

THE LEADING EDGE

A newsletter by Earl Creps,
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Shaping servant leaders to change the world in the power of the
Spirit
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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@agseminary.edu

MINISTRY ON THE EDGE: THE MISSION TO POST-CHRISTIAN AMERICA

Brian McLaren, author of *The Church on the Other Side*, will be
the primary speaker for this AGTS Leadership Roundtable
Conference, November 18-19, 2002 at the Renaissance Hotel in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The conference will deal with
understanding emerging culture and leading ministries from
maintenance to mission. Registration is limited to maximize
interaction. The conference can also be taken for AGTS credit.
Full details are available online:
http://www.agts.edu/conferences/roundtable_nov_02.html Register
online, by phone (800-467-2487, x1044), fax (417-268-1009), or
email (agts-ext@agts.edu). Registration is \$150 per person prior
to November 1, and \$175 thereafter.

QUOTABLE: AHISTORICAL TIMES

"One study of students at 55 elite universities found that over
a third were unable to identify the Constitution as establishing
the division of powers in our government, only 29% could
identify the term 'Reconstruction,' and 49% could not place the
Civil War in the correct half-century...Over half of high school

seniors couldn't say who we fought in World War II. And...a nation-wide survey recently commissioned by Columbia Law School found that almost two-thirds of all Americans think Karl Marx's dogma, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,' was or may have been written by the founding fathers and was included in the Constitution."

--Bruce Cole, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, Wall Street Journal, 11 June 2002.

LEADERLIFE: THE POWER OF COUNTERINTUITIVE THINKING

Because we cannot start from scratch daily, every organization operates on its own sense of what is normal. These norms are internalized as an unwritten "script" that governs day to day life in the group. Some organizations script around tradition, precedent, and the chain of command, while more intentional shops try to define their script, train for it, and be accountable to it. While some scripting is necessary to stability, there are several big downsides:

1. Organizational Anesthesia: scripts tell us everything is OK if our own assumptions seem uncontested. Groups stop paying attention in this kind of environment.
2. Terminal Tweaking: bold moves are seldom made if the organization never challenges its traditional or an intentional script. Endless tweaking of the details becomes a substitute for real change.
3. Gutless Leaders: those who should be "arsonists" become comfortable "keepers of the flame." Maintaining organizational stability, with the attendant political and economic benefits, becomes the prime directive.
4. The Cult of the Status Quo: the way things are becomes the group's default position. The script is so ingrained that following it always seems like the intuitive thing to do. Organizations end up where the script drives them. Goals tend to be something like "becoming of bigger version of what we already are—which is just fine, by the way."

My Major Recommendation: Become the leader in a whole new way by guiding your group in some counterintuitive thinking, challenging even their most basic assumptions. Consider Steven B. Sample's *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2002) as a resource:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0787955876/qid%3D1024322497/ref%3Dsr%5F11%5F0%5F1/103-8003118-1534215>

Here are some typical assumptions along with some counterintuitive resources:

1. Excellent leadership will always produce massive growth:
Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* (Revell, 1999)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0800756991/qid=1024322783/sr=1-2/ref=sr_1_2/103-8003118-1534215#product-details

2. Ministry growth is the most important index of success:
Samuel D. Rima, *Rethinking the Successful Church: Finding Serenity in God's Sovereignty* (Baker, 2002)
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0801091179/qid%3D1024322972/ref%3Dsr%5F11%5F0%5F1/103-8003118-1534215>

3. If I were really running this place well, things would be better:
Steve Sjogren, *The Perfectly Imperfect Church: Redefining the "Ideal" Church* (Group, 2002)
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0764423533/qid%3D1024323064/ref%3Dsr%5F11%5F0%5F1/103-8003118-1534215>

4. What we need around here is a better marketing plan:
Phillip D. Kenneson, et al. *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (1997)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0687010446/qid=1024323226/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/103-8003118-1534215

5. Becoming a mega-church should be our objective:
Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Baker, 1993)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0801038553/ref=pd_bxgy_text_1/103-8003118-1534215

6. We need to do what they've done at Willow Creek:
G.A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Baker, 1996)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0801052742/ref=pd_sim_books_4/103-8003118-1534215

7. Moving to the suburbs is the smart move:
E. Glenn Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.* (1999)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0310228883/qid=1024323432/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/103-8003118-1534215

If you are a growth-oriented leader, there is a lot in these books that you will purely hate. But facing arguments that run against the grain is the definition of counterintuitive thinking. This sort of exercise is way beyond thinking "outside the box;" it is thinking "against the box."

The point is to force everyone (yourself included) outside of the comfort afforded by whatever script is directing the group. Ask questions like this: "is growth really evangelism, or just transfer?", "are our people really growing in God, or just attending events?," "are our services reaching pre-Christian seekers, or just enabling shallow Christians to remain that way?" You get the idea.

So, pass out one of these books to your leaders, and start asking the really nasty questions, refusing to accept the group's canned, leader-pleasing answers. If you have the courage, the organization can be shocked into a new focus on mission. So...do you have the nerve?

Blessings!

Earl

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DATA DUMP: I'VE GOT GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS: CONGREGATIONAL LIFE SURVEY

A massive survey of US congregational life (300,000 worshipers interviewed in over 2000 congregations representing 8 denominations) turned up mixed results. In the "good news" category would be the fact that 63% of those who attend worship services regularly also have a private devotional life. Also, over half of the respondents said they had experiences spiritual growth in the last year. "Bad news" includes the fact that only 38% reported they were involved in any kind of small group experience. Most telling is the fact that one-third of those surveyed indicated they had been in their churches for less than 5 years, indicating very high rates of turnover and transfer. 54% reported not having invited anyone to church in the last year. While the average church is under 100, 60% of attendees worship in a megachurch, with 10% of churches drawing half of all weekly worshipers. Find the Key Findings online at:
<http://www.uscongregations.org/key.htm>

LINKS TO THE FUTURE: WEB RESOURCES

Resources for designing small groups

<http://www.intuitor.com/statistics/SmallGroups.html>

Check out this fascinating article on the relationship between small group design and effectiveness. An offbeat but insightful

treatment that will make you look like a genius. Thanks to Glen Davis (Chi Alpha pastor at Stanford University <http://glenandpaula.com>) for contributing this one.

Add theological terms to your spellchecker
<http://faculty.bbc.edu/RDecker/btd.htm>
This link will take you to some free software that will add a theological dictionary to your spellchecker so that it will stop stumbling over "Nehemiah" and "propitiation." Just follow the instructions on the web page, download the file, copy it into the right directory for your Word spell check dictionary and away you go.

Free 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.

WE RECOMMEND: WILLOW CREEK SATELLITE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, AUGUST 8-10

www.willowcreek.com/academicnetwork
Willow Creek's leadership training events are world class. While their onsite event has been sold out for months, you can attend their Leadership Summit via satellite broadcast at 51 locations around the country. Speakers include Bill Hybels, Warren Bennis, Kirbyjon Caldwell, and John Ortberg. Registration for students and faculty is only \$55! Check the link above for locations near you.

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Please feel free to forward to a friend.

THE LEADING EDGE...cutting a path from today to tomorrow