

20 Characteristics of the Exhorter

The teacher aims for your head; the exhorter aims for your heart. It is not so much the content that the exhorter wants to impart as how that content can be made effective in peoples' lives.

Every one of the gifts can teach, but the exhorter makes the most interesting and palatable teacher. All of their efforts are geared toward edifying and encouraging other people. We could have called this person the encourager. In fact, the Greek word *paraklesis* means "a calling to one's side to aid" denoting both exhortation and encouragement.

1. Loves to encourage others to live up to their full potential.

The exhorter wants everyone to have a full, meaningful life. Exhorters are builders of people. They want to help people live up to their full potential. Their greatest joy is being an instrument to help another to live victoriously.

2. Wants a visible response when teaching or speaking.

Interaction with their hearers is essential for exhorters. They watch expressions on people's faces, listen for reactions and analyze language. They need to know that they're *really* communicating. The most frustrating experience for the exhorter is to share something of value with a person and then find out he or she wasn't listening.

3. Prefers to apply truth rather than research it.

Research is not the exhorter's cup of tea. He or she avoids it if at all possible. "Why reinvent the wheel?" they will ask. "If someone else has put together materials on a subject, let's use what's available: It's putting truth to work that the teacher is interested in.

4. Prefers the kind of information that has practical application(s).

Exhorters are "how-to" people. They also like to read books that focus on practical application. They prefer sermons that reveal how to apply Christian principles to everyday life. Conversely, they do not like abstract books or sermons.

Exhorters love to hear other exhorters teach. "Wow! What great teaching," they will say when someone emphasizes the practicality of a principle. On the other hand, they will not be too thrilled at teaching for teaching's sake. Too much *fact* and not enough *act* is, in their estimation, like overloading circuits that have no outlet.

5. Loves to prescribe precise steps of action to aid personal growth.

Exhorters love to give specific steps for people to follow. They know how to instruct others to get from point A to point C in the best possible way. It's all part of their incredible ability to give constructive and helpful advice.

6. Focuses on working with people.

Exhorters are *people* people. They are not interested in working with things or systems or abstract ideas. They love to be around people, doing things with people or for them.

7. Encourages others to develop In their personal ministries.

Exhorters want everyone to develop a full and fruitful ministry. They understand well the concept of the Body of Christ with each member functioning to the benefit of the others. They want this ideal realized in practice.

8. Finds truth in experience and then validates it with Scripture.

Life is so full of lessons and insights to exhorters. That's where they primarily learn. Then they check the Bible to see what it has to say on the subject. They're always glad to find "it's in the Bible, too!" Exhorters discover truth by finding out experientially that something "works".

9. Loves to do personal counseling.

Of all the seven motivational gifts, exhorters are the ones most gifted in and frequently drawn to counseling. They are naturals for it. We have talked with dozens of exhorters who tell us that even in their high school days other students sought them out for counsel. People sense their ability, their caring concern, their interest in helping and their approachability. One of the most helpful qualities of counselors is the ability to be transparent about their own problems and how they have worked through (or are working through) them. The counselee easily identifies with such a person: "Well, if she's been through this and overcome it, maybe I can, too"

Exhorters have this ability. They are the first ones to admit that they are not perfect, but just another person "on the way" It is easy for them to admit their sins and sorrows, their pains and pitfalls.

10. Will discontinue personal counseling if no effort to change is seen.

While exhorters are not prone to quitting, there is one situation that will make

them give up and move on. If a counselee refuses to implement his or her advice the exhorter may say something like: "I cannot counsel you any further until you have put into action those things we've already agreed on;" or "If you cannot follow my advice, I cannot help you" or "Look, both your time and my time are being wasted until you are ready to change"

Exhorters realize that their success rests not so much on how much they know or how experienced they are, but rather on how far the counselee is willing to act on the advice given. Without such action the exhorter will feel that his or her efforts are like shoveling against the tide – useless. Exhorters want to make their time and effort count, so they will move on to someone who will act on their advice.

11. Is fluent in communication.

Exhorters are the mouth of the body, with the greatest facility in speech of any of the gifts. One of our biblical examples, Peter, was a fluent communicator. Perhaps that's why he was so often the spokesman for the disciples.

An exhorter friend told us, "My greatest joy has always been to express encouragement to others. If I had no voice, I'd probably write prolific letters or emails".

12. Views trials as opportunities to produce personal growth.

Exhorters unquestioningly believe Romans 8:28: *"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (KJV).

They also refuse to accept the word impossible, preferring to believe what the angel said: *"For with God nothing shall be impossible"* (Luke 1:37, KJV); and Jesus' words: *"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ... nothing shall be impossible unto you"* (Matthew 17:20, KJV).

Exhorters see opportunities, not obstacles. Challenges, not trials. Possibilities, not problems.

13. Accepts people as they are without judging them.

While perceivers see people as either in the will of God or out of the will of God-with nothing in between-exhorters are just the opposite. They don't see extremes at all-only a vast gray area where everyone is somewhere along the way. No one has arrived. No one is a complete failure. But everyone is at that point in life where a few well-chosen steps will bring him or her that much closer to God's will.

Therefore, the exhorter does not see any need to judge people for where they are-or are not-but rather sees the need to help them take those steps in the right direction. It is this nonjudgmental attitude that enables him or her to help people so much.

14. Is well liked because of his or her positive attitude.

There is an old song that goes, "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with Mister In-Between." It must have been written by an exhorter. They are so positive.

Because of this other people like to be around them. Someone has said you draw more bees with honey than with vinegar. So, the exhorter draws people to him or her just by being optimistic and positive.

15. Prefers to witness with his or her life rather than verbal witnessing.

While exhorters can witness verbally (and they do), they believe they must *live* the Christian life in order to be credible. "We need to walk our talk" one exhorter said candidly. To them faith must be demonstrated in practical ways in daily life. They love the book of James, especially these verses from chapter two:

*"But someone **will** say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do . . . You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is use- less? . . . You see that his [Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did . . . As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."* (James 2:18-26, NIV)

Exhorters believe that it is not enough to know the *logos*-the written Word-but that it is essential to live the *rhema*-the living Word of God. The truth of the Bible must become flesh-in them, here and now. One exhorter says, "I can only teach or witness to that which I've appropriated in my *own* life. If my life is witness, then others will want what I've found-Jesus Christ."

16. Makes decisions easily.

Decision making comes naturally and easily to most exhorters. For them life is too short to be indecisive. They are action people. They make their decisions based on what they know at the time. *Let's decide and get on with it*, their thinking goes. If more information is needed, they figure it will come.

"If I'm wrong in a decision." Exhorters say, "God will correct me. I'm confident in that. I don't mind being corrected. It's better to move ahead and get something accomplished, even if I have to make adjustments later on, than to be paralyzed by indecision."

Since exhorters are such practical people and so life-related in all that they do, we find that their decisions are usually right on target.

17. Always completes what is started.

Similar to the serving gift the exhorter does not like unfinished work or uncompleted projects. They finish the letters they start, they work overtime to complete assignments at the office or they burn the midnight oil to complete a Bible study assignment.

18. Wants to clear up conflicts with others quickly.

Exhorters do not like strained relationships. They go immediately to the other person to find out what's wrong. If necessary, they will even take the blame in order to build the bridge to a restored relationship.

19. Expects a lot of self and others.

Exhorters feel that very few people, including themselves, live up to their potential. "I expect a lot of myself," they say, "and I guess that keeps me motivated to accomplish more. God has equipped all of us so abundantly. Often we don't recognize this. "If we set low goals, that's all we'll ever accomplish. If we set higher goals, we'll grow. Often I can see potential in others that they don't see themselves. I enjoy encouraging them to stretch."

Each of us has a comfort zone, an area within which we can operate without being challenged. It's easy just to stay there. The exhorter doesn't believe that's God's perfect will for us. He believes God wants us to venture out into the unknown and do things we didn't think we could.

20. Needs a "sounding board" for bouncing off ideas and thoughts.

Exhorters need people in their lives that can be sounding boards. You see, exhorters often think with their mouths. They like to verbalize a thought aloud so they can hear how it sounds. It's as though they're trying an idea on for size to see if it fits. They can then do their own analyzing. A sounding board is basically passive. While it's common for a married exhorter to use his or her mate for a sounding board, sometimes it is a close friend. Single exhorters rely on friends, relatives, classmates, teachers and sometimes whoever is available at the moment.

Problems of the Exhorter

Exhorters tend to have a "mouth problem" Since God has made them the mouth of the Body of Christ, they use it a lot, either for good- encouraging others-or in negative ways, as we will examine now.

1. Tends to interrupt others in eagerness to give opinions or advice.

Exhorters have much to say. And, normally, that is not a problem. But when there is an ongoing interchange of conversation, or any kind of structured meeting going on, the exhorter's tendency to interrupt can be a source of frustration for others.

2. Will use Scriptures out of context in order to make a point.

The exhorter believes it is the point he or she is making that is important. In his or her mind, verifying it with Scripture is secondary. Of those who hear the exhorter, many will not bother to check out the proof text. Not so the teachers and the perceivers. They'll check it out and if the Scripture has been used out of context, they may reject the point, or even the one who made the point. They may even try to correct the exhorter.

Exhorters are adaptable. So, if their error is pointed out to them, they'll say, "Okay, if that Scripture doesn't fit, I'll find another one that does."

Exhorters usually have a good sense of humor, too.

3. May be "cut-and-dried" in prescribing steps of action.

Because those with the motivational gift of exhortation are so good at giving advice, they can easily fall into the trap of giving "pat" answers. They may counsel three people in a row with the same basic problem and, after prayer, prescribe the same steps of action. The people are helped. Then along comes the fourth person. Same problem. This time the exhorter doesn't bother to pray about what advice to give since the same counsel worked for the previous three cases. But this time that advice is not what was needed, and therefore is ineffective.

It is very important for the exhorter to consistently rely on the Holy Spirit-the Counselor-for wisdom and guidance in giving advice. Other- wise he or she can develop a cocky I-know-what-to-do-in-every-situation mentality.

4. Is outspokenly opinionated.

Exhorters are always glad to tell you what they think. They are not as rigidly

opinionated as the perceivers or the teachers, but on matters of life application they have strong opinions. That, coupled with the well-oiled jaw, makes opinions spill out readily.

He or she can also be gossipy, bossy, overtalkative and feisty. Actually, as one exhorter put it, "My mouth often runs ahead of my mind."

The exhorter's bossiness stems from the desire to give advice. Exhorters rather enjoy telling others what to do. Someone once said, "Don't answer questions that haven't been asked and don't give advice that hasn't been asked for." The exhorter could benefit from that wisdom.

5. Can become overly self-confident.

In today's world, self-confidence is a sought-after quality. But like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand, it makes a bad foundation. Our basic confidence must be in the Lord. Then, with sober appreciation for the gifts and abilities He has given to us, we can begin to build godly self-confidence.

If you run into any exhorters, you will usually be blessed by them. But if you are still a victim of torrents of verbalization, feel free to request: "Please say that in twenty-five words or less!"