

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



7 Early Warning Signs

**THAT YOUR CHURCH HAS
A "FRONT DOOR" PROBLEM**

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How do you know if you aren't attracting enough people to your church?

If your church has plateaued or is in decline, is the problem that you're not attracting enough visitors or that you aren't keeping those who are already attending? What signs will lead you to discover the problem?

The debate between front door problems and back door problems in church leadership has raged for years. Before we move ahead, let's set some working definitions for what we mean by front door and back door:

The front door: Our ability to attract new visitors to our church.

Every growing church needs to attract a healthy flow of new visitors on a consistent basis.

The back door: Our systems, approaches, and community that enable people to stay at churches long term.

Growing, healthy churches have consistent methods for helping first-time guests become active parts of the community; however, how does one diagnose the problem between the front door and the back door?

Over the years of talking to vast numbers of church leaders, I'm convinced that we all naturally consider growth problems at our churches as back door problems. We got into

ministry because we wanted to care for others, and we are typically community-minded individuals. Therefore, we think that if we just get more people plugged in, our churches will grow.

More often than not, I've found that churches are simply ignoring the front door problem and aren't reaching out enough as a result. We become obsessed with keeping our current attendee base rather than reaching out to those in our communities. Here are seven early warning signs that might indicate that you have a front door problem at your church.

Low First-time Guest Numbers

The key to understanding your front door is to be aware of how many new guests attend on a regular basis. You understand your new guests and can track how many there are by offering a compelling gift in exchange for contact information. Qualified guests are those that give you their contact information.

If in a given year you have fewer new guests than the average attendance of your church on a regular basis, then you simply aren't attracting enough people through the front door.

For example, if your church averages 200 people per week, then on average you should be seeing at least four first-time visitors every weekend. You need to track this information for at least four to six months before you can get a sense of

where you're landing numbers wise. As you keep a close eye on this over time, you will start to see the patterns.

You Have Room on Big Days

Does your church still have empty seats during Christmas Eve? Last Easter were you forced to open up new services? If you have available room on big days, you are not tapping into the full potential of your church.



A church with a wide front door wrestles with adding new services—or maybe even new locations—on these big days as your church should be attracting enough people that it pushes all of the organizational buttons in your church.

Typically, I've seen churches achieve at least two times, if not three times, their normal Sunday morning attendance on these big days. If you aren't striving for those numbers, then you may not be reaching enough people as a church.

Little Pastoral Messiness

The reality is that when people come in through the front door of your church, it causes problems for your pastoral team. When we're attracting people, they come with all their problems. This isn't to say that people outside the church have more problems than those inside the church—more often, it's just that folks outside the church aren't as good at hiding their problems as people that have been with us for a while.

If you can't remember the last time you faced a complex pastoral care scenario, you may not be reaching enough people in your area.

When was the last time you used your pastoral gifts for an issue that you had never seen before?

No One is Complaining

To connect with those you have never reached before, you need to do things you've never done before. People who've been at your church for a while will resist this. However, the things that brought people to your church ten years ago will likely not work today, so you need to try new things. And new things often cause people to be uncomfortable and start complaining.

An early mentor of mine told me if I didn't have ten percent of my church upset with me, I probably wasn't trying anything innovative, and while that number may be inaccurate, the principle stands. When was the last time someone pulled you aside and said the music was too loud, too edgy, or too much like a nightclub, or whatever the issue might be for your church? **If no one's complaining, you're simply not reaching.**

Little Community Interaction

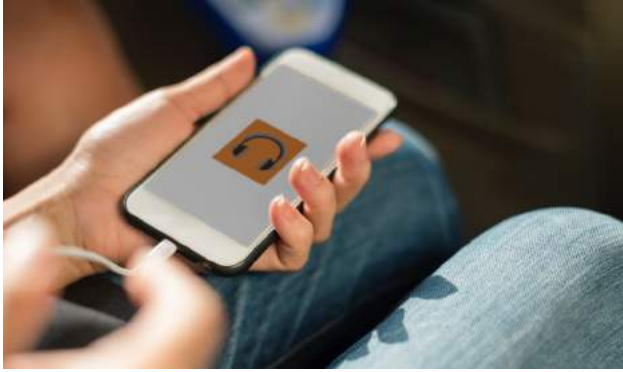
Churches that aren't reaching people on a regular basis are also likely not interacting with the community around them. If your church is growing and people are coming in through the front door, then you should be bumping into community members regularly.

Churches with a wide-open front door that connects with lots of first-time guests have to deal with the community related hassles of a growing church (including impacting traffic patterns, dealing with town officials about what the church actually does, and why so many people are coming to it).

If your church isn't having those kinds of conversations, then it could be a sign that your church, quite honestly, just doesn't have a good enough front door. If you're not having some sort of interaction with your community on a regular basis, even if it's only with your neighbors across the street, then it could be a sign that your front door has a problem.

Online Traffic is Flat

When was the last time you looked at your social media stats or considered the number of downloads for your podcasts as an early sign of a closed front door?



These days plenty of people will check out your podcast and visit your website before arriving on Sunday morning. These statistics offer vital insights on what our community feels excited about. If those statistics have gone flat or worse, decline, then it's definitely an early warning sign that your front door may be beginning to close.

Nothing Scares You

Is everything going smoothly at your church? Have you done something recently that scares you? Have you tried something new that you weren't sure would work or not? If nothing scares you in your leadership at your church, then frankly you don't have a wide enough front door.

In order to reach people, you've got to try things you've never done before, and that means you need to be willing to take risks and attempt things that may not work out in the end. We need to try things that could ultimately succeed, hurt us, or not work, but if we're not risking anything, then we're not claiming new ground either.

Questions to Determine Whether Your Front Door is Wide Enough

Reflect on your church and ask yourself these questions:

- Is our front door wide enough?
- Are we doing everything we can to connect to people within our reach?
- What needs to change to reach folks who aren't here today?

Scripture points towards a loving God who is constantly seeking His people, who is willing to forsake the 99 in order to go after the one, who's willing to go, literally, to the ends of the earth to draw us back to Him. The same should be true for your church.

What are you doing to make your front door wider?

How can you approach more people this year than you did last year?

What are you doing to ensure that you're reaching people far from God and making a place for them in your church?

[Church Growth Flywheel: 5 Practical Systems to Drive Growth at Your Church](#) is all about pushing your church's front door wide open. The feedback from church leaders has been so overwhelming as they've found the book incredibly helpful in showing them how to reach more people in their communities.

I'd love to hear your ideas on what your church has done recently to open the front door wider at your church.

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