

# Training Hosts

I finally got him to come back to church, but somebody ran him off again!”  
Sound familiar?

Does your hospitality team know that lasting impressions are made at the Sabbath School door in the first 30 seconds, and that within five minutes guests decide whether or not they will return to your church?

As you seek answers to this challenge, consider the following tips.

**What guests look for:**

1. High levels of socialization: They are looking for the right (to them) kind of human contact. They expect to be treated courteously, even warmly.
2. A sense of belonging: They expect verbal and body language to say “You’re welcome and accepted.”

**What greeters must deliver:**

1. Low levels of anxiety.
2. The right messages:
  - I care. Learn the names and faces of regularly attending members.
  - I care. Learn to say the right things. Greeter committees need to meet regularly to analyze approaches, to role-play, and to discuss worst-case scenarios.
  - I realize I’m in a sacred place. Don’t try to be too lighthearted by making jokes or small talk.
  - I respect your privacy. Don’t talk too much about the personal lives of the guests. Don’t pry.
  - I am assertive. No limp-fish handshaking—or bone crunching.

**A case study:**

A church member has been witnessing to a friend for 10 years. Finally the friend accepts her invitation to attend Sabbath School. The two friends decide to ride to church together. A greeter meets them in the parking lot. Flashing a warm smile, the greeter says to the guest, “You must be visiting our church today.”

“Yes, I am,” the guest responds. The pleasure of being recognized so cordially shows on her face.

Then the greeter says, “I thought you were a visi-

tor, because you don’t look like us.”

Ouch!

You were standing close enough to see and hear the scenario just described. How will you try to save the situation?

**Plan:**

Organize a task force whose job is to observe the total greeting process. Task force members must be unobtrusive. They can go into the restroom or other private place to enter notes in their journal.

Their focus:

1. The words, the tone, and the body language of greeters. Are greeters as perky, friendly, etc., to guests as they are leaving as when the guests entered?
2. The words, the tone, and the responses of guests. How long do they keep ribbons or stickers on their lapels? Do they sign the guest book—completely? Do they stay for the entire program? Do they leave with or without the church/Sabbath School bulletin? (The deacons can help you assess this.) What are the facial expressions and other body language as guests are leaving?
3. Members: Do they react differently to guests with ribbons and guests without these identifiers?

Did guests get what they expected? Review “What guests look for” above. If the guests received what they expected, will you rejoice with the greeters? If guests did not, how will you address the needs?



**James W. Zackrison**