

PUSH BUTTON PATIENCE

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. . . (Ephesians 4:1-2)

People hate to stand around and wait, especially when other folks are waiting with them. An office where I previously worked was located on the fourth floor of a nine-story building. The structure was equipped with three passenger elevators and one for freight. One button summons the three passenger cars and another is for the freight car.

When I arrived at the office, it was always interesting to watch people clamoring to get into the elevator. These people who had violated every legal and safety principle while driving to work show the same lack of patience while waiting for a ride to the top of the building.

The elevators must move faster when the call button is punched repeatedly. How else do you explain why most people are not content with one touch. Some folks are convinced that pushing it harder will also hasten the arrival of the car. Holding the button down is another popular method.

This same principle also applies to buttons located at street intersections. You know the one, it says "push here for walk light." Nobody is content to push the button one time. They must design them not to work until they have been punched at least a half a dozen times.

Even if a large crowd is waiting to cross the street, every new pedestrian feels obligated to push the button several more times. They must think we are all idiots; standing there without knowing how to push the button.

The caliber of the crowd does not make any difference in button pushing. Recently, I went to an art exhibit featuring famous masterpieces from the turn of the century. The museum was crowded and we had to walk several blocks. True to form, the art crowd loved to push the crossing button.

Later that same day, we had tickets for a Texas Rangers baseball game. Although the crowd was rowdier, the approach to the traffic button was just as vigorous.

We give these buttons an enormous amount of control over our lives. Have you noticed how some people will not cross the street until the "walk" light is flashing? Even if there is not a moving vehicle within sixteen square blocks, they refuse to cross against the light. While I admire their compliance with the law, I also question their courage.

Meanwhile, back at the office, those who are in a real hurry also lift the cover and push the button for the freight elevator. Normally it is not used much early in the morning for freight purposes so chances are good it is waiting to open its doors.

I always hesitate using the freight elevator. Ordinarily, I will pass on the invitation, preferring to wait for the people elevator. I think my hesitation is really an insecurity. I am not comfortable riding in a box that has padded walls. I know the workplace can be stressful, but I am not prepared for padded walls.

Some people choose the freight elevator because they are self-conscious. The regular elevators do not have padded walls but they are covered with mirrors, on the walls and ceiling. If you happen to get stuck at the front of the car, when the door closes, you and everyone else is confronted with a full frontal view of yourself.

Some people, men and women alike, take the opportunity to make last minute corrections in their appearance. It allows them to enter the office with confidence, knowing their hair is in place and there are no food particles stuck between their teeth. I have begun to notice that my hair is getting a little thinner on top.

Elevators tend to be uncomfortable places. Other than "Hello!" or inane comments about the weather, what else can you discuss in twenty-five seconds. The standard

comment when stepping out of the car when it arrives on your floor is, "Have a nice day." Two people who are conducting a lively conversation suddenly become mute when they step into an elevator.

After several years of working in the same building and riding the elevators every day, I developed some friendships. Granted they were not close relationships but I do know if they prefer warm or cold weather. I even learned the names of a few of them.

Compounding the natural uneasiness of being in a thirty-six square foot cubicle with strangers is the fact that you are surrounded by mirrors. There is no way to keep from staring at everyone else. You can see them, even when you turn your back. It elicits extreme self-consciousness, like wearing one of those backless hospital gowns.

Elevators have another button designed for our impatient society. It is the "Door Close" button. Immediately after someone steps out, people begin pushing that button, hoping to speed up the process. I always feel rushed. It makes me want to dart out of the door as soon as it opens on my floor so I will not detain the other passengers.

These buttons may be quite useful to our hurry-up world. If we took the time to calculate, we might discover that constantly pushing them would provide an extra three to five seconds every day. Over a year's time, that is an extra twelve to twenty minutes. Enough time to justify an extended coffee break on my birthday.

However, I have another theory. The buttons are not really connected to anything at all. The elevators automatically return to the ground floor and open. Traffic lights are timed to cycle at specified intervals, regardless of how many times we push the button. Buttons are there to give us a feeling a control. They provide the illusion that we are really making things happen and helping our lives become more efficient.