

On the Corner

by Robert Docter –

So—you've now changed your epaulets. You're now Salvation Army officers. How's it feel?—relieved, anxious, overwhelmed, unready, confident, sad, delighted...

Get in the habit of becoming more aware of your own feelings. With awareness, you'll be able to think about the kind of response you make. When the mind is inserted into the process you suddenly have a choice. Otherwise, we might as well have some ordinary layperson wearing those epaulets—and you are no longer any ordinary layperson.

You are now a fully trained professional.

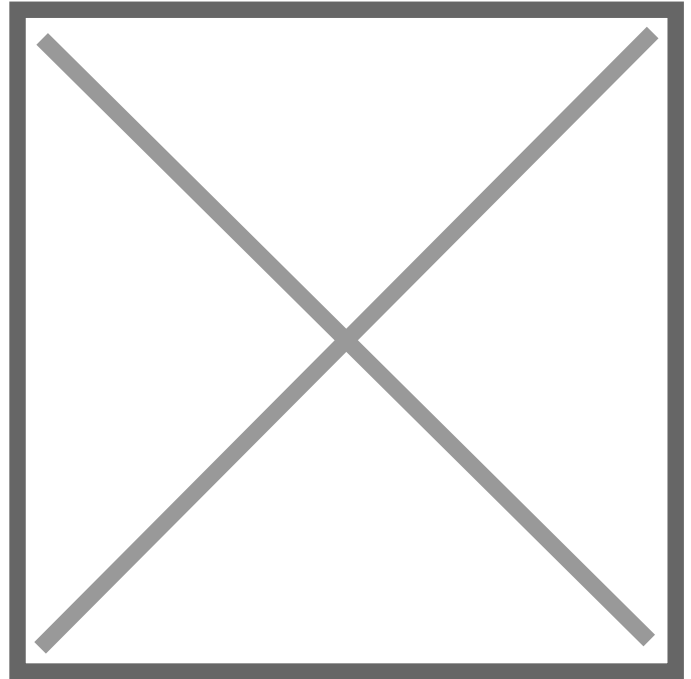
Right!

I've got some advice for you as you enter this "people" business as a "servant leader."

Here goes.

First, show up in every way. Show up for work—physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Show up with empathy and compassion. You're there to discover and love the unloved—to hug the unhuggable—to listen to the hurting—to understand the non-understandable—to teach the unteachable—to perceive with accuracy the hidden matters within a system of relationships. Show up with intelligence. Trained professionals practice their discipline. Let's face it. You really don't know all there is to know about being a Salvation Army officer. You need a lot of practice. Therefore, be open to feedback—seek it—avoid sensing it as criticism—and when you give it to someone with whom you are sharing this little spinning hunk of dirt we call "Earth"—be sensitive to that person's feelings as well. This job is a lot more than simply being a pastor—although some of you would prefer to limit yourself to that role. You're not putting on vestments on Sunday morning—you're putting on a uniform—and the symbolism of the difference is something I urge you to spend a lifetime figuring out.

Second, embrace the attitude that this place to which you are assigned now constitutes a permanent appointment. There will be no new appointment for you in two or three years. This is it. The town is now your town. The people, however, are not your people. In fact, look on that relationship the other



way around. You are now theirs.

What we're talking about here is your attitude. An attitude is a predisposition to behave in a particular way. If you go into this appointment and see it as a temporary stay, that attitude immediately begins to condition what you do—how you behave—what you expect. If you perceive the appointment as temporary you care less. You relate with less risk to spare yourself the loss of impending departure. You work for the short haul. You avoid being a builder. You fail to confront needed change. You're looking ahead instead of where you are.

Be yourself. Be genuine. Be there.

Third, figure out what's going on in this place. What's happening? In other words—try to make a quiet assessment as to how the system at this place functions. For instance—what is its outward appearance? What does someone see for the first time when approaching and entering the place? What's the overall feeling and tone of the place when people come together? Who sits next to whom? Who's out on the fringe? Who talks to whom?

Try and figure out the power structure in the group. Who defines the problems? Who makes the rules? Explore the roles people play. Who are the caregivers—the workers—the talkers—the task-oriented—the big picture people—the contributors—the blamers and critics—the encouragers and supporters. Are there any victims or villains—any rescuers?

So—you are now a Salvation Army officer. As such, you take on an extremely complex role. Avoid believing that you have to be perfect. No one is perfect—even your D.C.! Try to be a learner. Travel gently in your relationships—be bold in your vision for the Army in your town—be respectful in your relationship with everyone—and please—be consistent. Remember, inconsistent people make those around them crazy.

Vaya con Dios.