

MFT, a kind of spiritual boot camp

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These times remind me of a certain kind of experience I had on MFT.

Looking from the outside, MFT was a bunch of sleep-deprived young people pushing themselves to sell candy or flowers every day, giving all their money to some oriental guy. They must be brainwashed; why else would people in the prime of life be throwing their lives away like this?

Looking from the inside, it was a kind of spiritual boot camp. Every day I was asked what my goal was.

Some days I was told what my goal was. It was simple; each day you made a money goal, I want to come back with \$120. Made your goal and then forgot it. Then you made an internal goal, what you were going to focus on. That you stayed with, trying to apply it in every moment.

Now, I didn't like goals. I didn't trust ambition and human desire. I was quite creative, quite spiritual and for me, I worked best when I wasn't actively chasing something outside of myself. Inspiration came, I didn't like trying to force things. Plus, I had a built-in dread of success. From my childhood, the world of adults seemed like a lonely and frightening place, full of stress and anxiety. I didn't want any part of it.

So, in the beginning, I think, my internal goal was something like 'run between houses and shops. I started MFT in January in Kentucky, so plunging through snow drifts was something that this Canadian could enjoy, in a grim way. Pushing myself physically, with a rigid internal discipline, was something I could do, and the result came. Not a lot, Kentucky wasn't exactly awash with money at the time. Or Tennessee and Indiana, the other parts of our region. Run, run, run, push, push, push went my first few months. I was often the top fundraiser.

Gradually, I started bringing back a little less each time, till I was a bottom seller, not a term we used a lot. This was when I started learning the difference between internal and external goals. I had to wear a watch, something my hippy self had refused to do. I didn't want to be a slave to timetables, schedules, to be just another lemming on the treadmill of the business world that passes for civilization. But if you're going to be on time for your pickup, time your prayer condition, or keep track of your hourly goal, you needed a watch. So, I strapped a cheap drugstore Timex to my wrist. The cloth band was soon soaked in my sweat, turning a variety of colors.

Most days, the result would come if I just walked and talked enough. There would be a warmup period, then talking to people would become smooth and I'd know what to say and who to talk to first. Walking became easier, my tired legs would feel light and running became a joy. But some days that moment didn't come, people kept saying 'No, thank you.' 'I have my own church' or 'What church is this, now?'. Or worse. I was doing all the regular things, but nothing was happening.

I have to admit there were days when I was mystified that this worked at all. 'Here I am,' I thought, 'a total stranger, walking up to people in a town I've never been in before, asking people to give me \$2 for a box of candy they could get at the drug store for 60 cents, because it's benefitting an outfit they've never heard of. Huh???'

I'm not the kind of person who chats up strangers, shooting the breeze about the weather or their shoes or where they're from. I couldn't understand why people spent time and energy this way, talking to someone I didn't know terrified me, or at least made me uneasy. If there was a deeper dimension to it, I could talk for hours. At parties in theater school, I was always the one in the kitchen or sitting on the stairs, having a deep talk. I wasn't in the living room dancing or hooting and hollering.

So, approaching people I didn't know didn't come naturally to me. But being a spiritual messenger did.

My picture was: serious missionary runs in full of deep purpose. Not one human flaw showing, absolutely sure of himself. People recognize this serious young man and give him money.

Going door to door in Kentucky towns, people would readily open the door and listen to you. But talking confidently and authoritatively, they politely declined. And sometimes not so politely. I saw they didn't like someone who knew better than they did, who talked higher. I started acting like I didn't quite know how to do this (which was true enough. I wanted to look like I knew what I was doing. I wanted to bust onto the scene, showing them all how it was done.) People responded immediately, when I left them room to help me, rather than talking to them from a great height.

It worked like this: you'd make an hourly goal, \$10 or something. Kept track of it. Sometimes it came steadily. Sometimes it came at the very last minute. You started to see it wasn't just a result of running around and talking to everybody. (Sometimes that was an internal goal)

But there would be days where there was no response. Same kind of area, same people, same approach, same fundraising line, same product. Nobody's reaching for their wallet. For no reason you can make out, it's not working. They're acting like people you don't know and will never see again, who don't know you and never heard about your church, Christian youth group, or whatever. Or, worse, who 'knew' about our church from cheezy news reports.

When I wasn't breaking through, I'd run harder, talk a little more seriously. But the harder I'd try, it made no difference. I'd start to freak. 'I'm doing everything right, but I'm making nothing. Pickup is in an hour, and I've got nothing to show. C'mon!' and I'd run harder, sweat more, pray more desperately. But when I focused on money, it chased money away.

It was like God had designed a trap for my fallen nature. A three-sided box, and I was inside it, banging my head on the dead-end wall, like a fly on a windowpane, over and over again. It wasn't until I was ready to forget about the result I wanted. No matter how much I wanted it, going straight at it wasn't going to work. I tried. Oh, I prayed with greater and greater intensity, willing people to donate money. C'mon, God, I really want this. I mean, I really, really, really want this. Nothing. C'mon, I really, desperately, pleadingly, deeply, really, really, really want this. I can cry, too. Here's some tears. C'mon c'mon c'mon!' In the three-sided box, one side was always open, but I was blinkers on hell-bent on doing things my way.

The more I tried to push people, the less they wanted to give, the more frustrated I'd feel, then the harder I'd try to push them. None of this worked, needless to say.

I remember the frustration and desperation that would well up, mad that people weren't giving, my providence was failing, this little town was making a bundle of bad conditions, why the hell weren't they donating? See you in hell, buddy. Good going. Freaking narrow-minded small town, middle aged, middle class, middle Americans. Completely content with your little job, your little church, your little house, smug in your social standing and not wanting to change one little thing or look one inch outside the confines of your lives. I have mah own church that I'm a respected member of, thank you very much.

None of this worked. It wasn't until I gave up my frantic efforts, relaxed my death grip on what I wanted other people to be doing, that I'd consider coming at it a different way. I'd sigh, give up like I was ending the world, and try just loving people instead of coming at them with waves of spiritual pressure to do what God (and I) wanted them to do.

And guess what? Just from being with people where they were, instead of where I wanted them to be, they suddenly started warming up to me and giving. Was that something that I wanted to do? No, probably the last thing. But many times God worked that way, showing up in the way I least expected. Or wanted.

This was a tough way to learn what Father and Mother always did: be loving and grateful no matter what anyone else is doing. In any situation, focus on your internal goal and keep at it. It will be tested. My main point is this: in a spiritual life, do the right thing no matter what other people are doing. Focus on being the example, rather than demanding that everyone else does right. Second point: praying for and focusing directly on the result you want doesn't work. Declare your goal, but then put your attention on the things you can control, the internal things that move the spirit world and make the magic happen.