Following Up with Guests

In the last video, we talked about a follow up framework that you can use really on any follow up system that you need in your church and we introduced you to these five questions, right? What does success look like both for them, the person in the process as well as for you, and then what do you want people to know, what do you want people to feel, what do you want them to do, and what do you want them to believe. And those five foundational questions are really important to get down on paper and brainstorm and to get really clear about so that when we go to actually build the follow up process, that we’re leading people to do those things. And all of those things are really based on them. It’s really a people first process and that’s what I love about this.

People from time to time will ask me, “Michael, you should have been on process. Processes don’t matter as much as people.” And I agree. People matter more than processes because people run the processes, right? If you don’t have any people, then a bunch of processes on sheets of paper aren’t gonna do anything, but processes make the work of people so much better and so much more effective. And so as we design a follow up process with intentionality, that’s people-focused and that leads people to accomplish specific steps and specific goals we can really begin to have success. So, in this video, we’re gonna actually take that framework that we talked about in the last video, and we’re gonna apply it to guests. Because here’s the thing, guests are going to visit your church this year. They are. You’re gonna have some first-time guests. You’re gonna have some first-time guests by accident. Somebody is gonna come to your church thinking it’s a different church, you’re gonna have some guests who are family of other people who got dragged to church because their momma said they had to come. You’re gonna have somebody visit your church in the next few weeks or months or in this next year. What happens next? And so the cool thing is, is you don’t have to leave this up to the heroic actions of just somebody. It doesn’t have to be like, “I hope when a guest comes that they meet this person and not this person because if they meet this person, they’re going to have a great experience but if they only meet that person who knows what’s gonna happen?” You don’t have to leave it up to accident, you can design a process with intentionality that will help that first-time guest take the relevant and correct next steps that will lead them into a deeper relationship with your church.

We wanna design that process with intentionality and in advance. So, we wanna move you from that phase one follow up where it’s just the heroic actions of a volunteer staff member, it’s like if they remember to do it, it happens, if not, oh well knows, to a process that’s documented and written down and it’s just happening automatically. And that’s what we wanna do with guests. Every church needs a system for following up with first-time guests. And that system, it needs to be simple, it needs to be simple. Simple systems work better than complicated systems in church. You don’t need to have a 47-step process that involves 16 different people in all the different ministries and need to have a summit and get the elders too. It doesn’t need to be complicated, it needs to be simple. Now, here’s the rub. Simple is hard. It’s easy to add stuff on. “Oh, yeah. We should have him do this, oh, we need to tell him about that, oh, we need to invite him to this.” It’s actually harder to be simple. But I want to
encourage you to fight for simplicity in your follow up process.

I'm gonna give you some ideas. You don't have to add all of the ideas into your process. That will be like adding all the ingredients in your pantry into the meal. Doesn't work. But a handful of ingredients put together in the right way in the right proportions, that produces some excellent food. But all the ingredients just thrown in, that is not gonna be good. Nobody is gonna want that. So, your system needs to be simple. It also needs to be repeatable. This is something that you want to do every time. And you're gonna see in the process that we'll talk about in just a minute, a lot of this can be automatic or automated. You can set some things up so that when somebody visits your church, that a lot of your system just happens. It just happens. You push the button and it just happens or in some cases you don't even have to push the button. It just happens. Some things are gonna require a personal touch. You can't automate everything but you can automate some.

Your overall system needs to be repeatable. It also needs to be effective. The goal and this is why in that framework we talked about what does success look like. Your follow up process, it needs to work and you need to define what work means. If you're following up on first-time guests, how many of them become second-time guests? How many of them become members? How many of them come back within 90 days? That's a number you can look at and say, "All right. Here's what's happening. Now we're gonna have our process and we're gonna measure it so that it can be effective."

Now, that moves us to phase three. A follow up where we actually begin to tweak things and measure things and it's growing in effectiveness. But at very minimum, we wanna say that "Hey, we just don't wanna design a process full of activity, we want to design a process that leads to effectiveness." So, there's some of you, you're doing things in your church and you're doing things but it's just activity. And maybe they're not working anymore. And so we wanna step back and we wanna evaluate those things and go, "Is it working? Not just are we doing it, but is it working? And if it's not working, what part of it is not working? And what can we do and what can we change?" So, it needs to be effective.

Then it needs to be documented. We want to write this down. And so whether you start with a sheet of paper, whether you have a pretty flowchart, it's on a website, on a tool somewhere, whether you have a dry erase board, whether you print it out on a piece of paper, your system needs to be documented so that you can say, "Hey, when somebody comes to our church, this is what happens. This is what we do." When you document it, you can share it, when you document it, you can improve it, when you document it, you can get together and talk about it, when you document it, you can share it with your Church Fuel coach, hop on a one-on-one Skype call, walk through it and talk about any gaps or things that are missing. And so documenting things is really, really good.

One of the rookie mistakes I see churches make with their follow up process, this is just a little side note. But one of the biggest mistakes I see churches make with their guests, in particular, is when a guest comes and maybe they fill out a card or they check in a kit or whatever, you get their email address and you drop them into your email newsletter and a first or second or within the first week, they get the MailChimp newsletter that goes to everybody in your church and it talks to everybody the same way. Well, a new person doesn't know what's going on. A new person does not need to be invited to the church workday or the business meeting.
You actually want to protect your new people from those things. Not because they’re bad, they’re just not relevant. You wanna carve out, you wanna treat your new person, you wanna put a bubble around them. And be very intentional with that communication, not just drop them into your newsletter.

Now, after a period of time, can you drop them in your newsletter? Of course. But a new guest, you don’t wanna just send them the newsletter that everybody in the church is getting like the members who’ve been there for 30 years, all that information is not relevant. So, don’t make that mistake. Instead, what you wanna do is you wanna design a simple follow up process, designed to help them know, feel, do, and believe that leads to success. That’s what we talked about in the last video. You wanna design a follow up process that helps them take the next step. What is this? This is a key decision that you’ve got to make. When you’re designing your follow up process and you’re working through those questions, what is the single most important goal of that process? What do you want that person to do? What do you want a new guest to do? And then you design your process all around that. That means so much of your process is about leaving things out, not putting things in.

You have to decide what is the single most important step that a new guest can take? What do you want? You work through that framework. What do you want them to know? What you want them to do? That’s the step. What’s the action that you want them to take? What does success look like? What is the next step that you want them to take? And then your entire follow up process needs to be designed around helping them take that next step. I visit a lot of churches and I’ve been put through a lot of follow up processes. And a huge mistake that I see is the follow process tries to tell me everything that’s going on in the life of the church. Just everything. And that’s focused on the church, not on me. I’m not interested in everything that’s going on in the life of the church. Maybe I will be one day when it’s my church, but not now. I don’t know enough to know that I don’t need to know all those things yet. So, it’s confusing.

Donald Miller, I mentioned him in the first video, he says, “If you confuse, you lose.” And so our follow up process can’t just dump a bunch of information in that know box and say, “Here’s all the things you need to know about our church.” Now, that’s two mistakes. It’s our church focused and number two is too much stuff. People can’t process that much stuff. They don’t need to know all those things. So, as you design a process, as you start to work through a process and we’re gonna give you the worksheet and help you walk through it, you’re gonna lay it all out like on a calendar type grid of a framework so you know when to do what. I wanna just talk about some things that could be on your process, that could be on your process.

Now, again, the key decision here is what do you want somebody to do? The point when a first-time guest visits your church, what’s the next step? Is it come to the new member class? Is it come back a second time? Is it meet the pastor? What is it? You have to decide and it can’t be all the things. Needs to be one of the things. You’ll have some things happen that aren’t number one but those things will be residual. The core, you got to focus in on that core. What is the single most important goal? What’s the key thing you want them to do? And you design the process around that. So, when you’re building your process, here are some things that could be on your process.

Number one. Email. Email. Listen. This is really important. I was actually talking about it with my daughter last night because she got an email about potentially babysitting in the
neighborhood, she's a new babysitter. And she got an email about babysitting and I actually had to have this conversation with her. I said, "Hey, sweetie." I was like, "Hey, email is how adults communicate with people." They didn't Facebook message her, they didn't connect with her on social media apps. That's how she communicates with her friends in the GroupMe. They're in all these different ways of staying in touch. But the adult just emailed her and I was like, "Hey, you have this icon on your phone and it's blue and it's mail and this is how adults are gonna communicate with you." I had a talk about that.

And so email sometimes is really boring. It gets a bad rep. But email is still a key way for adults to get information and communicate. But here's the deal. You don't wanna just email them your newsletter, you don't wanna just email them your Tuesday or Thursday MailChimp newsletter, you don't just wanna go into the database and say, "Start sending this person the newsletter." Instead, you wanna think through what are the most important email messages that someone should get. And those emails should be tied to that step. Should be tied to that step. Now, the cool thing about email and we'll talk about this one later is, these can be scheduled. You can think through these. What do I want a new guest to get, not what do I want Frank to get. But what do I want a new guest to get. And you can send them out and you can measure or you can see if they're opening, you can see if they're reading, you can see if they're responding, see if they're clicking. You can measure these things. But what do you want those early email messages to be?

Now, we have some templates for you inside Church Fuel, and we have some templates that other churches are using. They're saying, "Here's what we're sending." And we're not just sending one email but we're scheduling out emails over a long period of time, in some cases, up to six months, that are designed to help people take the next step. And so don't hate on email, don't downplay email. It is a really easy way and simple way to follow up with people. Now, what should those emails be? It depends on what your goal is. How often should those emails happen? It depends on your overall process that we're going to build.

Number two is a text message. A text message. Again, now you may not have a cell phone number for everybody that attends but you may ask for that. In fact, I'm a big fan of the connection card or the welcome card just having three things on it. First name, best email address, cell phone number. And just those three things, you can do everything else. You can get more information later. They check in their kit, you can get more information, if they sign up for an event, they're paying something with their credit card, you get more information. But if you get somebody's email address and cell phone number and you know their first name, you can do almost everything in this follow up process. So, I'm a fan of simple welcome cards or connection cards. But if you get somebody's email address, you can send them a text message.

Now, there's a couple of ways you could do it. Somebody could personally text them. You don't have to have a complicated system. You could just say hey, somebody could just text them, it could be you. It could be you, the pastor. When I was pastoring a church, I used to call every first-time guest on Sunday afternoon because we didn't have that many. And I was like, "You know what? I can do this. I can." And it is actually very meaningful to somebody to get a call from their pastor just getting up. And so I used to do that until we had upwards of 10 or 12 a week that I couldn't do. But I used to do it. But you could just text somebody and you're like, "Well, they're gonna have my phone number." Yeah. I mean they're gonna have your phone number.
number. That's why you have a phone so you could talk to people and people can call you and if it's crazy, you can change your number. So, let's not get too big for our britches, you could just text somebody.

But there's also automated tools that you could use that make this automatic. And it could still feel personal like 90% as personal. And you could set up a text message that sends just an automated message on Sunday afternoon or on Monday, you can even put a link in there and say, "I'd love some feedback. Here's a link." And so you can send some automatic text message. Now, you don't wanna overdo this but one or two. Even over time some text messages are absolutely appropriate in most cases to follow up with people and it's a great thing.

Now, number three. You could do a survey. You could send a survey. This now starts to interlace. One of those early emails could be about the survey, one of those early text messages could be about a survey. So, you can mix and match these. But a survey is really cool. And I put a link in the notes that you can click on to New Life. New Life did a great job with their survey. And you could send out a survey, people love to give feedback, people love to be asked for their opinions. Now, you don't wanna make a 50-question survey. You wanna make a really short survey and say, "Hey, even if you never come back, even if you never grow through the doors of our church again, we'd love to hear from you. I'd love to know what you think." Make it personal, make it simple. But people will respond to a survey. And a survey doesn't have to be a dead end, it can actually be the beginning of a conversation. And so you could use a survey. That's actually a great way to start a conversation with guests.

Number four. You could use a handwritten note card. This is something that I still do today. Anytime somebody joins Church Fuel, they will get a handwritten note from me. I'll put my business card in it that has my cell phone number on it as well. And I send them a handwritten note. Why do I do this? Because in this day and age of instant and social and digital, something that's handwritten that literally has a 50 something cent stamp on it, stands out in the mailbox. I wanna follow up with people in their inbox but also in their mailbox because most people only get bills, most people only get junk mail. That's what I get. But any time somebody sends me a handwritten note, guess what? That's a 100% open rate. I read that. And they wrote it. And I write it with a pen and I put a stamp on it and I hand address it. And it does not take long, it takes about 5 minutes or so, 10 minutes maybe altogether. And it costs less than a dollar for the card and the stamp. But it's really meaningful to somebody to send a handwritten note. So, you can do that. You can send a handwritten note to somebody who visits your church for the first time.

Now, you can see email and text and handwritten note, if all this is happening in the first five days, people are gonna be like, "Wow. This is a cult that I visited." You can space this out. And you don't have to use all of these tools, but you can put them in and just see how it feels, you can put them in and see if it's measured. In some cases, a handwritten note would work so much better than a text message. In some places, a text message might work better than a handwritten note. In some cases, you may wanna do both. But just space them out. So, you could do that.

Number five. Personalized video. I've gotten this a few times. There's some cool services that you can use. I'll link to one. There's some cool services that you can use, that you could record a little video and actually put a screenshot of that video in an email and just sent it to them. And again, it doesn't take long. I went to a webinar not long ago and it was for a
product and somebody sent me a follow-up email and it was mostly automated. But that email, I hadn’t met the guy that sent the email. He had a little video and he was holding up sign saying, "Hey, Michael." So, I knew he created that video and I knew what tool he was using. But it was a 60-second video that he put in the email. And you know what? I watched it. My inbox is crowded and I get all kinds of stuff there but I watched it. Why? Because it stood out, because it was personal, because somebody took a minute or two out of their day to very quickly record a little video. And you can do that. Wouldn’t it be cool if somebody... maybe it was you, maybe somebody in your church sent a little video to somebody that visited your church just thanking them, introducing yourself, saying if they have any questions they could respond. It takes a digital medium and makes it into a personal touch. And that could be a really cool thing that you do in your follow up process.

Number six. Here’s an idea. Single point of contact. A single point of contact. If you’ve ever stayed at a nice hotel. Not long ago my family and I went on vacation to Phoenix, Arizona. We stayed at a nice resort in Phoenix. I’m not sure why we went to Phoenix in the summer, it was really hot and fairly miserable and we could not go outside in the afternoon. I think I was living on Mars. But right before our check-in, somebody sent a text, the concierge sent a text like, "Hey." He introduced himself. "You can reach out to me anytime during your stay and I’ll take care of it." And I did that a couple of times. I actually had a couple of questions and I texted that person and he texted right back. And even though there was a big staff, even though there were all these people, somebody at the hotel said "Hey, I’m your guy. If you need anything, I’m your guy." What would happen in church if we did that? It doesn’t even have to be the pastor. It could be a key volunteer, it could be a group of people, it could be other staff members, it could be other volunteers. But what if somebody that was sending these emails or sending a note card said, "Hey, listen I’m a member. I’m a member of the church. But if you need anything, reach out to me. I can get you in touch with the right person."

In a big church, this is almost crucial because people get lost. But in a small church, this feels very, very personal. And both of those are really good. Just say, "Hey, I’m your person. I’m your guy. Listen. I’m not gonna give you a directory of 14 different places and make you figure out who to talk to, I’m your guy, I’m your girl. If you need something, here’s my number. Here’s my cell phone number, here’s my email address." And you could make this feel very personal by assigning a person to a person, a single point of contact. Almost like a concierge at a nice hotel would do. That can be a really cool part of the follow up process.

Number seven. Automation. I mentioned this, automation. That you can automate a lot of this, email messages, text messages. You can actually design and flowchart out a little campaign. Maybe it’ll last a month. We’ve got some inside Churchill that last up to six months. And we can put all the little pieces together and they just happen. When somebody starts it just happen. When they get to this point, send this text message. If we don’t have a cell phone number then don’t do that, but then send this email. And then seven days later, send this email. If they click it, send it this way, if they don’t, send it this way. You can do all that inside your church. In fact, I’m linking to a tool that you can use to set all this up and you can say, "Hey, what emails do I wanna send a new guest, how often do I wanna send them, what’s the interval?" You can set it all up. And then on Monday when you have a guest say, "Send the guest follow up sequence." Boom it just happens. It’s all automated.
You’re not depending on the heroic actions of one volunteer anymore just to remember that they need to check in with someone. When somebody signs up for a new small group, you can automate the process, when somebody signs up to volunteer, you can automate it, when a new giver happens, you can say, “Here’s the five things I want them to know but I don’t want them to know them all at once. It’s too much. I wanna spread it out over six months.” Boom. It can just happen. And so automation is your key. Your church database may have some of this built in. The tool that I linked to called FollowUp, it’ll do it for you.

There’s lots of tools you can use to do this. But you can automate, if not everything, a lot of it. You can even automate tasks, for example. You can say, “On day five, send an email to Pastor Billy that says check in with the guest from last Sunday.” And so even that phone call, you don’t have to have Pastor Billy just remember, you can automate a notification to him to call or text. And so automation can be your friend. This is not the robots taking over the church, this is tools to empower conversations, these are tools to empower ministry happening. And so don’t be afraid of automation.

Number eight. You can send a gift. You can send a gift. It could be a book. Maybe the pastor has written a book. It’s actually a great reason for a pastor to write a book none other than to give it to their church members. That’s a really, really, really powerful thing. You can send a gift card to a coffee shop, you can send a coffee mug or a tumbler, you can send something from a local business. A gift is actually a really cool thing. You could go extravagant with this, you could go simple to this. I know churches that give gifts out in order to get that connection card filled out. And we have Church Fuel members that make a donation to a local nonprofit in the name of the guest. I know churches that send really cool things in the mail. All of these are great ideas, but here’s the thing. You decide if this works in your culture. In some cultures, this is a really bad idea. But in some, this is a great idea. This is a fantastic idea.

I knew a guy who was raising money to plant a church in New York City. And they were raising money. And any time somebody donated to the church, they had a New York City pizza delivered to their house to say thanks. And they would do this for everybody that was donating to this new church plan. And I thought that’s a great idea. It was meaningful, it was personal, it was like a reverse investment and it made a huge difference. I followed up later and I was like, “Did that make a difference?” He said, “Oh, yeah. It made a difference because nobody is used to being treated that way.” And again, you’ve got to process through this what does this look like. I would encourage you to not do cheap T-shirts and cheap coffee mugs. Those just go to goodwill. But if this makes sense, you should consider this and where in your process. Maybe you do this when they come back the second time, maybe you do this a month later, maybe you do this the morning of. Where does this fit in your process?

Number nine. Last thing is other members. Other members of your church can get involved in this follow up process. There’s a high-end networking group called [inaudible 00:22:45]. These are like CEOs, business leaders, pay a lot of money to be in this group. And when somebody joins the group, they actually have a welcoming committee of other members who have been members for a long time reach out. And they volunteer. And so these are people who are paying to be in the service but they’re volunteering to be on the welcoming committee to welcome new members to bring them into the group. And it’s this interesting triangle of effectiveness. And so you can involve other members in your church all along in any of these ideas that we’ve been talking
about. It doesn’t just have to be from the church, it could be from other members. Maybe another member is that concierge approach, maybe the emails are coming from another member, maybe a handwritten note is coming from... maybe you have a volunteer team called the welcoming committee that gets together and creates and runs this process for you that you can involve other people and people make the process more effective.

And so don’t be afraid to involve other members in your church. There is something powerful from an email or a text that says, "Hey, I am not on staff but I just wanted to reach out and I’m a member, I go to the 9:00 service and I sit in the third row, and my name is Bob." All right. There’s something powerful about involving other people in your process. Even if parts of it are automated, look for the ways to make the human touch. Now, I wanna close by giving you a couple of mistakes that I see and those are some ideas. You do not have to do all those ideas as you build your process.

But a few mistakes that I see made is number one, confusing intentionality with annoyance. There is a line here. You wanna be intentional in your follow up process but you do not want to be annoying. So, you need to wrestle through that. As you write all this out on paper, that’s the advantage of writing it down. You can go, is too much? Do you feel like it’s too much? Is it too little? Is it too heavy on the front end too light on the back end? Is it too much personal too much automation? Don’t confuse intentionality with annoyance but at the same time, a few emails and you’re not gonna... some people are worried about annoying when we shouldn’t be. We’re reaching out with something that is effective and helpful and if you’re truly putting them first and not just selling, selling, selling your church. Come, come, give, give whatever, if you’re truly putting them first, then reaching out consistently is a good thing. You have their best interests in mind.

Number two is not defining clear outcome. We talked about this. What do you want a new guest to do? Not what all could they do, but what do you want them to do. And that’s why I pulled in starting with that framework. What do you want them to know? Do you feel or believe in what a success look like? That’s why starting with that will provide clarity before you start building your process. Because as you build your process, if it’s not about the thing that you want them to do, you’re confusing people. And if you confuse you what? You lose. That’s right.

And then number three is waiting for action to decide. Waiting for action to decide. In other words, you don’t need to wait until you have a guest visit and then go, "Oh, wait. What should we do?" No. If you haven’t had a guest in your church in five months, spend an unusual amount of time devising your follow up process, creating, implementing it, automating it, getting it all set up, pray over it. And I just believe there’s something spiritual that happens that when you prepare, God will send people. Now, I don’t know how that works. I don’t even know if it works all the time but I’ve seen it so many times that when church gets intentional about taking these actions. We’re gonna prepare for a guest even if we don’t have guests. We’re preparing in faith. We’re not just believing in faith, we’re acting in faith, we’re preparing in faith that that somehow... I don’t even know how it works but it somehow facilitates guests showing up at your church.

So, here’s your homework. You’ve got a worksheet and part of it is the follow up framework. But then there’s something that looks like a calendar. And you can see some icons down at the bottom you can draw. You don’t have to get overly specific and overly technical right now. But what I want you to do is
I want you to decide and just sketch out what your process should look like. When you want to send the email, draw a little email. You can write, "This is the survey." When you wanna do a phone call, put a little mark there and say, "Phone call from volunteer." When you want to send the next email, put that email in there. What do you want that email to be? You wanna send the note card, you wanna do the gift. Just use the different tools that we talked about and just sketch out what could be, what would your process look like. And then post it, get some feedback. Say, "Here, look. Here's what we've got, here's our community, here's our church, here's what we're trying to do you, here's what our process looks like."

Because almost all guests follow up processes look very similar, but each of them are nuanced, some of them are weighted heavier toward personal touch, some are more toward automation, some are way more toward email, some more toward text. Every process is a little different but they're all pretty similar. Our churches are really unique but we're really not that unique. So, there's so much that we have in common and so create your process, just sketch it out, and then post it and get some feedback. Get some feedback on your process because once you write it down, guess what you can do? You can implement. You can implement it, you can move to that execution phase, you can get a lot, you can set up the tools, you said. "All right. What are we gonna use to send the text? What are we gonna use to schedule the emails? What are all the different tools?" But just design it on a piece of paper in theory first and then go and implement your process. And that's your homework. To use the follow up worksheet to write down your process.

What are you gonna do to follow up with a first-time guest? What and when? And put it on that grid, put it on that calendar-looking grid. Week 1, week 2, week 9, week 12, whatever. Sketch it all out. It's a blank canvas but it's... it's not a blank canvas, it's a canvas that's not blank which makes it usable... it's got a little framework there but put your stuff in it. Fill in the framework. Take those principles, know, feel, do, believe in success and then start applying. "Okay. This is what we can do, this is what we're gonna do. We're gonna send cookies, we're going to send an email, we're going to text, we're gonna write a note card." Just write it in on your process and then post it and share it with the group. And we'll give you some feedback, we'll give you some input, we'll give you some just thought on what it looks like and give you a place to wrestle through some things if you need that.

That's how to follow up with guests using the follow up framework. In the next video, we're gonna talk about givers. What do you do when people give for the very first time? And so that's going to be a really good one. Some different ideas for you when we're talking about givers. And that's what we'll talk about in the next video. Thanks for watching. And God bless.