

"Don't Wear out Your Welcome"

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Theme: Leave people wanting more of you not less.

Text: Proverbs 25:17

Here's a thought: Benjamin Franklin famously said that guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.

Open with "What About Bob?" (Original Trailer) at www.youtube.com/watch?v=54kT8uYTbhE. The one who posted this claims it was the original trailer but I seriously doubt it.

"What About Bob?" is a 1991 American comedy film directed by Frank Oz, and starring Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss. Murray plays Bob Wiley, a psychiatric patient who follows his egotistical psychiatrist, Dr. Leo Marvin, on vacation. The story is an exaggerated example of what can happen when someone wears out their welcome.

The Bible is so practical and relational! Solomon offers great advice in Proverbs 25:17, "Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house - too much of you, and he will hate you." NIV

Let's check with The New Living Translation on Proverbs 25:17, "Don't visit your neighbors too often, or you will wear out your welcome."

Your appearance can bring:

Dread

or

Delight

Dread



Whether you talk, borrow money or just hang around too much, people will start to avoid you and dread your company. You don't want to stay too late and have your hosts wondering, "Oh man, how am I going to rid of him?" This awkwardness erodes the respect you want to show toward others and the respect you want them to have toward you.

Too much of a good thing can turn into a bad thing. Have you ever stayed at an all-inclusive resort or gone on a cruise? The first few visits to the buffet are amazing! You are in awe of the variety and volume of foods offered. After a while, though, the novelty wears off and everything starts to look and taste the same.

If you call or text people too much or if you show up at their house too frequently they will start to wonder if you have a life. Maybe you don't have a life, so if this is the case it's time to get a life!

I remember a guy who would spend a lot of time – *too much* time – at our house when I was growing up. He just didn't seem to know when to leave and now I realize there wasn't much for him at home because his family was quite nasty to him. I actually liked Lester but I felt sorry for him.

What are some signs you have worn out your welcome (from www.hubpages.com/entertainment/Signs-That-You-May-Have-Worn-Out-Your-Welcome)? It might be time for you to leave if:

- They ask you if you would rather leave by taxi or by ambulance.
- They ask you to do them a favour and take out the trash for them and, once you're outside, they lock you out.
- They pay a family member of yours to call you and tell you that they are in the hospital. Can you come right away?
- Four large guys throw you outside.

I learned from an excellent mentor years ago that hospital visits should be short and sweet. Some patients might be lonely but most of them are uncomfortable and in need of rest. We want to be a blessing to sick people. Surely we want to be a blessing to healthy people too!

The principle we are talking about refers not only to our visits in someone

else's space but to our words in someone else's ears. "Less is more" certainly applies to our verbiage. If we want our words to have more impact with the Lord and with people, there should be fewer rather than extra (Proverbs 17:27-28). Indulge yourself in lengthy monologues and watch people's reactions: anywhere from glazed eyes, yawns or downright avoidance when they see your name on Caller ID or see you enter a room.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:7-8:

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. NIV

Brenda and I were staying at a pastor's house in Zambia in August 2016 when one night we were kept awake by the neighbour praying very loudly for hours. We talked about this with our host the next morning and he explained that he tried to talk with his neighbour about prayer like this and how it affects the people around him. However, the behaviour continues because he – and many other well-meaning believers – think that the Lord is somehow impressed by our many words. Prayer – like any conversation – should consist of some talking and plenty of listening.

James 1:19 gets right to the point: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry ..." NIV

Someone has said, "An expert is a person who lives 50 miles away." In other words, familiarity breeds contempt. The more you are around people the more they can take you for granted. They tend to see more of your ordinary characteristics and to overlook your extraordinary ones.

Even Jesus found this to be true in Mark 6:1-6:

1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown [Nazareth], accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! 3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith. NIV

I used to receive phone calls from someone who has the gift of the gab. Whenever I saw his name on our Caller ID I knew it would be a long

conversation. I started to ask myself before I answered the phone, “Do I have time for a long conversation? When was the last time we talked?” Let yourself off the hook: You don’t have to answer the phone every time it rings. You can decide how frequently you talk - or listen - to someone.



You can become an unwanted guest even in the home of your closest family and friends if you wear out your welcome. Shawn M. Burn explains in “The Trouble with Houseguests - Why houseguests, like fish, smell after three days” in Psychology Today (www.psychologytoday.com/blog/presence-mind/201307/the-trouble-houseguests):

Benjamin Franklin famously said that guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days. Many of us are inclined to agree.

At the heart of the matter is that houseguests temporarily set up their personal shop in another’s primary territory. In contrast to secondary territories (like workplaces) and public territories (like stores), this is typically a cherished, personal territory where inhabitants have a high degree of personal control over an extended period of time. This, in combination with predictable routines, norms, and roles, reduces stress and makes our homes secure, restorative environments requiring little adaptive energy.

Houseguests then, are stressful to the extent that they disrupt our routines and usurp the high amount of control we normally enjoy in this personal territory. If their routines interfere with ours or if their presence restricts our normal uses of home spaces, stress is likely. Maybe Ben was right; a few days we can tolerate, but stress builds as visits go on. Anxiety-prone hosts in particular may become stressed by disruptions in their routines and loss of control over personal spaces.

Primary territories also differ from other territories because their occupants feel a sense of ownership (i.e., “This is my home and my stuff”). When guests invade our territory by roaming too freely throughout our home or touching our personal items, when they contaminate our territory by leaving their stuff around or not cleaning up after themselves, or when they create resource shortages by snarfing our

food or using all the hot water, we naturally experience this as a territorial invasion and react defensively.

Of course, territoriality isn't the whole picture. Among other things, increased household labor also makes guests "smelly" (often more of an issue for women in traditionally gendered households where they bear the brunt of cooking and cleaning). The moral of this story: if you want to stay a welcome houseguest, it probably pays to respect your host's home as a primary territory, and to keep your visit short.

Unfortunately, not everyone respects boundaries so our efforts to establish them will define our relationships. However, Jesus teaches us to do to others as we would have them do to us (Luke 6:31). Let's begin by modelling for others how we would want them to treat us.

Do you sense that people's shoulders drop or their eyes light up when they see you? Why is this?

Your appearance can bring:

Dread

or

Delight



Absence makes the heart grow fonder. This doesn't mean that you need to stay away from people for extended periods of time to make them appreciate you, but it can help to give people space. Good relationships are like healthy lungs – they expand and contract. No one wants to be around someone who is smothering and nosy, but people *do* want to be around someone who is attractive and inviting.

I would suggest that you set a time limit when you visit someone and stick to it. This time limit might be just in your head or it might be something you discuss with your host or with the person you are meeting upfront.

What are some more signs you have worn out your welcome? It might be time for you to leave if:

- They start a game of hide-and-go-seek, but nobody ever comes to find you.

- They begin to make up horrible stories about awful things you did that are only half true.
- They suggest that you participate in a demonstration of their Doberman's ability to subdue a person.
- Everyone else is already gone and your hosts are asleep.

Even Jesus was not always available. I am not encouraging you to be antisocial but I would exhort you to play a little bit hard to get sometimes. I learned way back in elementary school that the more desperate a guy or girl appears the less attractive they become. Treat yourself with enough respect that you don't let anyone take you, your availability, your help and your words for granted.

The Apostle Paul advised in Titus 2:15, "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you." NIV

Paul told his protégé in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." NIV

When I phone someone I often ask, "Is this is a good time to talk?"

I have told our kids over the years, "Leave people wanting more of you not less." Would you like to depart with people wishing you would stay longer or with people muttering to themselves, "Here's your hat what's your hurry?"

How do you close a conversation when your time or patience is limited? Healthy relationships include respect and honesty that flow both ways. I have surrendered the "steering wheel" of conversations too many times so I am learning to establish boundaries by how frequently and how long I will talk with someone who wants to "drive". One little trick I use before I add another comment to the conversation is to interject, "I will have to go soon." This gives the other person fair warning that the end is near.

What boundaries would *you* like to establish with people who visit you or call you? Will you apply these same boundaries to *yourself* when *you* visit or call someone?

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