
These Few Keys Create Great First Impressions

The first ten seconds matter, and in the first ten minutes decisions are being made.

For example, when I walk into a hotel, a concert venue, or a retail store, within seconds the first things I encounter have made an impression on me. Either positive or negative.

I've walked into restaurants that were so bad, I literally froze in the doorway and said to my wife Patti, "We are not eating here." We were really hungry, but we left!

In contrast, I recently walked into an incredible hotel. It was stunning, and within minutes I told Patti, I'm not sure we're ever going home!

Your church creates the same effect. One way or the other. Your guests make lightning-fast decisions about your church. No church is perfect, we are all working on stuff, but we can't afford to mess up on the first impression.

If your first impression is positive, you gain instant grace for any other element of your church overall that needs improvement.

If your first impression is negative, it is far more difficult for a guest to overlook any less than inspiring element of your church.

8 Key First Impressions:

1) Clearly marked street signs directing where to turn into your church.

Not every church comes with several police officers and a couple of hundred orange cones to make plain where to turn in from the main road. Even with sophisticated GPS apps like WAZE, that final turn is often the most confusing. Make sure it's marked and easy to see.

2) Friendly parking lot attendants.

I've pulled into churches on vacation or places I've consulted, and it seemed like the parking lot attendants were angry with me. Hey, I've never been there and don't know where to go! At other churches, they seemed bored. But the ones I love have me smiling before I get out of my car! They are waving, saying good morning, directing, some even wearing giant Mickey Mouse hands! I instantly think... "I like this place!"

3) Well maintained landscaping and buildings.

Everyone notices when they drive onto a property and see a professionally maintained look. It signals that you care and subtly hints toward a good experience inside. You don't have to spend a fortune; you may even have professionals in your church that will offer you a discount to take good care of your property.

4) Warm and engaging greeters and ushers.

Your greeters and ushers are of utmost importance. They are among the first smiles and personal conversations once a guest is out of their car. World-class hospitality is essential. A bored, untrained or distracted greeter might ensure your guest does not return. An usher who is talking to his or her buddies and doesn't make eye contact can sour a guest's experience. Nothing is too small to pay attention to.

5) Clear and informative interior signage.

The larger the church building, the more critical the signage is, but even in small churches clear signage is vital! For example, clear signage to the bathrooms can make a guest feel at ease rather than frustrated! Clear signage to the nursery is also a top priority.

6) A clean and well-staffed nursery.

For any family that has infants or toddlers, this is mission-critical. If your nursery doesn't seem safe or clean, they will not likely trust their child to your care. And more importantly, they may not return.

7) Worship service starts on time.

Americans in general are time conscious. Perhaps we shouldn't be clock watchers, but it's part of our culture. When you start late, or your service runs over, that feels disrespectful. It communicates that the church's agenda is more important than your guest's plans for the rest of the day.

8) Elements of surprise and delight!

The first-time guests were seated, and the husband asked for a blanket for his wife. An unusual request, but the usher learned that his wife was undergoing chemotherapy and felt cold nearly all the time. The church didn't have blankets, but the usher said, "I'll get one right away." He ran to his car and got a blanket from his trunk and gave it to the guest with cancer. This couple still attends that church!

Surprise and delight might not be that dramatic, but notice how simple it was. It can be humor during the service, or maybe a small gift like chocolate for first-time guests. Don't underestimate the positive impact of surprise and delight!

> [Read more from Dan.](#)

Learn more about your developing your first impressions - [start a conversation with Guest Experience Navigator Bob Adams.](#)