

The Importance of Knowing Why We Do What We Do

(Adapted from an article submitted by Ken Knipp)

Lyle Schaller tells a story of a congregation which always recited the Apostles' Creed in their worship service facing the back of the sanctuary. This practice had been continued for many years without question. No one in the congregation knew why this custom was followed, yet the majority of the congregation was unwilling to change this practice. Finally, it was discovered that many years earlier, when the practice of reciting the creed was begun, a banner on which the Apostles' Creed was printed had hung across the back of the sanctuary. Since the congregation did not know the creed from memory, they always stood, looked at the banner, and then were able to repeat the creed together. This practice continued many years after the banner itself had been removed.

This brief story illustrates how easily we can adopt practices without having any real understanding of the reason why we are doing them. When this occurs, we are exposed to two dangers. The first is that we will follow a very legitimate practice, yet fail to draw out its proper results because we don't understand the reason behind the practice. The second is that we will continue a practice which no longer meets its original purpose, again because we do not grasp the reason why that practice was initiated in the first place.

There are a number of areas where this applies to the ministry of Young Life. Many staff and volunteer leaders have seen others in leadership roles doing contact work, leading clubs or directing camps and modelled what they did after the form of ministry they saw, without always understanding the *function* which the *form* intended to fulfil. Here are some examples:

I have encountered plenty of leaders who thought that if they simply attended a game or other school events, or walked onto the school campus, they had done contact work. While going to school events or the places where kids congregate is a necessary part of contact work, that doesn't get beyond the form. The function is for leaders to be *actively present with kids*, initiating friendships with them. Risking our security is involved, dependence on the Holy Spirit is involved, initiating conversations is involved, seeking to personally demonstrate the love and presence of Christ is involved. These things do not automatically happen if we simply show up at a place where kids are.

The principle holds true for club as well; in fact, it may be here where we have the greatest danger of holding onto the form while forgetting the function. The goal of club is to create a situation in which kids feel safe, where they drop some of their barriers to the Gospel, and are open to understand both a verbal and nonverbal expression of the gospel. Hopefully, this understanding will be evident in skits, message presentation, camping and every other area of our ministry. We need to have a clear idea of why we are saying what we say, and why we are doing what we do. We need to be sure that we understand the *function* we are trying to accomplish, or else we will be facing the back of the church after the banner has been removed.