

Making Time by Using it Well

A Massachusetts Boston Mission Case Study

"President, we're frustrated at how little support our ward's leaders give to the missionaries," complained Elder Eddie Matthews in his interview with Pres. Ralph Mantle of the Cambridge Massachusetts Mission after a recent zone conference. "Sometimes Bishop Boyer asks us not to attend PEC. And when he lets us attend he only gives us left-overs. Last Sunday in Ward Council, for example, they went through everything else in the ward first and we barely got three minutes at the end to go over our investigators."

"That's surprising," President Mantle responded. "Whenever we talk Bishop Boyer *sounds* like his heart is in missionary work. The Everett Ward isn't the garden spot of the mission, but they've always baptized regularly. Have you talked with Bishop Boyer about this?" When Elder Matthews confessed that he had not, President Mantle urged him to do so. "And I'll talk to the stake president again to see if he can convince Bishop Boyer to give you more time."

The next Sunday after PEC Elder Matthews pulled Bishop Boyer aside. "Bishop, it seems like missionary work is always the last thing on the agenda in these meetings. Today, for example, the discussions about improving home teaching and how to improve the quality of sacrament meetings took all the time. Can't missionary work can get a higher priority?"

Bishop Boyer replied, "I'm sorry, Elder Matthews. The Stake President and I have talked about this. Missionary work really is a priority. But there are so many other problems of crisis proportions that the other leaders bring into these meetings, we always end up taking the time to cover them. Let's do this: From now on let's put missionary work first on the agenda. I promise that we will always give a minimum of 10 minutes to you. And we'll take more time when necessary. This way, missionary work will crowd the other things off the agenda, not *vice versa*."

"Sounds great to me, Bishop." Elder Matthews said. "Thanks for being so responsive!"

At the next Ward Council meeting Bishop Boyer opened by asking, "Elders, you're first. Tell us who you're teaching, and how we can help."

Elder Matthews's companion, Elder Joseph Adcock, took the lead by saying, "Well, things are slow right now. We just have two investigators. One is Phil Rizzuto, who lives in the Little Italy neighborhood. We just taught him the third lesson last Friday. The other is Tony, who has been cutting the missionaries' hair for years. We teach him in his barber shop in late morning when he doesn't have customers. We're excited about both of them, but we haven't been able to get either one to commit to come to church."

"What's Tony's last name?" Bishop Boyer asked. "Can you tell us more about him?"

"I guess I don't even know his last name. We've always just called him Tony," Elder Adcock confessed. "You know it, don't you?" he asked his senior companion.

When Elder Matthews replied that he didn't, Bishop Boyer asked, "Are the members helping you teach these guys?"

"You bet," Elder Matthews replied. "I wish every ward had a member like Bill Dickey. Because he's retired he basically can go with us anytime of the day or night. So he's helping us teach both of these men."

"Anything else, Elders?" Bishop Boyer asked. "No," Elder Adcock said. "That's about it."

"Wow – that was easy. Three minutes! Thanks elders!" Bishop Boyer concluded, and then guided the discussion to other topics on his agenda.

Learning to Use Time Productively

The next Saturday morning, Elders Matthews and Adcock joined three ward missionaries in the home of ward mission leader Bobby Richardson for their weekly correlation meeting. A ward missionary, Eileen Stock, had been assigned to lead a discussion about Section 2 of the booklet "Leading a Great Ward Mission," whose topic is how to keep new members strong and active. Eileen began, "There are some scary numbers here. It says that in New England if someone is baptized 'singly,' meaning that she is the only person in her living environment who is trying to live the gospel, the probability that she will remain active in the church is only 8%. But if someone is baptized into a living environment where there are other people who also are trying to live the gospel, the probability of remaining active is 85%! Here's why: New members need friends, responsibility, and nourishment in the good word of God. But it's not just *any* friends. They need *friends at home*, because *that's* where new members make the decisions that lead to continued activity or to inactivity. Home is where they decide to sleep in instead of going to church. It's where they decide to take up the same old habits with the same old friends. It's an amazing statistic. If converts have friends, roommates, or family members at home who also are trying to live the gospel, the probability that they will stay active is literally 10 times higher than if there are none of these kinds of people at home!" Eileen concluded.

"Does that mean we should stop teaching individual people?" asked Elston Howard, another of the ward missionaries.

"No," Eileen responded. "If people want to join individually, of course we baptize them. What we need to do differently, however, is that when the missionaries begin teaching someone individually – like they're teaching Phil Rizzuto and Tony what's-his-name – our job in this meeting, and the job in PEC and Ward Council meetings, is to figure out how we can help the missionaries to teach friends and family members who are in the living environment of the investigator. It literally is an eternal life-and-death challenge. Can you imagine how differently members would think of missionary work if 85% of new members became strong and remained committed to the gospel?"

"I had always felt the reason for trying to teach the friends and family members of current investigators was to find more investigators – and that's true," Bobby Richardson observed. "But this is the difference between near-certain inactivity, and near-certain activity after baptism!"

Elders, assuming you don't know anything more about Tony if you don't know his last name, tell us about Phil Rizzuto. Is he married? Does he have children?"

"I think the answer is no to both. He lives in a small apartment, and he's always been alone," Elder Matthews responded. "He's about 45 or so."

"Do you know anything about his extended family – any siblings or parents living in the area?" Elston Howard asked. When Elder Adcock replied that they didn't, Brother Howard continued, "What can you tell us about his employment? And does he have any hobbies?"

"He says he's looking for a job right now," Elder Adcock noted.

"Do you know what he did in prior jobs – what his profession has been, what sort of job he's looking for, and so on?" Elston continued.

Elder Matthews responded, "I guess we don't know what his prior jobs have been, either. I have no clue if he has any hobbies. If you don't mind my asking, Brother Howard, why are you asking all of these questions? We're so focused on teaching. Knowing these things just hasn't seemed that important. Brother Dickey might know some of this, but we've just not asked."

Bobby Richardson stepped in. "There are two reasons we'd like to know. First, to be good friends we need to find if any members of our ward might have something in common with each investigator. We can't know this if you can't tell us anything about them. And second, based on the statistics Sister Stock has reviewed here, we need to find things that ward members might have in common with *other* people in Fred's living environment – siblings, parents, children, roommates, close friends – so that we can help you begin teaching some of these people. Remember: if we just baptize Phil there's only an 8% chance that he'll stay active. The more you can tell us about Phil and his friends, family, work, hobbies, etc., the better we'll be able to find the right connections."

Would the Real Phil Rizzuto Please Stand Up?

At their meeting with Phil Rizzuto later that Saturday, Elder Adcock began, "Phil, in our earlier lessons we've taught you what we believe. We'd like to start today by explaining what our church is *like*. It isn't the type where people walk in, hear a priest deliver a sermon, take communion, and walk out. We don't pay professional ministers to teach and take care of us. The members teach and care for each other. It's really neat – it's like you belong to a big family where everyone takes care of everyone. We've started to tell some people at church what a good man you are, and they keep asking us questions about you that we just don't know how to answer. Would you mind telling us a bit about yourself?"

"There's a lot to say – I'm older than you," Phil answered. "What do you want to know?"

"Well, just begin at the beginning, Phil," Elder Matthews encouraged. "Where were you born? Tell us about your parents and siblings. Where did you go to school? What jobs have you had? Do you have children? Were you raised in any particular religious tradition?"

Phil was a man of few words so the Elders had to prod him to keep talking. But he ultimately did, and this is what they learned about Phil Rizzuto. He was raised in the North End of Boston, in a quintessentially Italian Catholic family. His parents had emigrated from southern Italy in 1946. His dad ran a butcher shop on the ground floor of the building where they lived. Phil was the fifth of six children, all of whom helped out in their dad's shop. Phil was 50 years old. He played shortstop on the state champion baseball team of Dom Savio High, the Catholic school he had attended. After a stint in the Navy, Phil had married Ruth, whom he had known in high school. They had bought a home in Everett, another Italian-American community north of Boston, where Phil had opened a butcher shop that sold specialty meats and cheeses imported from Europe. He and Ruth had two daughters, Maria and Jessica, who went to Everett High and a son, Lou, in 7th grade who loved to ski. "Funny," Phil reflected. "Lou wants to ski on the Olympic team, and I'm scared to death of skiing. His name is Lou Gehrig Rizzuto, but he's not into baseball."

Phil's business had turned down when a huge supermarket with a large deli department had opened a block away. He and Ruth had taken a second mortgage on their home in hopes that the business would rebound, but it didn't. They lost their home, and the stress it created led to their divorce a year ago. Phil had cried when he spoke of how much he missed his children, who lived with their mother in an apartment in Everett, about a mile away. "So here I am," Phil summarized. "No job, no money, no car, no family, living on unemployment. Who ever imagined this is where I'd end up?"

At Ward Council meeting the next day, Bishop Boyer again gave missionary work the opening time slot. Bobby Richardson took the first few minutes reviewing the statistics of 8% vs. 85% that Eileen Stock had explained in coordination meeting the prior day. He then turned the time to Elder Matthews, who explained all of what they had learned about Phil Rizzuto. As soon as he had finished, Del Crandall, the Elders Quorum President, spoke. "This is truly funny. My neighbor, Frank Torre, is assistant manager of that supermarket that put Phil out of business. I've been trying to find a way to invite Frank to learn about the church, but nothing so far has clicked. Elders, could you and Phil come to our place for dinner? If I ask Frank to come and to help me help Phil get a job, he'll be able to see how Mormons all work to help each other. And who knows? Maybe Frank might have an opening in the Deli of his store!" Brother Crandall and the Elders agreed to find a time for this dinner.

Lew Burdette, the Young Men's president, spoke next. "The Scouts are planning a ski trip to Nashoba Valley in three weeks. We'd love to have Lou come with us. Maybe he could teach the younger scouts how to ski. Plus, we're looking for one more adult to drive. If you'll introduce me to Phil, I'd like to ask him to help us, and I'll ask him to bring Lou along."

"That's a problem," Elder Adcock said. "Phil let his wife keep the family car, and he doesn't have one."

"That's okay," Lew responded. "I'll just let him drive one of ours."

"This is just fantastic," Elder Matthews said gratefully. "Phil said he'd come to church next Sunday, but he has no way to get here. Brother Burdette, Could give him a ride?"

Bishop Boyer interrupted. “Elders, I don’t think that’s the right question. You need to go back to Phil and say, ‘Most of the members have cars, but they’re pretty busy with their own families and giving rides to other people who don’t have cars.’” Bishop Boyer continued, “You need to ask Phil, ‘Do you know somebody who has a car who could bring you to church on Sunday?’ If you frame it that way, you’ll be able to find out who his most supportive friends and family members are. If Phil asks someone to drive him to church, *that’s* the person in Phil’s living environment who we need to baptize along with Phil. That’s where his major support will come from. Can you do this, Elders?”

“Will do, Bishop Boyer,” Elder Adcock pledged.

The Young Women’s president, Becky Derrick, then raised the possibility of organizing a Young Women’s activity that might interest Maria and Jessica Rizzuto. “We have three Laurels who attend Everett High School. I’d bet they know the Rizzuto girls.” After some discussion, however, Becky concluded that the Elders and the three Laurels needed to find more about the hobbies and friends of Maria and Jessica before they could plan something. “Besides,” she said, we need to be careful not to overwhelm Phil.”

After additional discussion Bobby Richardson said. “We have a lot to do. A week ago I thought Phil Rizzuto was just some depressed loner who couldn’t hold down a job. Now that we know something about him, it’s amazing how many links into his life we have! Let me summarize. Del, Frank Torre might take an interest in helping Phil, and you’re going to bring them both to your home. This is great! One of the principles of member missionary work is that if we can enroll our non-member friends and neighbors to serve alongside us while we serve in our callings, they often will feel the spirit, just like we feel the spirit. Sometimes they realize what’s been missing in their lives and want to know more about the church. So I think your idea of idea of enrolling Frank to help Phil, rather than just asking the ward members to find a job for this unemployed butcher, is brilliant. Who knows – maybe when he gets this view of what the Mormon Church is, Frank might become interested.

“Brother Burdette,” Bobby Richardson continued, “The Elders are going to introduce you to Phil. You’re going to ask him to help you drive the scouts – and his son Lou – to ski at Nashoba Valley in three weeks. Right? I don’t ski either, but I’ve taken my kids there. There’s a lot that Phil can do in the Lodge while the scouts are skiing with Lou. You also said you’ll see if Lou can teach the younger scouts how to ski. And Elders, at your next meeting with Phil, you’re going to explore whether there is anyone that Phil could ask to bring him to church next Sunday. In our next meeting we’ll need to hatch a plan to help you begin teaching the person who gives Phil a ride – because having someone like that get baptized along with Phil will be key to keeping Phil active in the church.”

“This was a great discussion,” Bishop Boyer said. “But just looking at my watch, this has taken 20 minutes and we’ve not even talked about Tony-the-barber. Elder Matthews, would you mind if we pushed that discussion into your correlation meeting next Saturday? We just have some other things we need to cover in this meeting.”

“No problem, Bishop Boyer,” Elder Matthews agreed. “We can do that. But just FYI, you don’t need to call him Tony the barber any more. It’s Kubek – Tony Kubek – and his is an interesting story, too. Sorry we’ve been so uninformed about our own investigators!”

There’s More to Tony Kubekian than We’d Thought!

At Missionary Correlation Meeting the next Saturday, Bobby Richardson began by reviewing what had been decided in ward council about how the members would work to involve Phil Rizzuto and his son Lou in the scouts’ upcoming ski trip – and on the link between Del Crandall’s neighbor Frank Torre, and Phil’s profession as a meat cutter. Then he continued, “So now Elders, tell us more about Tony – not Tony-the-barber, but Tony *Kubek*.”

“It’s a very different story,” Elder Adcock volunteered. “His real name is Tony Kubekian – he’s Armenian, but speaks great English. But he drops the *ian* because he thinks Kubek sounds more American. Turns out he’s married – his wife works for her cousin, a rug merchant, cleaning oriental rugs. They’re about 50, but have never had children. They came to America 20 years ago when the old Soviet Union collapsed. We’ve never met Mrs. Kubek, but Tony says they’re both atheists, for two reasons. First, that’s what he was taught in school. And second, they can’t believe that there is a God who would have allowed the Ottoman Turks to kill 2 million Armenians. Gosh, I never even knew that there *was* an Armenian genocide – and Tony said that’s a part of the problem. Everyone in America knows Hitler killed millions of Jews, but nobody knows that the Turks killed millions of Armenians. Tony says that he’s been letting us teach him because he has time in the middle of the day, and he’s curious why so many Americans actually believe in God when there is so much cruelty in the world.”

“We’d love your advice,” Elder Matthews continued. “Is there any way to get them to become more interested? Or should we just quit teaching Tony? We’ve tried to explain the purpose of life to him, and that God needs to allow suffering and evil in order for us to know happiness and choose the right. But he’s not convinced.”

“I have advice on that question,” Elston Howard interrupted. “You can’t convince him of that doctrine. The only way is for him to convince himself. You know how *Preach My Gospel* teaches you to choose questions, find answers to your own questions in the scriptures, and then prayerfully synthesize your own answers to your questions in a few paragraphs in your scripture study journal? They tell you to study in that way because they want you to read, ponder, and pray. Same thing applies to Tony Kubek. You can’t convince a 50 year-old man with that background that he’s wrong and you’re right. He’s got to convince himself, and then have the Holy Ghost testify to him that his new conclusion is right. So give him a homework assignment – to read 2 Nephi 2; then write a two-paragraph essay around the question, “Why does a loving God allow his children to suffer;” and then to pray to know if what he wrote is true. If he’s not willing to get an answer to his own question, then you should stop teaching him – because you’re wasting your time.”

“And I have an idea,” continued stake missionary Eileen Stock. “I’ve always dreamed of having a nice oriental rug in our home. I’ve been slowly saving to buy one, but haven’t had enough to buy one. But we’re close – and I bet there are eight to ten other women in the ward in the same position. We want to have one of those rugs, but we don’t even know how to go about

buying and caring for one. Do you think that Mrs. Kubek and her cousin could conduct a “seminar” on buying and caring for oriental rugs at his shop? I could work with her to plan it, and we could do it in a way that helped us become friends. I’ll invite the other women. Maybe if Mrs. Kubek sees we all have this in common with her, you could start teaching both of them in their home instead of just teaching Tony in his shop.”

“Fantastic idea, Sister Stock,” Elder Matthews responded. “Now you’re going to ask me what Mrs. Kubek’s first name is, and my answer is that it is *not* Mrs. Kubek. I forgot to ask!”

Progressing Names? Or Progressing People?

“Elders, could I just make one suggestion before we move on?” asked Bobby Richardson. “It may just be me. But I really don’t get much out of these progressing investigator lists that we go over in every meeting. It’s just a bunch of names on a sheet of paper, and I never know what to do with the names. Finally, I feel like I almost know this Phil Rizzuto guy, and I see how we can help you bring him into the church. And now that we know about Tony and his wife we can help you. We can help you bring *people* into the church. But we’re not good and bringing first names into the church.

“I have an idea,” Bobby continued. “We have an extra digital camera. What if we give this to the ward mission as the official investigator camera? Elders, when an investigator qualifies to be on the progressing investigator list, just take a picture of him. Drop the camera by my house every Friday evening. My son is good at this stuff. I’ll have him create a version of this progressing investigator form in our computer, but we’ll make a prominent place for the investigator’s photo as well. If we have their photos when we talked about them in this meeting and in PEC and Ward Council, these investigators would be real to us – not just names on a list. These discussions about Phil Rizzuto and Tony Kubek have been great. Now – if I had their pictures in my mind – and better still, photos of friends and family – I could be thinking all week about how we can help you bring these real people into the church.”

“Gosh, I wish I’d have thought of that!” Elder Adcock responded. “We’ll do it!”

An Assignment for Zone Conference

Two weeks later, President Mantle saw Elders Matthews and Adcock in the foyer of the Everett chapel and asked for a report on their progress in getting the PEC and Ward Council to give adequate time to missionary work during their meetings.

“It’s been a total about-face,” Elder Matthews enthused. “All of a sudden, it seems like the whole ward council is excited about missionary work. Do you remember this Phil Rizzuto that we’ve been teaching? Now we’re teaching his brother, who we met when Phil asked his brother to give him a ride to church. Phil’s coming every week. They’ve already called him to be assistant scoutmaster, even though he’s not been baptized – and his son Lou comes to scouts with him every Tuesday. Brother Crandall’s neighbor is trying to get Lou a job in the deli department of his supermarket, and it looks like we might begin teaching that neighbor, Frank Torre, too.”

And Sister Stock, one of the stake missionaries, is organizing a class at an Oriental rug shop where the wife of our other investigator, Tony Kubek, works. They've really hit it off – and I bet we can start teaching both of them in their home instead of his barber shop."

"Elders, congratulations," President Mantle responded. "Could you take 15 minutes in zone conference this week to teach the other missionaries what you've done, so that they can learn from your experience?"

"Sure, President," Elder Matthews promised.

That evening while walking to the bus stop, Elder Matthews asked Elder Adcock, "The President told us to tell the zone what we did. I know what we did. But what do you think we should *learn* from what we've done? We need to start preparing this lesson right now!"