



Leadership Lessons from a Dairy Queen

By Adam Hamilton

One evening, my wife, LaVon, and I stopped by a Dairy Queen just before its closing time. I ordered a cherry dipped cone. The cherry sauce was apparently too hot, and it resulted in a less than perfect cone. The owner pitched it in the trash. Turning the sauce down, and stirring it carefully, the owner tried again, but still with the same result. I said, "Don't pitch it. I'll eat it. I don't mind!" But it was too late. He had pitched the second cone, wanting to make sure my cone was perfect. A third time he tried a different technique, but the sauce would not cooperate. Before he could pitch it, I told him I really wanted this cone just the way it was and that it would taste just the same whether it looked perfect or not.

As LaVon and I sat outside eating our ice cream, the owner came walking out and said, "I just wanted to apologize for the cone not being right. Here are a couple of tokens for two free sundaes!" I was in awe. I hadn't complained about my cone; it was delicious. But this man went out of his way to make sure my experience at Dairy Queen was perfect. In that one act, he won me over. I'm coming back!

This story is an example of excellent leadership. The owner of the ice cream parlor instinctively knew that it's often the little things that separate success from failure. He knew building relationships and demonstrating you care about your customers makes all the difference. He knew giving away two sundaes might result in a lifelong customer. He and his wife, who had just purchased the Dairy Queen a few months earlier, were friendly and endearing, and they left me rooting for them as they seek to develop their business. As I left that evening, I lifted up a silent prayer on their behalf, that God might bless them and help them fulfill their dreams.

I believe pastors and church leaders who think like this DQ operator are more likely to succeed at reaching people for Christ and developing vital congregations than those who do not. We, too, must care about the little things, about doing our best to make sure people have a quality experience and about pursuing all we do with excellence. We must demonstrate to others we care about them, and we must seek to build relationships with first time visitors in the hope they become "regulars"; that is, they commit their lives to Christ.

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