

Chapter 3

Having

the Proper

Atmosphere

Have you ever been to a place where just being there excited you? I remember the first time I ever went to a professional baseball game. It was in Tiger Stadium in Detroit, Michigan. The scoreboard in the center of the field was flashing information about the teams that were playing that day. Marching bands in brightly-colored uniforms played as we waited for the game to begin. The players then came out onto the field to warm up. Their uniforms were bright and colorful. They stretched their muscles and loosened up for the game. Then the National Anthem was sung. After the soloist was finished the roar of thirty-five thousand voices cheering made goosebumps run up my spine. The first pitch came barreling out of the pitcher's hand. Next, I remember hearing the crack of the bat and I was so excited that I could hardly stand it. I jumped into the air and shouted in support of my team. Man, did I ever get caught up in the atmosphere of that place!

All of a sudden I gained control of myself. I was quite amazed at

Jump Starting Your Bus Ministry

how the lights, the color, the loud music, and the excited players were causing me to share in their excitement. So I took out my pen and jotted down the things that the baseball league used to create this kind of atmosphere. My list was something like this:

- ◆ bright colors
- ◆ bright lights
- ◆ upbeat music
- ◆ uniforms aid in having unity

I went back home and started to work on this thing called atmosphere. I wanted our folks to experience the same excitement that I had experienced at the baseball game, but I wanted them to experience it for Jesus. I want our services and meetings to be exciting. So I started to study the subject of atmosphere.

Atmosphere is a *surrounding influence or condition*. It can be positive or negative. Now the truth is, there is always an atmosphere. We must be sure that it is an exciting and positive one. We want our bus workers to be positive and excited about their bus routes.

As I studied the subject of atmosphere, I made a remarkable discovery. **Atmosphere cannot be created.** This discovery set me back a bit because creating atmosphere was the very reason that I had started the study in the first place. Then I asked myself this question: "If atmosphere cannot be created, then how can we determine what kind of atmosphere we will have?" The answer is this: I must do the things that are conducive to having an exciting

Having the Proper Atmosphere

atmosphere. I must do those things that allow the kind of atmosphere that I want to happen.

Now let me explain. In order for a gasoline engine to run, there must be combustion inside the engine. But you cannot create combustion. In fact, you cannot even create a spark. What you can do is put in a spark plug and hook an electrical wire to it. When the electricity runs down the wire into the spark plug, it runs to the end of a prong and then is forced to jump to the other side of the plug. The result is a spark. The spark was not created; it happened.

Next, the pistons must push a mixture of gas and air to the top of the cylinder. This must be timed perfectly so that the compressed gas and air reach the top of the cylinder at the same time the spark occurs. The result of that is combustion. And when combustion occurs in an engine, it produces horsepower. And horsepower moves the vehicle. So I think that you can see what I am trying to say. We cannot create atmosphere, but we can do the things that will allow atmosphere to happen. It was once said by the makers of the Cadillac automobile, ***"It is not enough to do things right, one must do the right things."*** If you do the right things, you will have the right atmosphere.

By having the right atmosphere in your bus meeting you will eliminate about fifty percent of your problems. By just being caught up in the atmosphere, your workers will forget that they have so many problems. All they will be thinking about are those precious bus children.

Your bus workers come to their bus route visitation weighted down with the cares of this life and we know that the cares of this life can sometimes be very heavy. Not having their minds on what

Jump Starting Your Bus Ministry

they are doing will frustrate them and cause them to be less productive. But having the right atmosphere will help create a desire in your workers that will cause them to look forward to the bus meeting and bus route.

Let me give you several ideas that have worked for us to create an exciting and positive atmosphere in our bus meeting.

1. Have each of your bus routes make a flag to identify their route.

Each route having its own identity will build a camaraderie among the workers on the route. It will do the same for the riders. In the bus ministry we named our bus routes after Bible characters like Barnabas, Elijah, Caleb, Joshua, and so on. Each flag had an emblem on it that matched the bus route's name. Elijah's flag had a picture of a bus being caught into Heaven by a whirlwind. Barnabas' flag had a picture of Barney Rubble on it with his forefinger pointing to Heaven indicating that the "Barney Bus" is number one.

These flags were made of good material and were professionally done. They were very colorful. We made flagpoles and stained them with walnut stain, then placed a gold ornament on top. Everything was done first class.

These flags did several things for our bus meeting:

- ◆ They added a lot of bright color.
- ◆ They created a feeling of unity among the workers of each route.

Having the Proper Atmosphere

- ◆ The flags helped remind us of the importance of our mission.

These flags were set up each week in the bus meeting with the American and Christian flag on either side. Remember that what we are trying to do is to allow an exciting, positive atmosphere to fill our bus meeting.

It was not long before I noticed a closeness among our bus workers. They became a close-knit family. In fact, they became a family inside our church family. Now, I do not believe that the flags alone caused this, but I do believe that they were a part of doing the "right things" that would allow the kind of atmosphere we wanted to happen in the bus meeting.

2. Sing only upbeat songs in your bus meeting.

Use songs that are exciting and that will help your workers focus on the bus ministry. It is a good idea to sing bus songs, like "Father Abraham," or "Jesus Loves Me," or "The Wheels on the Bus." I found that these types of songs were fun to sing and they helped all of us focus even more on reaching boys and girls for Christ. After a couple of these songs were sung, no one was thinking about the chores that they needed to do at home or the grocery shopping that had to be done that evening. All they were thinking about were the little boys and girls that live on their bus routes.

It is a good idea to have your bus workers act out the songs as they sing them. This is good practice for them so that their bus programs will be sharp and fun. I have heard it said that none of us ever grow up; we just learn how to act in public. You will be

Jump Starting Your Bus Ministry

surprised how much fun those songs are and how they effectively focus your thinking. That's why we sing them with the kids!

At any rate, singing these songs will help you put things in place to allow atmosphere to happen. That's why they sing in the armed forces and at college football games and everywhere that they are trying to create an atmosphere of excitement. If you try singing "Amazing Grace" and sing it a little slowly, your workers are going to want to bury somebody instead of working for three or four hours on a bus route. Try your bus songs in your bus meeting and you will see amazing results. Those adults who at first just look around like what you are doing is stupid, will start to get into it and before you know it, they will break down and enjoy themselves. And they will be more likely to lose themselves on the bus so that the kids enjoy themselves.

3. Have a segment of time set aside for testimonies.

Many times the testimonies are the icing on the cake. We will have a worker from each route take just a couple of minutes to share with us something about his bus route. Sometimes I may just ask him to tell us why he is in the bus ministry, or I may ask him to share a victory that he has experienced on his bus route.

One day after asking our workers to give testimonies, one of our workers told a story about a little girl who was shot by her mother's boyfriend. The little girl was only three years old. She is six now and has contracted spinal meningitis. The doctors do not expect her to live. At the end of the story the bus worker said, "Oh, yes, she got saved about three weeks ago on our bus." There wasn't a dry eye in the room and everyone was anxious to get out on their bus routes and lead some little boy or girl to the Lord.

Having the Proper Atmosphere

Everyone was thinking about the many children on their routes that had very little chance of making it without Jesus.

The testimony time is so effective that I sometimes do not have to do anything else. I just have prayer with the workers and turn them loose. Giving testimonies about a victory on a bus route is a wonderful way to set the stage for the right atmosphere to be present in your bus meeting.

4. Make your bus meeting fun.

On occasion, it is a good idea to have skits in your bus meeting. You could assign a week to each of your bus routes to be responsible for a skit or maybe the bus director could do one. The Bible says in Proverbs 17:22, "*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine . . .*" And sometimes your workers need a good dose of laughter.

One day I was working on the bus meeting for the coming Saturday and I got an idea to create a funny bus character. We ran Chevy buses so I decided to have one of my assistants put on a baptismal robe and a curly wig and come to the bus meeting as the new bus worker. I decided to call her/him?! "Miss Chevena Bus." I got up in the bus meeting and announced that we had a new guest who was going to bring a lecture on the subject "How to Run a Bus Program." Well, you would have had to have been there and experienced Chevena to have appreciated her . . . I mean him . . . I mean "it." It was one of the funniest things that I have ever seen. A merry heart really does do good like a medicine.

On another occasion I came up with the idea to start a radio broadcast for the bus ministry and have a live broadcast in the bus meeting. I got a man to dress up in wild-colored clothing. We put

Jump Starting Your Bus Ministry

sunglasses on him and told him that he was going to be the deejay for our new radio broadcast and that his name was going to be TieRod Clutch. His station's call letters were W.B.U.S. Busssssss. It brought a lot of laughter as we listened to him bring the "Bus News" and give a weekly report on last Sunday's bus results. *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."* Make your bus meeting fun.

5. Of course, the main event in the bus meeting is preaching.

The preaching in the bus meeting should only be about fifteen or twenty minutes. If you will work on what you are going to say, you will not need any more time than this to encourage and excite your bus workers.

The messages that you bring to the bus workers should be messages of exhortation, not rebuke. The idea is to motivate. It is not the place to straighten out all the problems of the church or your bus ministry. You want to simply add to the things that you have already done in the bus meeting to allow the right atmosphere to prevail.

All of the things that have been mentioned in this chapter have been tried and proven. They are effective. They work. They will help you motivate your workers. Atmosphere will never take the place of duty, but it will make duty a more pleasurable task.

Having the Proper Atmosphere

Principles to Remember

- ◆ Atmosphere is a surrounding influence or condition.
- ◆ It is not enough to do things right; one must do the right things.
- ◆ Atmosphere cannot be created; it happens.
- ◆ Atmosphere will never take the place of duty, but it will make duty a more pleasurable task.