

Always Say Thank You

Paul, my dear church friend whom I have known since third grade, sent me an email. And he was mad. At the end of July, Paul mailed a sizable check to our childhood church in Southern California. The purpose of the check was to establish a camp scholarship marking the 40th anniversary of the passing of our friends Van and John, who were killed in a car accident when we were teenagers and in youth group together. Paul wrote a heartfelt letter to the pastor, along with the check, and sent it off.

Guess when he received a thank you letter or an acknowledgement of his gift from the church? You're right. He is still waiting. Paul does know that at least one of the families was contacted because Van's mother wrote him a lovely letter of thanks. But the church has yet to make any contact with Paul. What are the chances he'll be inclined to write another check?



Then, I mailed two checks in memory of two individuals whom I hold dear in my heart. The checks came from my personal account (as opposed to my joint account with my spouse). With each check I enclosed a hand-written letter about the person whom I was memorializing. The responses from each organization are telling. Letter #1 went to a church. And, you guessed it; I have not heard one word from them. No letter, no receipt, no nothing. I wonder if anyone read my letter about my friend. I wonder if anyone cared. Letter #2 went to another organization. I did receive a thank you letter, but the envelope was addressed to my husband and me. I could have overlooked that until I opened the letter to find the salutation: "Dear Tom." I didn't even exist. Worse still, there was nary a mention of the letter I sent. It was a standard thank you letter.

Fortunately, I know the development director and called her to let her know about my experience.

Surprisingly, she had never seen my handwritten letter and neither had the executive director. The person

who was entering the information either threw the letter away or put it in an unknown file. The same person also saw our unusual last name in the database and never thought to amend the information to make it personal to me.

Here are my suggestions for churches:

1. If you get a gift, write a thank you letter. Period.
2. Everyone who handles money should understand what they do from a stewardship perspective. They need to be aware of the importance of stewarding relationships, not just processing money.
3. If someone takes the time to write a personal letter with a financial gift, make sure it is passed on. In the thank you letter, someone should write a personal note indicating that they have read the letter and how its sentiments are appreciated.
4. Take note of who is sending the donation and how they might want to be addressed. No doubt mistakes will be made, but sometimes, with a little attention to detail, they can be avoided. And make sure you spell the donor's name correctly.

People want to feel like they matter. They want validation that what they have sent to you has made a difference. That's definitely something you can easily and happily make happen.

In her new book *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Anne Lamott says: "Saying and meaning 'Thanks' leads to a crazy thought: What more can *I* give?" Wouldn't it be exciting if everyone who received a thank you letter immediately felt that tug to give more? So, to whom should you write today?

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