

THE LEADING EDGE

Earl Creps' leadership newsletter

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Impact Players: AGTS Voted One of the Best Christian Places to Work

New D.Min. Cohort Begins

“Quotable”: The Truth

Check It Out: Granger Community Church

LeaderLife: Category X

Data Dump: Why Do We Go To Church?

Links to the Future: Online Resources for Learning Your Community

Hard Copy: Resources on Technology and Planning

Archives

Talk To Us: Feedback

IMPACT PLAYERS: AGTS Voted One of the Best Christian Places to Work
In a recent national poll, AGTS was voted one of the best Christian places to work. The poll was done by surveying the staff of many institutions and businesses on a wide variety of issues ranging from relationships, to management, to spirituality. You can check out the story at:
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/108/52.0.html>

NEW D. MIN. COHORT BEGINS in October of 2003. Inquire about joining the program, or achieving M.Div. equivalency, by contacting our Team (see the end of this newsletter.) Extensive program information is also available online at:
<http://agts.edu/dmin/index.html>

QUOTABLE: The Truth

“If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.”
--Unknown

CHECK IT OUT: Granger Community Church

<http://www.gccwired.com>

Granger Community Church has one of the most engaging websites going. The church is a fascinating mix of technology, experience, passion, and purpose-drivenness, mixed with a few pieces of Willow Creek. An interesting example of a hybrid church that is making a variety of pieces work because they fit its context. This may be a “fast-forward” of what casual contemporary churches will look like in the next few years. Cloning impressive models may well be replaced by

assimilating components into a customized form, something like “mass customization” using “plug-and-play” modules. As culture becomes more diverse, and authenticity ascends as a value, model knock off’s may be near the end of their run.

LEADERLIFE: Category X

Recently, I was talking with Leonard Sweet about a growing edge of my ministry, puzzling over the fact that I had no “label” for activities which seemed to happen almost effortlessly. He gave me some good advice: don’t label it—just let it happen.

Len’s reason was simple: as soon as a label is attached, the ministry begins to conform to the tag rather than being an organic activity of the Spirit. Naming, then, and the accompanying drive for short-term results may be one way of quenching the work of the Spirit. (In other cases, of course, a clear identification could facilitate the Spirit’s ministry.)

After this talk, I began to reflect on the fact that every form of technology, from Velcro to MP3s, has roots somewhere in basic scientific research the outcomes of which no one could have predicted. Similarly, results tomorrow depend on having at least one category of ministry from which I do not demand results today.

This is Category X. Most of us worship at the altar of the bottom line, so the idea of having an entire category not enslaved to results is going to take some effort. I know it does for me. But the results (forgive the contradiction) will be worth it. Category X is the incubator of creative leadership and ministry.

To clear the ground for Category X, I recommend the following forms of fasting:

1. Work Fast: God’s activity cannot be cloned, but you may be able to identify some rough patterns in how he reveals himself to you. Perhaps it tends to happen in a certain place or at a certain time. If so, I would make sure to be there. I would trade in considerable time doing “work” (which often comes down to answering e-mail) to be in this place.
2. Office Fast: get out of the office much more often than you do. Wireless communication makes this very practical. Find a place to work (especially on sermons) where you will be surrounded by pre-Christians. Their very presence will change how you think.
3. Book Fast: declare a fast on Christian books, and spend a month or so reading outside of churchy literature. Some of your greatest insights will come from history, plays, fiction, etc. If you just have to read Christian books, try something with which you do not agree.
4. Labeling Fast: don’t rush to name everything that happens in your ministry for purposes of “bottling” it for future use. This compulsion stifles creativity, and tends to put you in control of things—not a pretty picture. There is plenty of time

for putting things in the bulletin later.

5. Computer Fast: ask God to make your computer break down so you can be temporarily delivered from technology. In these seasons of peace, you can find a stillness like no other. If prayer doesn't work just turn the thing off.

I'm going to stop right there. Category X cannot be created by recipe. It's more about what you don't do than about any sort of plan.

My major recommendation: Identify the things that block your creativity (e.g., too much time reading boring but obligatory books) and back off on them for a month or so. If this doesn't give you a vision for what Category X could mean, throw this newsletter away.

Blessings,
Earl

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DATA DUMP: Why Do We Go To Church?

"When people who regularly attend Christian church services were asked to describe the importance of various spiritual endeavors, a minority of regular attenders described evangelism, having meaningful relationships with other people in their church, and giving 10% or more of their income to their church as very important considerations. After studying more than three-dozen different faith practices and biblical beliefs, adults under the age of 35 were the least likely of any group to have a biblical perspective or consistent participation in each of the factors examined."

---SBC Life, June/July 2002. Referencing the Barna Update.

LINKS TO THE FUTURE: Online Resources for Learning Your Community

Understanding your community
<http://www.outreachmarketing.com>

Check out this resource. It's one of several that can provide your ministry with specific information on the community you are attempting to reach. A recent study of the area around AGTS found that the residents perceive their top spiritual need as "sports and recreation." It would not be difficult to translate that information into action.

Online resources by Earl Creps
<http://agts.edu/faculty/creps.html>

Downloadable resources are available on a range of leadership topics including pastoral ministry, communication, We Build People, generational issues, postmodernism, discipleship, revival and renewal, evangelism, etc. Resources include free PDF files, Power Points, and other assets.

HARD COPY: Resources on Technology and Planning

Jewell, John P. Jewell, Jr. *New Tools for a New Century: First Steps in Equipping Your Church for the Digital Revolution*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

Jewell provides a basic, and very necessary, orientation to technological issues for church leaders. Understanding these assets in today's culture is as vital as understanding how to use a telephone.

Harry Klopp, *The Ministry Playbook: Strategic Planning for Effective Churches*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002 (320 pages)

Church consultant Klopp brings a wide range of experience to this "textbook" on church-based strategic planning. A helpful introduction, but watch out for the "playbook" metaphor.

ARCHIVES & IDEAS

Past issues of the *Leading Edge* are archived at:

http://agts.edu/dmin/leading_edge/index.html

Email your ideas for future issues to: dfegler@agts.edu

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THE LEADING EDGEÖtools for transformation