

Customer-driven Ministry

John 7:15-52

During my 34 years with a major church music publisher, we were primarily customer-driven. Like most of the business world, we tried to learn what the customer wanted and then provide it with the best product we could. Obviously there is some economic logic behind this approach.

It is often defended on a ministry basis as well. We all want to minister to real customer needs. Therefore we must learn what the customer wants, then provide it as best we can, right? Customer-driven publishing, or customer-driven ministry, seems to make a great deal of sense.

But over the years, I've experienced serious flaws in that approach.

1. Often customers don't know what they want until they see it. Needs and desires tend to be limited by past experience. True innovation demands more than an analysis of past buying habits. True innovation requires vision.
2. As Christian publishers, we serve a God who is NOT customer-driven. Yes, He deeply loves people and meets their practical needs where they are. He is intent on effectively communicating with them and helping them. But He doesn't follow their lead: they must follow His. He tells them what they need to know, not what they want to know. He doesn't cater: He ministers. He challenges. He leads His people beyond their experience, beyond their desires toward something better. He is focused on what can be. When His people are in need, He creates something new:

*"Behold, I will do something new,
Now it will spring forth;
Will you not be aware of it?
I will even make a roadway in the wilderness,
Rivers in the desert."* (Isaiah 43:19, NASB)

This is the God we serve. God offers people something better than they know to ask for. And we are ambassadors for Him.

Customer-driven ministry easily turns to catering to the customer. Selfishness subtly moves in and takes over. We end up simply appealing to the customer in our own best interest rather than serving his or her long-term best interest.

Read John's gospel, and note Jesus' focus. He focused on the Father. His one desire was to speak His Father's words and do His Father's works. That must be the focus of each of His disciples as well. He calls us to focus on speaking the Father's words and doing the Father's works. Focus on the Father.

What's more, imagine what the Bible would be if it were customer-driven. Tied to the fads of the times, it would not be the source of timeless truth that every generation and every culture desperately need it to be.

As a creator, as a communicator, as a servant of God, let God's burning love for His people inspire and lead you. Don't just follow what is. Imagine what could be. Imagine something better. Imagine springs in the desert and roadways through the wilderness. Follow the God whose zealous love is forever creating something new, leading His people beyond their self-imposed limitations.

Listen & Sing: "God's Mysterious Ways"
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