

IS YOUR MOSQUE SUCCESSFUL OR IS IT JUST GROWING?

By Maher Budeir

The American Muslim Community is making a shift and is generally moving towards professionalizing the operation of our institutions. More and more, I am hearing the right questions being asked about the desire to run things better and to operate masjid finances, facilities and other services better and with more accountability. More and more institutions are hiring specialists to do facility maintenance, office work, in addition to hiring more paid weekend school teachers, counselors and youth directors. While many have started this transformation, the majority of the mosques in the US are experiencing growth. Unfortunately growth, by itself, is often mistaken in many institutions to mean success.

The reality is growth in some cases is one of many indicators of success, but in other cases it is not even that. For most mosques, growth comes because of the geographic monopoly most mosques naturally have. Meaning the mere fact that people would go to a specific mosque because it is the one mosque that happens to be within 10 minute or 20 minute drive from their home. Most Muslims in the US may not have the option to choose among different Islamic Centers based on quality of services. Only in larger metro areas where multiple mosques exist within a reasonable driving distance do parents have a choice to select the higher quality Sunday school or the Friday sermon that normally delivers more relevant and interesting topic. But, the majority of mosque goers do not have much choice. This dynamic allows many mosques to grow in number of participants and worshipers regardless of the quality of services, or the level of success of the organization.

So, if growth is not the sole accurate indicator of success, what is?

1. Does your masjid have a good connection to the community?

A well run organization is one where activists, volunteers, and participants are comfortable communicating and sometimes disagreeing within civil norms and in a positive atmosphere. Worshipers should know whom to ask what question, and know why things are done in a certain way.

2. Does your masjid provide quality services?

From the relevant Friday sermon, to the interesting Weekend school format and content, all programs and services must be deliberately designed and thoughtfully developed to suit the users and serve the constituents in the best way possible. Services must be delivered with excellence (Ihsaan) and an attitude of service by all service providers. Whether they are volunteers or paid employees, the commitment and superior customer service must stem from the spiritual and moral commitment to serve our Creator.

3. Does your masjid attract users who may otherwise not be active in the Muslim community?

If items 1 and 2 above are done well, this normally leads to growth in the community. Not just growth in numbers, but growth in the wider circle of participants in the masjid services and activities from those who otherwise do not participate. Well run institutions are likely to attract the casual visitor to become a regular, and the Muslim who is on the fence to become more comfortable in the community, and feel that they belong.

4. Is your masjid an accepted destination for non-Muslim leaders in the area to seek information about Islam, and to reach out to Muslims?

A successful masjid is one that is well known by the broader community as the place in the area to represent local Muslims. The local government leaders must know your leaders by first name, and leaders in other places of worship must have at least visited the masjid and made connections with your masjid leaders. A masjid is part of the larger community and leaders of the larger community should know what happens in their community and what their local Muslims are like. This is easier to achieve in some communities over others, but the masjid leadership and community must make a genuine effort to give the larger community no excuse to characterize the masjid as an unknown entity.

5. Are your masjid leaders strong spiritually? Are they representing your community?

The last important sign of a successful masjid is when the leaders of all aspects are in tune with their personal connection with Allah ﷻ, have good overall relationship with His creation. They should not be so overwhelmed with running the masjid Operations that it consumes their lives and it impacts the balance in the different aspects of their lives. Lastly, the masjid leaders must represent the diversity that exists in the community. This means, if you look around during a Friday sermon and see high level of diversity, brothers and sisters of different ethnic background and different age groups, then your masjid leadership, including the imam, board members, management team members, and volunteers should have the same level of diversity you see in the community. A diverse leadership team means a broader view, a richer experience, and a welcoming culture.

Developing specific measures to track your masjid progress is essential. Running our institutions in a reactive manner without measuring progress will keep us in perpetual mediocrity. The above are general guidelines for measuring success. How does your masjid measure up? How do you plan to bring your institution to measurable success?