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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Israel Galindo



## Perspectives on educational planning

I'm currently working on a project on educational planning in the congregational setting. The project is in response to frequent questions I receive from church staff and lay leaders about planning the Christian education programs in their churches. Two common questions are:

- How do I determine what is successful versus effective?
- How do I interpret people's participation — or lack of it — in educational events?

Following are some basic rules I always share with folks looking to get a handle on planning their church education program:

*The persons who show up at an event are the ones who need to be there.* I'm continually puzzled at the over-focus on numbers in congregations. If 100 people don't show up at an event, then the event is considered a "failure" — even when it's a congregation of only 50 people! My own rule about events and workshops is, "I'll work with whoever shows up" — even if it's two people. When you plan and offer an event, the people who will attend are the people who have a felt need for what you are offering. The "other" people you imagine "should" be there are of no consequence to the effectiveness of the event or to whether or not the "few" who attend get what they need. Focus on the ones who have invested their time in coming, not on the ones who did not attend.

*Not everything is for everybody at the same time.* People need different things at different times. Therefore, you will never be able to enlist all or most of the congregation for a given event. As a rule, an effective program will be about one thing, so the people who will attend are those who need that one thing. The fact is,

many people will not need or be interested in that one thing at the time you offer it. Be clear about the population you are aiming for in the program, and make sure you market and announce the offering in the ways and venues those people need to hear it. For example, don't market an event on parenting to people who don't have children in the home. Don't market a program on divorce to married couples. The people who are interested in the topic of divorce are those who have experienced a divorce.

*If you plan something good and no one shows up, do it again next year.* Too many church educators give up on good programs and educational offerings because no one — or "too few" — showed up the first time it was offered. Sure, it takes a lot of energy to create and offer a new program and event. And sure, it's disappointing when people don't "get it" the first time. But the fact is, people often cannot appreciate what they don't know, and likely won't make a connection between a "new" program offering and what they need. If you offer a program the first time and people don't attend, but you're convinced it's needed and worthwhile, then offer it again the following year. Sometimes people need to recognize something as familiar before they embrace it. Typically, people need to "see" and "hear" a new message eight times before actually noticing it. It generally takes a program three years to "take."

*If you offer an event that meets people's needs, then offer it again in three years.* Surprisingly, some church leaders will offer an event that is well received and attended, meets people's needs and gets great feedback, but they think of it as a "one-shot deal." Consider, some people who needed that event were not able to

participate for some reason and would benefit from it being offered again. Another group of people did not need what you offered this year, but in three years they may be at a different place and will need it then. This is particularly true of events for families, who go through predictable family life cycles. While families with only preschoolers at home will not have attended this year's program related to children in the family, in three years, those preschoolers will be "children" and those same parents will need and want that event. When you discover a good program that meets the needs of people, put it on the calendar for three years down the line and offer it again. You'll reach a whole group(s) of people who didn't need it now, but will need it then.

*When programming, focus on people's needs and not their predilections.* A basic principle of learning is that an unrealized or perceived need is a motivator. "Interest" is not a sufficient motivator for learning or change. Remember, everyone has a limited amount of resources and energy. Therefore, focus on offering educational programs that will give you the most return on your investment of time and effort — those that meet people's needs. Programs that challenge people toward growth and maturity are far preferable over satisfying their interests and "wants" and entertaining and affirming them. After all, the goal of education is growth.

*When planning an event, ask, "What theology informs this?"* Christian education must always be undergirded by an informing theology. A Christian theology that frames and informs the educational events at the church is what makes Christian education "Christian." If there's no difference in what the church offers people, then what's the difference? **BT**

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with Baptists Today and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Israel Galindo, professor of Christian education at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, executive director of Educational Consultants ([www.galindoconsultants.com](http://www.galindoconsultants.com)) and faculty member of the Leadership in Ministry Workshops ([www.leader-shipinministry.com](http://www.leader-shipinministry.com)). **Resource Page Archives now available at [http://www.thefellowship.info/resources/for\\_your\\_church/baptists\\_today.icm](http://www.thefellowship.info/resources/for_your_church/baptists_today.icm)**