

Activation / Retention

Aloha 2nd Ward, August 2001

Mike Baird

Introduction

- I would like to start today by reading this scripture spoken by Alma the Elder:
Mosiah 18:8-9:
8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;
9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death...
- My topic has these two words associated with it:
 - Retention – defined as keeping active those who are baptized
 - Activation – defined as changing inactive to active
- To some of us those two words don't have same warm fuzzies with them like "Love your neighbor, as thyself" as Sister Vial talked about or the "bear one another's burden's" or "stand as a witness, at all times"
 - Kind of interesting isn't it
 - Yet, isn't that what retention and activation are ultimately about?
- Two keys concepts related to my topic today
 - Small and simple things
 - Love

Small & Simple things

Alma 37: 6

Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, **that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass**; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

Love is *the* key

- Asked Sister Vial to speak
 - Love our neighbors
 - Can't you not only see but feel the love she has for the Korean people
 - After hearing her I knew she was the one to speak here
 - Glad she changed her schedule to be here
 - Love of our fellow man who we could also call our brothers and sisters is the most important ingredient as it relates to my topic.
- President Hinkley describes our responsibility as it relates to our neighbors as "Find the lambs, Feed the sheep"
- This calls to mind to me the words of Christ to Peter when he showed himself on the shore after his resurrection.

John 21:15-17

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
- Notice that the key word is that word love - Peter's love of the Savior
- This also calls to mind the parable of the lost sheep

Luke 15:4-6

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
- Again I submit to you it is love of our fellow man, our brothers and sisters that is our motivating factor to "Find the lambs and feed the sheep"

Putting ourselves in the place of a new member or less active member

First – put ourselves in their shoes before we discuss what to do

- Many of us grew up in the church and many of us have not been what would be termed as less active
- To address activation and retention I would like to first think about putting ourselves in their situation shoes
- Two Analogies help me:
 - Moving to Japan

Imagine picking up and moving today to Japan

- How would you feel?
 - You don't know the language
 - Stake Conference, PPI, FHE
 - You don't know the culture
 - You would feel left out
 - Relate my first trip to Japan
 - Relief to see Hal Conklin
 - What would you think?
- Joining a Health Club
 - Wife and I joined and signed up for a program with a trainer
 - We struggled with it but decided to make the commitment
 - Later we have discussed how this is like joining the church or being reactivated
 - We were out of shape, eating whatever and knew it would be hard, but more important to make it work it was a commitment we had to make
 - Lifestyle change in what I eat, exercise etc.
 - Same - lifestyle changes to be baptized or active
 - When you visit the club at first you tend to see nothing but "hard bodies"
 - Joe weightlifter
 - Baggy sweats
 - Workout card
 - Afraid to use a machine because you'll do it "wrong" or use wrong etiquette
 - Oftimes inactive members feel like my wife and I did in joining the club
 - "I am not as spiritual or as good as all theses"
 - These two analogies help me to begin to "walk in the shoes" of new or inactive members.

Retention

President Hinkley - every talk lately it seems like he calls on us to do more with new members and the less active members. For example In Maracaibo, Venezuela, he said:

“I plead with you ... that you will put your arms around those who come into the Church and be friends to them and make them feel welcome and comfort them and we will see wonderful results. The Lord will bless you to aid in this great process of retention of converts.

“You know what it has been like. Most of you here are converts to the Church. You know something of the loneliness that you felt when you came into this Church. Now will you please accept that challenge to warm up and be friendly to every man, woman and child who is baptized into the Church? It all depends on you” (“President Hinckley Urges More Missionary Effort in Venezuela,” Church News, 14 Aug. 1999, 7).

President Hinkley – New members need three things

1. A friend to whom the convert can constantly turn
 - Eric Johnstone
 - Daltons, priests, basketball, stake play etc.
2. An assignment
 - Something to engage the new convert
 - Wolfgang Hoffman
 - Gary inspired
 - Wofgang qualified – yes (more than most who join) and no
 - Has it been a time of growth - yes
3. “Nourished by the good word”
 - Tony Roberts in our ward
 - Questions in Sunday School

Activation

Many of us, I feel would find it easy to reach out to a new member and do the things I mentioned above. I know I do

But activation.....Going after that lost sheep, many of us struggle with this.

I mentioned this topic to several and the reaction is

“ugh... that’s hard”

Why?

- Easy to say - Yeah Mike I love my neighbor
- I can go with this while your talking and get pumped up but.....

Why don’t we do more after we leave that inspiring meeting?

Self examination

- Why am I not pro-active
- Why is it in the church we too often have this scene played out:
 - Do phone call with HT Supervisor

Activation thoughts

Let me give some thoughts on activation

My inspiration for these thoughts can be found in Alma 37: 6

Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, **that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass**; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

I would like us to grasp this “small and simple things”

Instead of

- “thanks Mike I feel tons of guilt now” and go home and do nothing

Rather

- “Yes that is something I can grab a hold of and **do** “

So here are some ideas and thoughts:

Service

- takes us out of ourselves
 - We feel good etc.
 - More important, those who are served, are touched
 - In probably no other way can we show that all important love
- The Pickerings

John Pickering’s wife, Melody, had joined the Church in 1979, three years after they were married, but because he didn’t share her interest in the Church, she soon became less active.

Brother Pickering, a deeply but privately religious man, found that many of his own beliefs

mirrored the teachings of the Church. However, he did not feel ready to make the kind of commitment that baptism would entail.

In 1999, missionaries stopped by the Pickerings' house "out of the blue," says Sister Pickering. The couple's two teenage daughters, Danielle and Ashley, agreed to listen to the discussions with their mother, but Brother Pickering declined. For several nights he would nod and say hello when the missionaries visited and would then go outside to prepare the house to be painted.

When the missionaries asked Brother Pickering if they could help him paint, he consented. To his surprise, on the appointed day, not only did the two young missionaries appear but also half a dozen other men from the Ottawa Ward. In only three hours the painting was finished.

"It was overwhelming to see so many people show up," recalls Brother Pickering. "I had no reason to think it wouldn't be just the two missionaries."

Sister Pickering, too, was surprised by the friendliness of ward members. The family had long felt a lack of connection with their neighbors and lived far from extended family, so the warmth and inclusion they felt was a new and welcome experience.

It wasn't long before Danielle and Ashley were baptized and Sister Pickering became active again. A short time later, Brother Pickering also entered the waters of baptism. All three say it was the Spirit of the Lord and the doctrines of the gospel that converted them, but the fellowshipping of ward members reinforced their sense of belonging in their new religion.

Brother Pickering has since joined with ward members in extending service to others. Among other activities, he has helped cut down dead trees, cleaned out a yard, and helped several families move.

"Service builds fellowship," he says. "When you're helping someone move, you're not just moving boxes; you're also talking and laughing with each other. You develop a bond that you wouldn't develop just by going to church on Sunday."

- We have had this experience in our ward in the past year. We had an inactive Sister who's husband joined the church and she became active. They are doing well. It is because certain members of our ward reached out to them. I remember the Barnes family in our ward in particular doing things with them during the week. Sitting with them at church and so forth.
- Doing service also makes those bonds of friendship.
 - My friendship with a new member of our ward, a husband who joined, is based on two activities
 - Roofing
 - Baptisms for the dead

Genuine friendship & just thinking of you

- We can show our love by telling someone, I was/am thinking about you
 - Brother Perrin
 - Struggling, staying away
 - Felt the spirit move me
 - Dragged him into the HP quorum
 - Took him out to lunch
 - “Thanks Mike” “Hey, I’m your friend, and that’s what friends do” “Mike, you don’t know how much your friendship means to me right now”
 - Rebecca
 - 14 year old girl that just became active
 - Young Women did a heart attack to let her know they were thinking of her
 -

Things aren’t always as they appear

- Ever have experience where you feared something so much and then it wasn’t at all what it seemed.
- Isn’t it most often they are nicer than you first judged? Two experiences that reminded me lately
 - Weight lifter
 - Big Guy in the temple
 - That inactive father, non member husband are not ogre’s
 - All of us probably have an inactive relative
 - Grandpa Baird

Effective Activities

- I have already mentioned service – what an effective activity
- Often it is easier for someone to participate in an activity than to come to sacrament meeting.
- Activities are there – we just need to make them effective
 - Make it a purpose
 - Cooper Mt Ward Basketball team
 - I’ve played on a lot of teams and I’ve coached quite a bit
 - Rec teams, Mens’ Bball and softball
 - Most fun was YM Bball in Cooper Mt Ward
 - Philosophy of quorum brotherhood
 - Make sure everybody scored
 - Told Andy not to shoot
 - Rooting for Members
 - Always several non-members
 - Eric Johnstone
 - We lose at times when we could win
 - Jeremy last year – forfeit the game so he could play

- We don't need to make it grandiose
 - Make it the over riding purpose is all
 - Then little things will make it happen
- When we do activities with these types of purposes in mind testimonies grow, Love abounds and bonds that make for a lifetime of activity are strengthened.

Callings that fit talents and Needs

- Callings can be powerful tools for motivation and strength.
- Is the less active or the convert always "qualified"
 - No, but the Lord will make us equal to the task and we grow
- I know of a Sister who was really struggling. She had family problems and personal problems. She was called as a primary teacher. What motivated her to come to church was her "children". Teaching them, getting hugs from them, their shining faces is what drew her. She transgressed and as part of her repentance she was not allowed to do her calling. The motivation to teach again those children was very strong in her returning to the full blessings of the gospel

Conclusion – Love + “small and simple things”

So my topic was Retention/Activation and what did I say about it?

- You can feel the urgency that President Hinkley feels when he speaks about it – It is important.
- Love of our brothers and sisters is what motivates us.
 - We call each other brother and sister
 - Its brother Norris, sister Orton, brother Read and so forth
 - Alma: “Bear one another’s burdens”
 - The words in final verse of one of my favorite Hymns “ Because I have been given much” are also appropriate
“Because I have been blessed by thy great love, dear Lord,
I’ll share thy love again, according to they word.
I shall give love to those in need; I’ll show that love by word and deed:
Thus shall my thanks be thanks indeed”

Now that I’m motivated - what do I do?

- “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass”
 - Service
 - Reaching out in genuine friendship
 - Thinking of you
 - Planning activities that encourage fellowship
 - Turning our activities into activities with a fellowship purpose
 - Extending targeted callings
- You know, there are some incredibly impressive things that are done in this world today.
- To me, however, there is nothing more impressive or rewarding than opening someone’s heart.
 - Occurs because of our love of our fellow man
 - Occurs most often by small and simple means

Bear testimony