



3 Keys to Build Meaningful Relationships with Stakeholders

THE CHALMERS CENTER
chalmers.org



It's *all* about relationships.

We're glad you're ready to build meaningful relationships with the people you want to serve. That's an important step to helping without hurting.

The reality is that most people don't have a lot of overlap with people living in a different socioeconomic bracket—for lots of reasons that we may not be fully aware of. That means pursuing relationships with people experiencing material poverty requires *effort*.

It's also important to remember that we're not just trying to build relationships with people for the purpose of providing handouts, or worse, to pat ourselves on the back for doing good.

True relationships are a two-way street, so our approach to helping people living in poverty needs to be highly relational.

In this relationship-building primer, we'll be sharing practical ways that you can begin the work of building real relationships with those struggling with material poverty.



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Real relationships are *intentional*.

Here's an inconvenient truth:

You won't experience relationships with people living in poverty unless you pursue them.

While it's easy to think that we can develop relationships with people living in poverty and stay in our comfort zone, it's simply not possible.

The U.S. in particular has become increasingly divided across socioeconomic lines, and we all tend to live, work, and worship alongside people like ourselves.

If we're going to develop life-giving relationships with people who are materially poor, we have to find opportunities and avenues to "share a table" with them.

Think about how you would build a relationship with a new friend. Asking thoughtful questions and listening well are key. You also have to keep in mind that the process of building relationships takes time, so it's important to be patient and prayerful.

→ **In the next section, we'll talk about the role of humility in building relationships.**



Real relationships are *humble*.

When materially well-off people enter into a materially poor community, it's easy for them to think they are the ones who are “fixed” trying to serve the “broken.”

But the truth is, we're *all* broken in one way or another.

In addition, when people from more financially secure backgrounds enter into a materially poor community, we often feel overwhelmed by the needs we see around us.

We see people living on the streets and buildings in need of repair. These needs can cause us to slip back into an attitude of “doing” and “fixing” rather than being in “relationship with.”

But we must resist this temptation to think of ourselves as the “savior” for people in material poverty. They don't need (or want) us to be their heroes!

In addition, thinking of ourselves as heroes deforms us because a hero mentality assumes “we” (who are materially well-off) are strong and “they” (who are materially poor) are weak. The truth is we're both weak and need Christ to restore us.

We have so much to learn from those we seek to serve, and we need to proactively look for and respect the assets God has graciously placed in every community instead of focusing only on needs.

As we see others' gifts and abilities, we start to view them as God does.

It challenges our sense of superiority, reveals our own areas of poverty, and lays the basis for mutual life-giving relationships.

Real relationships are *empowering*.

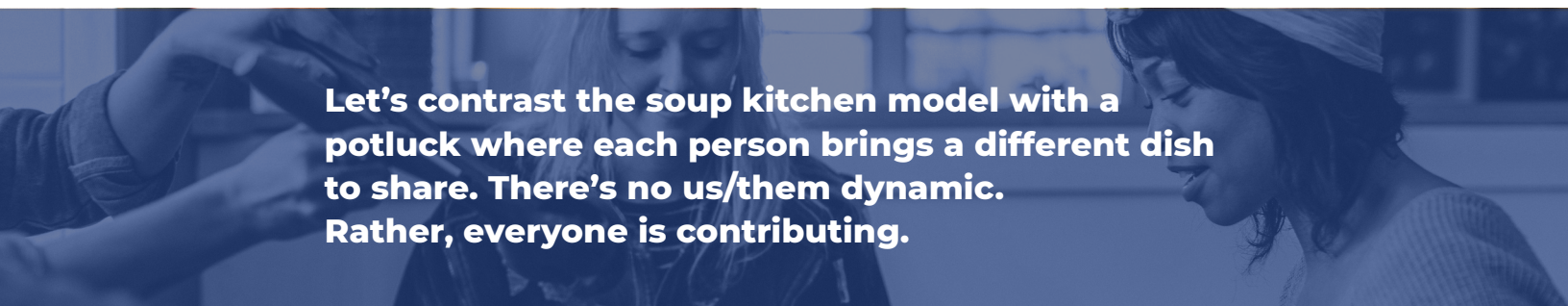
It can be tempting to do things *to or for* people in material poverty instead of doing things *with them*, but we must resist this temptation! Instead, we need to learn to interact with all people in ways that acknowledge their God-given gifts, skills, and desires.

When we view people as contributors and treat them as people who have something to give and not merely consumers, we empower them.

Unfortunately, we can all make the mistake of treating people who are materially poor as receivers. We build houses for them, we give clothes to them, or we prepare food for them. In doing so, we look right past their own skills as craftsmen, designers, or chefs.

If you've served in a soup kitchen before, you're familiar with the two sides of the table. On one side, "the helpers" line up and ladle out food to "the needers" on the other side of the table.

In this model, giving only goes in one direction. Those served are not given the chance to bring their gifts to the table. The challenge is that this model can disempower people who are materially poor and create an us/them dynamic that helps no one.



Let's contrast the soup kitchen model with a potluck where each person brings a different dish to share. There's no us/them dynamic. Rather, everyone is contributing.

When it comes to working alongside people living in material poverty, we all have something to contribute toward a solution, but unless we stop doing "for" and invest the time and effort into building relationships, we won't know what they have to contribute.



Getting started

Over the years, we've had lots of people ask us how to start building relationships with people in poverty, so we have some practical suggestions to help you get started.

- Volunteer with ministries and organizations that are embedded among people who are materially poor.
- Participate in community activities through local schools or recreation leagues.
- Shop and support small businesses in low-income neighborhoods:



Grocery stores



Restaurants



Barber shops



Laundromats

→ **Brainstorm a list of ways you can start connecting with people.**
 Keep in mind that this process of building relationships takes time, so it's important to be patient and prayerful in this process.



Take your next step with *Innovate*

Once you've begun the work of building relationships with people living in poverty, you'll likely find that you could use some extra encouragement and guidance as you think about creating solutions to challenges in your community. *The Chalmers Center can help.*

Even though there's not a one-size-fits-all solution to something as complex as poverty, we have developed a framework that has helped hundreds of churches and nonprofit organizations design and launch poverty alleviation ministries that are fostering real transformation.

This is what we teach in our flagship program, *Innovate: Ministry Design To Help Without Hurting*. It's specifically designed to help churches and nonprofit organizations create a new or improved ministry that empowers the materially poor.

Innovate guides teams of 3-7 people to:

- Use simple yet powerful tools to address the root causes of poverty
- Empower materially poor people to experience real and lasting transformation
- Think differently about poverty
- Create a new or improved poverty alleviation ministry
- Improvise the kingdom of God in their communities

Sign up for *Innovate*

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