

3 Ways to Take the Temperature of the Environment You Lead

My family will tell you that I'm a thermostat control freak. I have a day marked on my calendar when I have arbitrarily determined it's acceptable to flip on the air conditioning or the heater, depending on the season. And even when those systems come on, they're never set quite how my family would prefer.

They'd sure like the AC to flip on before it gets to be 76 degrees, and they'd probably enjoy the heater coming on before it gets to 65. Thing is, though, I like it just fine. I actually get quite a bit of satisfaction when I'm sweating in our living room, or when I'm bundled up at the kitchen table. It makes me feel tough; it makes me feel frugal (Notice I said frugal. Not cheap. Can I get an amen from the dads out there?)

But even as I write this, I'm realizing that those under my care don't have the same sensibilities I do. I have created an environment in the home that I like, appreciate, and enjoy, but those within the environment I've created might not be having the same reaction. Sure, I can simply dismiss their feelings and keep the thermostat the way I like it, but as a leader in the home I would do well to "take the temperature" of my family to see how they're responding to the temperature of our home.

It's a bit of a silly illustration, but the principle is strong I believe. When you find yourself in a leadership role, whether in an organization, a small group, or a home, there is a certain temperature you have created in that environment. As godly leaders, we are not only responsible for setting the temperature; we are responsible for knowing how the temperature we have set is affecting those who have to live inside of it.

When you take the temperature, you are making sure that you have not done something detrimental to the people living in it. You are humbly acknowledging that the culture you have intentionally created is having its desired effect, which is moving people closer and closer to Jesus. And you are also acknowledging that you are not the ultimate authority, and that like any other human, you might have made a mistake and created an environment that is having unintended consequences.

So how can you take the temperature inside of the environment you lead? I would suggest at least three ways:

1. Listen.

Most of the time, people who sit in your environment are talking. Many times it's the easiest thing in the world to become so convinced that you're right, your decisions are valid, that you purposely choose not to listen to those who are speaking. **But if you really want to know the temperature of the environment you've created, you've got to make sure your ears are open.**

Of course, when you're listening to others, you must also be listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. That's because not every voice you hear will be right or even helpful. So through the wisdom that only God will provide, you and I must learn who and what to listen to, and when is the right moment to take heed.

2. Observe.

Let me go back to the illustration of our home. It's possible that my sweet wife knows by now that I like the thermostat set at a certain temperature. And though she might not like it that way, she has decided in her godly heart to not press the issue; instead, she has decided to wear a scarf and gloves to the dinner table.

Many times observation is an even more helpful method of taking the temperature than listening. That's because people always communicate even when they're not speaking. They communicate through their body language, their gestures, and even the indirect questions they ask. Watch; observe; take note; people will tell you what the temperature is even when they don't tell you what the temperature is.

3. Ask.

Of these three, this is the most obvious, but it's also the one I think we do the least. We can actually, verbally, ask the question. Why don't we do this more?

I would posit it's because we already know what the answer is, and we don't want to really hear it. That's because when we do, we have to react to what we suspect but are unwilling to admit to ourselves. This is a humbling thing; it means we may have to adjust the "perfect plan" we had in place, and it means we have to admit that we, too, make mistakes.

But in those moments, we would do well to ask ourselves whether we would rather live with an illusion or pursue a better future? **We can actually find someone we trust, someone we know will tell us the truth, and actually ask the question.**

If you find yourself in a leadership role, friends, be it of an organization, church, group, or something else, don't be afraid to take the temperature of the environment you are stewarding. Don't be so married to your good intentions that you fail to embrace reality.

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