



# SHOPtalk

Mennonite Central Committee Binational Thrift Shop Network Fall 2005

## Inside Shoptalk

2

Network News  
Customer Surveys 2005  
Survey says...

3

Ask Edgar -  
Advice for managers  
Upcoming Events

4

Global Gleanings -  
Help for Sudanese Refugees

5

MCC Ukraine Learning Tour  
Highlights

6

Telephone Etiquette 101  
Ebay Trends

## The Network News



*A front entry sign at Abundant Blessings welcomes customers, lets them know their purchases will benefit MCC and announces the color of sale tags.*

### United States

#### Pennsylvania

*Mifflintown* - Five years ago on November 6, 2000, the Abundant Blessings Thrift Shop opened its doors for business in Juniata County. There are only two stop lights and less than 23,000 people scattered among a dozen and a half communities in the rural mountains of eastern Pennsylvania - an unlikely place for a busy, successful MCC Thrift Shop.

By the opening date, 67 volunteers had signed up through local churches. Today, there are over 120 volunteers from 40 area churches (only 11 are Mennonite or Brethren in Christ.) God has abundantly blessed our shop with donations that arrive from as far away as Delaware and New York, and to everyone's surprise, the mortgage was paid off in two years—well ahead of the three year projection.

*Continued on page two...*

### Canada

#### British Columbia

*Mission* - Damage from a recent, intentionally set fire at this Thrift Shop is worse than initially expected. The entire top floor will have to be gutted and repair done to the walls and floors. Most, if not all the roof will need to be replaced and only a small percentage of the product in the store was able to be saved. Damage is estimated at over \$400,000.

Norma Neufeld, the Provincial Thrift Shop Coordinator, recently received a two dollar coin and a note which indicated the donation was "to help the Mission store get started again." This is just a small indication of the high level of community support experienced by the shop. Volunteers worked hard to clear out store product despite the smoke and very difficult conditions. The store now hopes to re-open in mid-October.



*Volunteers have remained connected to the shop and each other after a fire forced the business to close temporarily in Mission.*

# Customer Survey Report

(based on Spring 2005 survey results)

A brief, one-page survey of customers was conducted in MCC Thrift Shops across North America. In order to encourage more forthright responses, the survey was designed to be administered by a person customers would not recognize as a regular staff member or volunteer.

These results are compiled from a total of 1,000 responses:

## Question 1: How frequently do you visit this shop?

**46% of respondents visit our shops weekly**

**5% of respondents were visiting one of our shops for the first time**

How do we use this information? Frequent shoppers need to have new items to keep them interested and shopping often. The practice of consistent "donation rotation", along with providing superior customer service will help you to accomplish that.

## Question 2: How did you find out about this shop?

**36% of the people surveyed found out about the shop by word of mouth**

**42% were driving or walking by when they discovered the shop**

**1% of shoppers said they were there in response to a flier or newspaper ad**

How do we use this information? Your best advertising is a happy customer. Friendly, efficient service, quality goods and a clean, attractive venue will have customers talking to everyone they meet about your shop. Passers by will be drawn to eye-catching window displays. Investments in these elements will provide a return that print advertising obviously does not.

## Question 3: Can you name the agency supported by this Thrift Shop operation?

The results of this question test the improved MCC education methods being implemented in many shop locations.

**54% of respondents correctly named Mennonite Central Committee**

(up from 39% in 2003)

There is more work to be done in sharing the local and global mission of your shop!

Other interesting information for you:

**86% of shoppers surveyed were female!**

Household goods shoppers edged out those looking for women's clothing by just one percent. The other items most sought after were books and magazines.

Does your shop layout cater to these trends?

**40% responded that the thing they liked the best about the shop was its appearance**

**67% said there was nothing to dislike!**

*Continued from page one ...*

We have a five week, color-coded "donation rotation" system. Items have a shelf life of four weeks at regular price, one week at \$1.00 and then finally they are put on to a 25 cent rack. Our customers love getting the bargains off that rack!

We often hear positive comments about the cleanliness, aroma, music and organization of the shop. Our volunteers are happy to serve "In the Name of Christ" and are amazed at the amount Abundant Blessings is able to donate to MCC from this small, rural community. Since November of 2000, we have been able to give MCC over \$385,000.



*In a newly expanded area of the Mifflintown shop, customers can easily view pictures*

The Ukraine Learning Tour has left a huge impression on my heart, but the biggest one I think, is what I heard one of our Ukrainian friends say; "although we are many miles apart, we are still brothers and sisters working together in the same family, the family of MCC." For us to be able to meet face to face and put the last piece of the puzzle in place, has been a joy and a comfort. Our Thrift Shop goals and mission now have a face and Praise God, it is a smiling one!

—Agatha Fehr, Winkler, MB

# Ask Edgar

by Edgar Stoesz



## Question:

I have been working as a manager in a busy MCC Thrift Shop for just a few months. At times, the work seems overwhelming. How do I figure out where to put most of my energy? Is it always about the “bottom line?”

## Answer:

That was the conclusion of our winter retreat. After some reflection I said to myself, “Really? All about relationships?” I thought it was all about results, about outcomes. Which is it?

Being a nice guy or girl, loved by everyone, doesn’t make an athletic coach secure. Who was it that said “Nice guys finish last?” If their teams don’t win, managers get fired regardless of how nice they are.

Isn’t the same true in the business world? CEOs are judged not by how nice they are but by the bottom line. Did they make money?

Teachers are increasingly expected to put up good numbers. They are evaluated not by how friendly they are, or how many popularity contests they win, but by how their students score on tests. Remember, no child left behind! On and on, we live in a culture that values results. So what is this talk about relationships?

Then I analyzed things at a deeper level. Yes, coaches, CEOs, teachers and almost everyone else is expected to produce good numbers. Results, in other words. Coaches of athletic teams produce good win-loss records not only by how they teach fundamentals but even more by how they motivate their players to put out their best, plus a little. Managers get good results when they create an environment where people gladly give their best effort. The best teachers relate to their students in ways that make learning possible.

So, yes, it is about relationships before it is about results. So how are relationships developed?

Relationship building takes time. It does not happen overnight. Sometimes the best relationships are forged in a crisis.

Relationship building requires trust. You must trust others while proving to yourself to be trustworthy.

Relationship building is based on honesty and reasonable transparency. Superficiality makes it impossible.

Managers! Before it is about results, it is about relationships. Add that to your list of priorities and watch the results improve.

## Doing Good Better Video

Edgar Stoesz has condensed a lifetime of Board service and hundreds of non-profit Board training workshops into a 70 minute video. It is based on the best seller by the same title that he co-authored and covers such basic topics as:

1. **Helping Directors Think as Directors**
2. **Six Duties of a Board**
3. **Effective Meetings**

Though directed to non-profit Boards, many of the principles presented apply also to for-profit or church Boards. This video is highly recommended for Board training and orientation.

**Order your copy today from:**

[www.doinggoodbetter.com](http://www.doinggoodbetter.com) or  
Discount Learning  
P.O. Box 253  
Akron, PA 17501

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## Upcoming Events

**September 19, 2005**

East Coast Regional Workshop in Akron, PA  
“History With Integrity... A Future Worth Celebrating”

**October 10, 2005**

Central States Workshop in N. Newton, KS

**May 3 - 7, 2006**

Canadian Thrift Shop Network Conference  
Waterloo, ON

**May 10 - 12, 2006**

US National Thrift Shop Network Conference  
Welcoming Place, Akron, PA



*Children in Rumbek, southern Sudan, meet for school under a tree because schools were destroyed during the Sudanese civil war. MCC is providing aid for returning refugees in southern Sudan, including school kits. (photo by John Robinson)*

## MCC provides aid for returning Sudanese refugees

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is providing \$990,000 Cdn./\$800,000 U.S. in aid to help resettle refugees who are returning to southern Sudan after a 21-year civil war.

On Jan. 9, 2005, the war ended with a peace agreement between the Sudanese government and former rebels in the south. An estimated 4 million southern Sudanese refugees live in northern Sudan or other countries and are expected to return.

The war left southern Sudan without schools, clinics, paved roads or an adequate food supply. Despite the devastation, an estimated 1,500 refugees are returning daily to southern Sudan, according to the United Nations. Aid organizations are assisting southern Sudanese communities in providing for the basic needs of returnees.

## MCC is appealing for donations of 13,000 school kits by Sept. 30 for children in southern Sudan.

MCC is providing shipments of blankets, clothing, soap and school kits at a total value of \$460,000 Cdn./\$370,000 U.S. for distribution by Norwegian Church Aid in the Eastern Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal regions of southern Sudan. These supplies will be distributed to 5,000 households, or about 25,000 people.

MCC is also providing \$530,000 Cdn./\$430,000 U.S. to fund relief work in Bahr el Ghazal through Church Ecumenical Action in Sudan and the New Sudan Council of Churches. These organizations will distribute plastic sheeting, blankets, mosquito nets, water cans, fishing equipment and cookware to 5,500 households.

With MCC funding, the New Sudan Council of Churches will also train community leaders in peacemaking in Bahr el Ghazal and Western Equatoria to deal with potential conflicts during resettlement.

MCC will continue to provide humanitarian aid to Sudan's Darfur region, where violence against civilians has caused the displacement of more than 2 million people and hundreds of thousands of deaths. MCC is currently planning to ship 3,000 metric tons of wheat for distribution to displaced people in Darfur.



## School Kits are MCC's most requested item.

Find out what items go into a kit and look for a list of drop-off locations at

[www.mcc.org/kits](http://www.mcc.org/kits)

# MCC Thrift Shop Network Learning Tour to Ukraine May 2005 Highlights



(Back row, l - r) John Peters, ON; Betsy, Keith Heavener, PA; Bryan Dyck, ON; Michelle Norman, IN  
(Front row, l - r) Agatha Febr, MB; Donna Baum, PA; Agnes Schmidt, MB; Judy Dyck, ON; Barb Schrag, SD

The Children's Charitable Centre in the industrial city of Zaporozhye, Ukraine hosted our group for over-nights and provided the most delicious, authentically Ukrainian meals during our ten day stay. The centre offered Awana Clubs and other activities for children in a densely populated, low income area of the city. MCC provides an operating grant to make these programs possible.

## From an interview with tour participants:

**Q. What experiences of the tour were the most meaningful and informative for you?**

**A. ... hearing the first hand experiences people shared with us about the struggles of development and the ongoing evidence of corruption.**

... I had no idea that MCC was involved with so many partners in Ukraine (57 in total).

... the people were the highlight for me—both MCC Ukraine staff and the partner organizations; their dedication is a great example.

This has changed my life perspective on many things; it has been an emotional journey—a tour participant



Polina presented her gift of artwork to our group.

At just nine years of age, Polina had already spent almost half of her young life at the House of Hope, a Baptist-run home for about 30 orphaned children in Priazovske. Four years earlier she had been found begging for food at homes in a nearby village. Polina's very young, alcoholic mother was unable to care for her and the identity of her father was unknown. MCC's Global Family sponsors contribute a portion of the operating expenses for this home and this fall, the first MCC-SALT volunteer will be placed here.



A quilt, hand-made by a group of Ontario children, was presented to the children at House of Hope.

Since its opening in April 1997, Good Shepherd Shelter has given help to about 800 homeless children. In this oblast of Donetsk, the government says there are about 15,000 homeless children. Shelter staff estimate the real numbers are three times this. The work of the shelter began with the prayers of a Bible Study group in Makeyevka. MCC provides volunteers and material aid such as comforters, medical supplies and canned beef. We were able to step inside the shipping containers which remain on the shelter's yard for storage of goods.

# Telephone Manners Matter!

—Barb Schrag



When someone calls your Thrift Shop, your only interaction with them is verbal. The first person with whom the caller speaks becomes an ambassador for the entire organization—saying the right things is very important.

Who is calling? The caller could be a potential customer, volunteer or donor who is not familiar with your shop. The first impression they are given will affect their decision to shop, volunteer or donate.

### Telephone Manners Training:

#### 1. Create a standard phone greeting and post it by each telephone in the shop. Sample greeting:

*Good (morning, afternoon, or evening), Your MCC Thrift Shop, \_\_\_\_\_ speaking. What can I do for you today! How can I help you?* Avoid answering a business phone in a way that may make the person on the other end feel uncomfortable or put on the spot (such as, “Hello”, “What?” or “Who is this?”) The very first piece of information every single caller needs is to be assured they have reached the person or place they dialed.

#### 2. Remind everyone that a good ambassador should speak clearly, be polite and offer to take a message or direct the caller to someone who can help them.

**Take a message:** “May I take a message?” or “I’m sorry, he’s busy at the moment. May I take your name and number and have him call you back?”

**Direct a call to someone who can help:** If the person who is calling asks you to help out instead and you don’t feel comfortable or don’t know the answer to their questions, it is always polite to say, “I’m sorry I don’t know but I’d be happy to pass the message on to John.”

**Pass the message on:** Taking messages is not helpful if the person they are for never sees them. If someone leaves a message, be sure to write down their name, phone number, date and time and the message—then be sure to give the message to the person they were calling. Set up a ‘message box’ or agree to leave messages in a certain place (on the bulletin board, in someone’s inbox, etc.)

**3. Be convinced that good phone manners are an important marketing tool.** Take time for the training necessary to ensure that your telephone enhances and supports the professional and positive image of your thrift shop.



# Ten bestselling Ebay categories

The following is a list of ten best-selling Ebay auction categories. Use this to help determine which items will do well in your silent auction and which items might do better on an electronic auction such as Ebay.



- 1. **Sporting goods** - baseball and softball gloves and bats top the list
- 2. **Vintage consumer electronics** - with brand names such as MacIntosh, Bose and Pioneer

- 3. **Watches** - all brands in working condition
- 4. **Sports memorabilia** - trading cards, collector items
- 5. **Toys** - action figures with “transformers” topping the list
- 6. **Cents-off coupons** - for baby diapers and formula
- 7. **Rocks and fossils**
- 8. **Brand name home gear** - Ikea, Pier 1, Longaberger baskets, John Deer, Sharper Image
- 9. **Star Wars** - vintage and current
- 10. **Brand name baby gear:**  
Gap, Gymboree, Baby Einstein, Old Navy, Pottery Barn



**Note:** To order a Silent Auction Kit or for more information on electronic auctions contact your Thrift Shop resource coordinator.

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We invite your comments, questions and contributions. To receive additional copies of this newsletter or to advise of address changes, please contact the appropriate person above.

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