

Impact Church, Atlanta

Demonstrate Vision in Relevant Ways by Olu Brown and Edwin Turnipseed

Perhaps one of the greatest vision moments was “Impact Giving Back.” Early on, we decided that it would be important for Impact to give back ten percent of our receipts to the community and model what we were asking others to do.

We both feel that Impact Giving Back has probably contributed to most of our “success” — whatever you call success in church planting. The concept was developed even before we had our first worship service. It was part of our DNA.

Impact Giving Back started as a very basic way of saying we want to make sure that no matter what happens in the community, we want to be a part of it — including financially. We also seek to give more than we take in our community. Impact seeks to be relevant to the community that it is serving.

Brown Middle School is located in the heart of the West End community of Atlanta. We talked about being partners with key stakeholders; and so we asked, “Why not here?” We took \$8,000 and got a directory of all the staff, the teachers, the principals, the para-professionals, the custodians and the cafeteria workers. We even took down names of folks involved in staffing specific projects. The final list included 80 people. We decided to give \$1,000 to the school and divide the remaining \$7,000 among the list of 80 people as gift cards.

We made this contribution at a time when monetary assistance was least expected — not at the beginning of the school year or around the holidays. It was right about the time when they were getting ready to do their standardized graduation tests. At that time teacher morale can be down and stress high. We walked into the school building and presented the principal with the \$1,000 check — not in any formal ceremony, we just walked in and presented the check. She was in a meeting and came out to accept it. She was excited about it, but obviously it wasn't the first time they'd been given money by a church. The principal was in a rush to get back to the meeting, so we asked the receptionist to give a bag to her. In the bag were the 80 gift cards with \$87 loaded on each card.

We got an email from the principal a couple of days later. She was overwhelmingly grateful and said, “We've never been able to give our staff or faculty anything like this before. How are we supposed to give it?” We reaffirmed the purpose of our donation: she got to decide how to distribute the gift cards as long as she made sure that everybody received one.

This is an example of how we intentionally focused on giving, not on receiving credit for the gift. We did not need applause. We did not need attention or a formal ceremony that was focused on our gifts.

We wanted all the staff and support folks to understand our purpose. We just wanted to tangibly convey, “Impact appreciates you and supports your efforts to educate the students!”

This is in line with our goal to attempt to give back at least 10% of what we were blessed with. We feel like we have been blessed because we have been able and willing to bless so many people.

We remember sharing the good news with the Impact congregation. We felt like we were on top of the world because we were showing people how to vision big and to give big. We were not holding anything back for the Kingdom. We were out of the box going 400 mph with no brakes or emergency off switch.

Excerpt from *Zero to 80: Innovative Ideas for Planting and Accelerating Church Growth* by Olu Brown, Impact Press, 2010, pages 35–37. Used by permission.

