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I Don't Want to Be a Control Freak!

Written by Bill Perkins

Lately the Lord has been prodding me to stop trying to control other people. This direction from God is in response to how I often try to fix family members, friends, strangers, businesses and, well, you name it.

I don't mean I shouldn't disciple, mentor, teach, challenge and equip people to grow spiritually and live better lives. I'm referring to thinking I *must* share my wisdom with others by telling them how to fix themselves or solve a problem. I sometimes act as though I have the authority to do this because I'm a life-efficiency-expert. As of today, I have no such certification.

An Example From Down the Hill

I'll give you an example. A few hours ago I called the local Mexican fast food joint that's down the hill and placed an order. When I got there to pick up my dinner, as always, a single girl worked the cash register, taking orders (which means using the only phone in the store to accept call-in orders, enter credit card numbers for charges and make change for those paying with cash) and handing cooked food to waiting customers.

When I entered the restaurant four people stood in a lazy line in front of me and the only girl working the counter, as always, had a phone attached to her ear as she scribbled down an order on an order pad. After hanging up she punched the key pad on the phone with the numbers on the credit card she was holding in her right hand. The card belonged to the next woman in line.

Meanwhile, an order that looked like mine appeared on the counter behind her. I couldn't actually see the food since it was in a Styrofoam container. However, the size of the container looked exactly like the container size of my last order.

Upon seeing it I waved my hand and pointed at the cooling food sitting on the counter, hoping to direct the girl to pick it up and hand it to me before it got cold. She didn't see me.

Meanwhile, there were now three people in front of me. The previously mentioned woman with the credit card finally got her order placed and moved into the area for people whose food was either being cooked or cooling on the counter.

I got lucky because the next person in line, a teenage boy, had an order waiting which he picked up and then left.

A Brilliant Idea

It was at this point I got a brilliant idea. The idea flowed from my expertise in the field of customer service. I must add that I possess this expertise because I've been a customer most of my life. While that doesn't set me apart from anyone else, and might even cause you to question my claim, my expertise is proven by the excellent service

provided by some of the companies I've spoken for on the subject at hand.

Those companies include, Alaska Airlines, McDonalds, Domino's Pizza and of course, the Oregon State Police. Am I saying their excellent service resulted from my half-day seminar? Yes, I said that. But I'm joking. The point is, I view myself as an expert whether or not I am.

I mention this so you'll see why I quickly figured out a solution to the service problem at the Mexican food joint down the hill. And you can see why I felt qualified to tell the owner how he could improve his business AND keep my food from getting cold while I waited in line because only one girl, as always, was working the counter.

Eventually there were two people in front of me. It was then I noticed something that filled me with unspeakable joy--literally, as I would not utter such emotion in a restaurant. I observed that the man and woman weren't standing one in front of the other. They were standing side-by-side. They were touching each other. They were a couple.

Halleluiah! I was next in line.

I returned my eyes to the clock on the wall which I had been watching with growing impatience. This I did even though I knew watching it wouldn't speed up the delivery of my cooling enchilada.

My Simple Solution

My solution to the service issue at the restaurant was simple: Everyone on the food service team must remember they want happy customers. For this to happen the food must be served right after it's cooked. Cold burritos and enchiladas taste nasty. If a sale has not yet started then the server should deliver the food and then take the next order or make change.

Finally, I stepped to the counter, smiled, directed the teenage girl to my food by pointing at it, paid my bill, left a tip in the one quart plastic tip jar and left. As I drove home I wondered how to tell the owner my solution.

I wrote about this experience so you'll understand how I'm inclined to try to fix other people's problems. This is not an isolated case.

The Father Who Didn't Chase

This line of thinking led me to the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-31. This amazing story of a father's enduring love for a broken son carries another not so obvious message. Namely, the father didn't chase down his son and try to control how he spent the money or lived his life. He made no effort to fix him. He waited for God to work in his Son's life and then he accepted him back.

I'd like to be more like the father, and thus more like the God the father illustrates. For this to happen I need to discern when to get out of the way and let God work in the people and problems around me. That's why I'm praying for the wisdom to ask him when I should back off or offer help. The good news is, as I live in alignment with Christ (check out this link), God is helping me *not* try to help others when they either don't need or want my help.

A Confession

As I wrap up this blog, my mind keeps flashing back to the clock on the wall in the restaurant where only one girl at a time works the counter. This thought causes me to feel I must confess something or forever live with it on my conscience. I do this in a spirit of openness, in a world of political correctness where anything goes unless you don't like it. The truth is, I'm ashamed to tell you how long I waited for my food.

I'm more ashamed to confess that I wanted to wait *at least* five minutes. Longer would have been better. But five minutes was the minimum I would be happy with in light of the inconvenience I endured. I sensed, but never said, *five minutes would justify my impatience.*

"So how long did you have to wait?" Cindy, my wife, asked.

"Three minutes," I said.

"Oh, that's not long," she said. "I've waited much longer than that."

"That makes me feel better," I said. "But I spent the time impatiently looking at a clock. That stretched out my three minutes."

Money, Not Advice

I've not called the owner. And I won't.

I'm glad I left a tip--and it was money not advice.