

# Commentary: In praise of ‘old school’ discipleship

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In the days of my youth, vending machines were a bit different than our modern ones. The idea of buying a cold drink by merely putting coins in a refrigerator-sized box was a novel and exciting proposition for my generation. But these early contraptions had issues that made the process a bit daunting at times and, at others, downright exasperating.

The machines relied on analog technology that guided the money down a path that measured and evaluated each coin. The customer could hear the clunking and sliding sounds as the coin descended through this process, and there was no small amount of suspense as the coin made its journey. A good coin would travel this route to the end until it passed a switch that confirmed to the machine the coin was good, and then the coin fell into a metal box. Your coin hitting the other coins in the metal box sounded as if someone had tapped a tambourine.

## **Steps for victory**

At any point, however, if the machine detected even the slightest anomaly, the coin would stop. There was a lever you could pull that would eject your coin into an outside pocket, and you could try again with that coin or replace it with another. Sometimes, the machine would accept a suspect coin on the second try or even on the 10th attempt. In any event, the crashing sound of your coin “going all the way to the change box” made for joyous celebration of your victory—victory, that is, if the machine in fact had cold drinks in it.

So, to be successful in purchasing a cold drink from one of these vending machines, one must locate a machine, determine it is working, have change

in your pocket and insert acceptable coins. And the machine must hold cold drinks. Lacking even one of these steps ends with unsatisfactory results.

### **Disciple-making process**

The process of making disciples seems to have some strong similarities to purchasing cold drinks from one of these early machines. Let's think on that a moment. What does it take to make a disciple?

1. The client must be thirsty. If the disciple maker is not sufficiently motivated, the process will discourage him and cause him to quit.
2. The customer must find a machine. Without a relationship, the process is moot. The disciple maker must pursue venues that will create a reason for a relationship.
3. The machine must be working. If a potential disciple is not willing and able to receive, then success is not possible. Disciple makers should look for "machines that have their lights on."
4. The customer must have good coins. Disciple makers must use Jesus' teachings to have success. Empty pockets disappoint everyone.
5. The machine must accept the coins. Sometimes, the truth has to be told again and again, perhaps in different ways, before the disciple accepts it.
6. The coin has to "go all the way to the change box." This is such a wonderful moment, I have coined (sorry for the pun) it as a phrase to note when a disciple internalizes a concept.
7. There must be cold drinks in the machine. A disciple maker will know the teaching cycle is complete when the disciple is bearing fruit of the gospel in his life.

The early vending machines are somewhat “old school,” but the lessons learned from them can be timeless.

So, as we pursue those truths that endure in our modern age, I leave you with a thought: Jesus spent three years with his disciples at the end of which the disciples still seemed to have gaps in their understanding of the kingdom. Should we presume we can do it faster?

*Ernie Rice is a Texas Baptist missionary serving in Haiti.*