



The 36 Things

1. Don't worry about "enabling;" plenty of people worry about that already.
2. If you aren't willing to be used, try another line of work.
3. The interruptions are your most important work.
4. Be careful to learn names.
5. We are all equal. We take turns serving each other. Allow yourself to be served once in a while.
6. Be vulnerable. Drop your defenses. This will make up for the fact that while you are at Loaves & Fishes, you have the greater power over the guest.
7. If you begin to get angry, back off. Anger and hurt are indications that you are nicer to others than you feel, or are overextended. Pay attention!
8. Take time to hear the stories!
9. Listen more than you speak. Listen from the heart, not the head.
10. Focus on one person at a time. Focus deep. Be attentive. Avoid the temptation to let someone else interrupt your focus until you are done.
11. The person whom you fear or loathe is your greatest teacher! Go back to him or her as much as you can bear.
12. There is always another story. Be careful not to take the side of one person over another in disputes between guests. (Please avoid the temptation to gossip about a guest with other staff.)
13. Enemies one day are friends the next. Do not join in the trashing of guests by guests, or take sides between couples, even when they are at each other, except to prevent violence.
14. Practice seeing the eyes of Christ in the face of everyone you meet. Speak to the Christ in them from the Christ in you.
15. Let the homeless make the agenda, even if it isn't efficient or the "best" way. Except for a violent situation, let go of control.
16. Make your best suggestions to the guest, then let it go.
17. Are you worthy to cast the first stone? Do not judge. Do not condemn.
18. Admonish guests for their behavior only. Be willing to hear their story, but do not get into the matter of reasons or motivations.

19. At least once a day, seek out a quiet person to talk to and say "hello." They may need attention more than any of the others.
20. Don't expect to change anyone. Just live with the guest in each day as it is.
21. Don't give out answers. Just walk alongside and listen.
22. "Make your work your worship." Be present in the work.
23. Cultivate the ability to meet the mood of the person who is talking to you. This may be hard sometimes when a serious or angry person talks to you right after someone who is comical or light hearted. When someone shows anger, be respectful but do not reflect the anger back.
24. Make it a general rule not to purchase anything from a guest no matter how inexpensive the item may be, or how desperate the guest may be to sell. You may become an unwitting fence. Professionally, it's unethical.
25. "Be faithful" is all.
26. "We can do no great things, only small things with great love." (Mother Theresa)
27. When talking and listening to a guest, put away any thought that you should be somewhere else, doing something else, or that you have something more important to do.
28. Keep a spiritual balance in everything you do: pray, meditate, read scripture, seek out a spiritual guide, something!
29. When conflicts arise, go slower, speak softer but up close, as if the crowd wasn't there. Project your voice to the ear of the person you want to touch. Be an island of calm. "Laser" your attention to the person in the center whom you know the best or who is the most violent. Speak his or her name and don't be afraid to say the key thing over and over again in your calm way. "How" you say is more important than "what" you say. If violence is imminent, catch an eye and step in the middle with hands up!
30. When it comes to matters of social justice and personal conscience, create as much holy mischief with the powerful as possible.
31. Take the side of the poor, the victim, in every conflict and share their fate.
32. When it comes to maintaining boundaries, work constantly to stretch them out as far as you can. Be a professional when it comes to ethics, but as far as preserving objectivity, do this only so that you can serve others better, not as a means to keep yourself distant and uninvolved with the pain. Be a friend first.
33. God is the guest.
34. Be open and generous! There is enough of you and material things to go around. The more you give away, the more there is to give. This is especially true of the heart.
35. The bigger Loaves & Fishes grows the more you must strive to serve the individual as a differentiated person.
36. Don't hold back on personal services.

David Leeper Moss, a Methodist minister, was the director of Brother Martin's Ministries, a program of Loaves & Fishes from 1989 to 1994. Before he left Loaves & Fishes, David kindly shared with us "36 things" he learned in working with our homeless guests. We hope that you will benefit from his wisdom in your relationships with our guests and with each other.