But if you care about quality and communication, if you want your ministry to reach more kids, then Harry Beckwith's business classic is a helpful tool. It's sort of like a business version of Proverbs—a wise, old business guru, stringing together pearls of experience, based on decades of consulting with Fortune 500 service companies. Each dissertation is only a page long, so you can read for seven minutes at a time, throw away five useless ideas and still be left with two great ones.

Don't believe me? See if any of these examples apply to your youth ministry:

1. **Think inside before outside.** Sadly, Beckwith says, getting the word out and attracting people to a poorly executed program is the best way to cripple an organization. We need to take a long, hard look at the quality of our offerings, to see if we're doing them in an authentic, compelling way. Instead of asking, "How can we get more people to come to youth group?" our first question should be, "How can we develop a youth ministry that more people will want to come to?"
2. **Understand the above-average illusion.** It's especially hard to appraise our efforts because ministry isn't a product; it's a relationship. When milk turns sour, you can tell. When a ministry gets old, it's harder to smell. But the fact that it's difficult to assess shouldn't stop us from trying. Otherwise, we run the risk of kidding ourselves. Beckwith says every business in America thinks it's at least above average—and half of them are wrong.
3. **Be brave. Ask.** Beckwith says most people won't tell you what you're doing wrong. Instead, most will talk behind your back or simply leave. The solution? Ask for feedback. Survey your youth. Survey their parents. The very act of asking will give you credibility among the people you're serving. You'll also gather great information. So survey on paper, ask questions in person, and listen, listen, listen—particularly for what you're good at. This is going to

4. **Study your points of contact.** If it's all about relationships, as we're fond of saying, then we should take a hard look at the relationships we're offering. Not just at the junctures where we do well but at every step of the way: at the front door, the snack table, and the introduction of newcomers. Look at each point of contact, Beckwith says, and then ask, "What are we doing to make a phenomenal impact at every point?"

5. **Face your greatest competitor.** "Your greatest competition is not your competition," Beckwith says. "Your first competition is indifference." Whenever Youth Ministry Architects visits a church, people tell us about all the things that are competing for their teenagers' time—school, sports, Xbox. That's why kids aren't coming, they say. Wrong. And here's how we know: because every wildly successful youth ministry in America faces the same competition.

Successful youth ministries overcome the real competition—the indifference that so many teenagers have to church, to God, and to youth groups. They develop a ministry that connects, and they figure out how to reach and engage the youth around them. While one church is asking youth to add yet another thing to their calendar, its neighbor down the road is inviting teenagers into a life-changing relationship. Which one would attract you?

Let's up our game in selling the invisible. ■

SELLING THE INVISIBLE

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to Modern
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I'd have if I could
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A CLASSIC."
—HARVEY MACKAY

HARRY BECKWITH