

# YMI Newsletter November 2011

Tuesday 29 November 2011

## An Inside Look

I live in Orlando, the town that is best known for Disney World. So, there is a high value of customer service in our community. It expresses itself in how one is treated in the tourist corridors of the city. In fact, when one receives bad customer service, it is notable, almost puzzling.

My family and I went to a restaurant the other night. The owner was working the cash register. Some of his children and their friends were finishing up dinner and there was another couple seated at a table waiting on their order. Having entered at the dinner hour, you would think that the owner would be excited or at the minimum welcome us. That didn't happen. He never smiled or thanked us for our business. The food was good. But, I didn't have to wonder why there were so few people in the business.

YMI doesn't have a store front. I don't work the cash register. But, I am very aware about how we serve churches. I find that there are a couple of strategies that are helpful.

1. Have a Helpful Mindset – I want youth ministers and pastors to know that we are in the business to be helpful to the local church. We are a non-profit organization. We are not looking at our customers hoping that they will buy more. We have our product that we know will be helpful to them. Even before a church becomes a partner with YMI, I end most of my emails with, "Let me know how I might help." There might be other things that I can help with that I am not yet aware of.
2. Be Willing to be Flexible – This might be the most difficult for me. Our two-year program is well thought out. We have tested it, tweaked it and refined it continually. We are pretty confident that what we offer works .... for most churches. Recently, we have had a few churches that have had different needs. We have delayed and restructured payment schedules. We have delayed the instructional training part of our program until later. We have worked with churches without a youth minister. All of these situations allowed us to experiment with new paradigms that work. Now I'll be able to offer these options as viable because they too are tested and refined.
3. Customize – I have realized in the last few months that since our main systems are pretty solid, we are now able to further customize our services for each church. Our system itself provides a certain amount of customization. But, now we are able to pay attention to some pretty important details. Every youth minister comes into our program with a different background and a variety of strengths, learning and motivation styles. We are honing in on these details so that we might maximize the learning opportunities and the resulting ministry outcomes.
4. A Good Start and a Solid Ending - These are critical pieces in making sure that our customers are satisfied. We begin with an orientation with each congregation. In most cases the field coach attends the orientation and it is followed by a meeting with the

supervising pastor, coach and youth minister so that they might dive into greater detail. I meet with the same three people at the end of our two year program. We call it the final consultation. At each end of the process we deliver a written document that encourages the discussion to revolve around observed and evaluated developmental points.

I suppose if people left their experience with YMI and weren't satisfied, I wouldn't know. After all, I didn't tell the owner of the restaurant I went to the other night, that I would have preferred for him to be a bit more inviting. But, I do get a great deal of positive feedback. What is most encouraging is that the better we get at this, the more it satisfies my desire to help.

## Most Recently

Photos from The Academy





## Partner Highlight

### The Chesley Magruder Foundation

I'll never forget the phone call I received on one June evening back in 2007. I was alone in the office. YMI was still pretty new. We finished our first year with students. I had been pretty successful in recruiting the second class of students. Things were looking pretty good for this fledgling organization.

My lap top died earlier in the week and I was working off of somebody else's desktop computer until I could get a replacement. The voice on the other end of the phone was friendly and filled with excitement. "Steve," he said, "I'm on the board of the Chesley Magruder Foundation and we just approved your grant request!"

Wow! Up to this point my requests of several other foundations had been denied. I wasn't very good at writing funding proposals. I felt very inadequate. And, it was (still is) difficult to find foundations that will fund faith based organizations that help those that work with youth. YMI was filling a large niche (I think of it as a chasm) that no other organization was willing to fill at the time we started. Therefore, funding wasn't very readily available.

Needless to say, that may have been the best news that I had received to date. Someone else believes that what we are doing is worthwhile and beneficial. I let out a loud, "WHOOOP!" after my telephone conversation.

Since that day and every year since, the Chesley Magruder Foundation has continued to believe in YMI and has funded a large part of its coaching expenses. Currently, we are holding their latest gift in a designated fund so that we might one day soon be able to hire a coaching coordinator (we are one-third of the way there).

As always, I am thankful for great partnerships. When we all work in the same direction, great things can be accomplished.

## Final Word From the YMI Guy's Blog

### Deadlines

I'm pretty good with deadlines. Hmm. Maybe I should restate that. I work very hard in the moments before a deadline. Some call it procrastination. I like to call it "focused energy release." Actually, I don't call it that. I just made that up.

But that's what it feels like. When a deadline looms on the horizon I feel myself staring it down the closer it gets. As it nears, my adrenaline pumps and I gut out the final product.

I write a newsletter for the organization that I direct, the Youth Ministry Institute. This blog will also appear in that newsletter. No one has ever commented on a bit of newsletter faux pas. But I am

sure people have wondered about the name of the month the newsletter is issued. No, I'm not making up my own names for the names of months. The Romans have already done that for us.

For instance, today's newsletter will be the November issue (issued on the last day of November). It makes more sense if it were the December issue (one day early). Fortunately, I know how my brain works. If I changed the month on the masthead, December 1<sup>st</sup> would arrive and I would talk myself in to something else on my to-do list. The middle of December would meander towards me and I would decide that it is still December and I have plenty of time to get the newsletter out. As the end of the month neared the December newsletter would look more and more like a January newsletter issued in December like it is now. So, I'm sticking with my deadline and my accurate, yet somewhat flawed, choice of month that it is issued.



Christmas time brings another sort of deadline for me. Since high school I have written the family Christmas letter. There have been many years when I have invoked the 12 Days of Christmas rule. In other words, if you receive my Christmas greeting within two weeks after Christmas, it still counts as a Christmas greeting. I am pretty sure that I have found myself stuffing Christmas letters after Christmas more often than I have before.

So, deadlines are critically important to me. They represent the finish of a project. I gain a great deal of satisfaction when I accomplish a large enough task to warrant a deadline. In fact, there may not be enough deadlines in my life. I have a strong desire to accomplish more. But, I'm not sure if I have the emotional strength to put everything on a hard deadline. There is, of course, stress involved when you do that.

This always leads me to evaluate what is most important. What deserves a deadline and what doesn't. Clearly family and faith fall at the top of that list for me. Am I as firm with deadlines regarding projects that involve my family members and my own personal devotion to God? Relationships tend to be more fluid and not prone to deadlines like other projects. So, how does my sequential brain and task oriented personality spend time on what is really most important to me?

I am approaching Christmas this year with that question. I don't think I have it answered. But, maybe, as with most things, simply asking the question heightens my awareness of my time and how I am spending it. Maybe if I knocked some of my tasks out of the way earlier, I would spend more time focusing on what is important??? I don't know.

So, it is nothing short of a miracle that I dropped my Christmas cards at the post office today!!! Yes, a November post mark will appear on them for the first time in over 30 years. You may wonder how I was able to do it. The deadline wasn't even close. Where did the motivation come from?

Those of you who know me best have already figured it out. My family moved this year. We wanted people to know our new address.

So, the deadline was Thanksgiving, which evidently lasts until the end of November.