



The Visit as an Extension Method

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA • AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

The personal visit to a home, farm, office, or business place is important in your Extension work. Such visits effectively bring people information they want, and you learn at the same time. Since visits do take time, you'll need to consider when it's wise to make a "visit" rather than reaching people in other ways. Visits pay.

When the person himself requests it.

When you need to be closer to the person and his family or to convince him you're ready and able to help. A visit may be helpful when you'd like someone to be a 4-H Club leader or when the person is a leader who'll help you be accepted by others.

When the person is trying out a new idea. Other methods may be more effective or less costly in making people aware of the idea however.

When you can't provide the information without a visit. You can't help a farmer analyze a brooder house problem or a housewife a kitchen arrangement without seeing the house or kitchen.

When the person wants to change but is reluctant to take the step. The change may be difficult because (a) the person hasn't tried a change in this field before; (b) the change itself is a big one that can't be tried on a small scale; or (c) it requires a shift in established attitudes or values.

When you need information from the family or on farm, business, or home problems.

When a new cooperator, such as a new 4-H family, starts working with you.

SUCCESSFUL VISITS

What makes a visit a success?

Put yourself into a counseling relationship with the person by having a sympathetic attitude and genuine interest in his problem, by asking questions skillfully, and by establishing a confidential relationship. He must be motivated to talk and willing to study his problem with you.



Listen intelligently, attentively, and sympathetically. Help the person, and often his family, to probe for and recognize the problem.

Finally, you must follow-up.

Some of the steps to effective visits follow. These steps, however, cannot be considered as a 1-2-3 way of making a visit. You may want to or have to skip some and adapt others. These steps have been proven though to be successful in helping others to solve problems.

STEPS TO EFFECTIVE VISITS

Step One--Prepare for Your Visit

First, know certain things about the man, woman, or young person you're going to see. Sometimes, of course, you won't find these things out until you visit the person.

- What kind of a person is he emotionally? Is he receptive, passive, an "aginner," and what is his attitude toward the program?
- What kind of a person is he functionally? Is he a leader in the others' eyes? In your eyes? Does he help you, hold office in formal groups, etc.? A leader in your eyes is not necessarily a leader in the eyes of his fellow workers.
- How fast has he accepted new practices and ideas in the past?
- Where is he in the acceptance of the idea? Is he barely aware of it, interested in it, ready to evaluate it, ready for a trial, or ready to adopt it?
- What experience has he had with this type of change? Favorable or unfavorable? Some farmers may do whatever Extension or an individual agent recommends; others are automatically against whatever an agent suggests.
- What kind of a person is he economically? What type of farm or other business is he operating? How successful is he? How large is his business?
- What is he like socially? What does he value most--money, independence, leisure, happiness, family, or community status? Is he a joiner? What are his ties to religion, nationality groups, etc.?



Second, consider the family. Is it well knit, well adjusted? What members help make decisions?

Third, be sure of the purpose of your visit. If the visit was your idea, you should have a definite objective. If your visit is at his request, your purpose is more general. In any case be flexible and ready with alternatives.

Fourth, be ready to answer questions on the subject and related subjects. You'll need to know, too, what the subject of the last contact was and what advice was given. Here good records help.

Fifth, take the right things with you. Pamphlets, pictures, materials for a demonstration, etc. all help.

Step Two--Make the Right Approach

Early in your visit, get on a basis where communication can take place. You need to be accepted as a counselor. These tips may help:

Have the right attitude, being genuinely interested and sincere, yet cheerful. However, don't get trapped into mere commiseration about conditions. To get on a personal, friendly basis quickly, talk with him about mutual friends, ties, associations--refer to problems or plans discussed before. A sincere smile helps.

Create and maintain a good attitude. The person will have this attitude if you're mutually friendly and if he believes you're sincere and willing to help.

Get everyone concerned into the discussion. Remember the husband, wife, children, and hired help may have influence.

Find a place where it's easy to talk. If you're discussing the hen house, to it. If the kitchen is the subject--go to it. If the subject is financial, spread out books and accounts on a table.

People are more likely to listen if you talk about their basic desires -- security, response, recognition, and new experience. Above all, listen carefully, sympathetically! Don't come to conclusions until the facts are in.

Step Three--Find the General Problem

Finding the general problem isn't always the third step in a visit. In an emergency situation it may be the first and you can jump right in. In this step, it's a good idea to bring out the importance of the problem and the fact that it's widespread. Then the person realizes that he's not alone in this problem. Make your point and get on, showing the stake the person has in the situation.

Step Four--Get to the Specific Problem

First, if you're considering a problem, ask questions about it and encourage the person to

talk about it. Sometimes he'll talk himself right into an answer.

Next, identify and analyze the precise problem and get agreement that it is a problem. Then analyze the problem to find the causes. Involve the person, moving him along so that he arrives at the causes with you. Good questions stimulate thinking.

If the person seems to be holding back, rephrase the statements into questions that will help reveal the obstacle.

Step Five--Consider the Solution

Here you should consider the alternative solutions, if they exist, with the person.

Study the probable consequences of each solution in terms of advantages and disadvantages. Move slowly, making very sure the person understands. Sometimes you'll help him select one of the best solutions based on his own or neighbors' experiences, research findings, and his values.

Step Six--Get a Commitment



The person and his family have to make the final decision. Don't pressure them--it may result in verbal agreement but no action. Often the degree of decision varies:

"I'll think it over" is a very mild degree. "I'll call the vet tomorrow to check over my herd" is a far more advanced degree of decision. If the degree of decision is not great, suggest something which may move him further along.

Get specific understanding of precisely what the person is to do and what you are to do.

Step Seven--Appraise and Follow Up

The visit is costly in time and money. You can get full value only if you follow up on the commitment. Did the person do what he said he would? What can you do if he didn't? Did the change work out as planned? If not, why not?

Your follow up may also further learning. You might put the person on a special training list for material or meeting announcements, or for future calls. Or you might get him interested in a special group dealing with the problem.

These are the general steps to better visits. You are the best judge of how they can be adapted.