



Creative Leadership in a Postmodern World

by James R. Armstrong

Can you imagine what it would be like if you walked into the ministry of your dreams? What does it look like? Take a moment and describe the atmosphere, the excitement, the energy, the spiritual pulse of the community. Is it a place of belonging? A place to make a difference in the world?



These are the questions I normally ask to establish the vision of a community. Today, we face a postmodern culture that defines itself through relationships rather than organizations; that sees religion as experience rather than an institution; and decides the relevance of a ministry by its ability to allow people to experience faith through a varied usage of creative elements. The challenge of today's leadership is to translate the vision God has given us to reach our culture into reality that may be experienced by the newest generations coming into the church. We must gain a clear understanding of how the postmodern culture thinks, how they look at the world, and also how they will respond to the church and her message.

I believe we live in one of the most exciting ages of the church. A time where we are forced to connect to the culture we live in and come out from the walls of the church. Or at least make what's inside the walls relevant to those living outside. So how do we design ministry to meet the needs of

"You see things as they are and say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

—George Bernard Shaw

this new postmodern culture we are called to reach? How do we enable our ministries to recognize that we live in a different world that requires different ways in which to share our faith and transform lives? Different ways to communicate, different ways to relate, and different ways to lead.

We Must Communicate in Their Language

Jesus used parables, blind men, fig trees, water, and fishing boats to communicate to His disciples and followers. He spoke the language of the people consistent with the times. People were drawn to Him and His teachings. One of the greatest characteristics of postmodern ministry is imagination and creativity in designing and developing models of ministry. As leaders, we can learn from Jesus, and capture the attention of those we seek by using object lessons, technology, and the creative arts. We are a visually educated generation, increasingly so every day. Utilizing technology, multi-media, music, movies, and current issues, we can connect and communicate in terms that relate to the audience. Medical professionals use updated devices and medical equipment to perform open heart surgery. Why is the church sometimes looked upon as a place where technology and innovation are inappropriate? We are a hospital for hurting people, operating on a heart that will last for eternity. People are dying—inside—and we need to take hold of the tools made available to us by the creative God we serve and put them to use. Being careful of our motive, not simply using media just because others are or because we have the capability, but rather as a tool to communicate and experience faith. The point is connecting and communicating in terms that relate to the audience.

"Understanding interactivity is the key to healthy communication. We can transform our selves and our world by changing the way we communicate with ourselves and others. Every thought, word and deed sends out ripples altering life for everyone. That's the nature of communication. That's the nature of life in an interactive universe. Why not accept it?"

—Ken Freed

We Must Become Intentional Leaders

Jesus understood that it would take extraordinary methods and displays of transformational power to reach the people of His time. A society influenced by differing cultures, social groups, and religious formation, it would also take a handful of extra-unordinary people to initiate a movement that would soon change the very world we live in. The number one approach Jesus took in establishing His ministry was RELATIONAL. He lived day in and day out with His disciples. He interacted with people on hillsides, country roads,

Myth about Media

The presumption that it costs thousands of dollars to utilize media is not true. You can learn to incorporate media within your ministry without blowing your budget. Seek members of your community that have a passion for high tech. Network with a pastor or ministry that presently utilizes new ways to communicate through audio/visual means.

city streets, on the water, and in sinners' homes. He went places with His disciples the Pharisees wouldn't dream. He understood that it would take a few years of training, dynamic teaching, and reality application before He could send His ministry team off to change the world. His focus was on building relationships, modeling what He taught, and helping them apply their faith to everyday life. His focus was on building the kingdom *through* leaders. Instead of trying to grow a ministry single handedly, He simply poured His life into 12 average (or not so average) people. He was intentional and had a plan.

Today, the need is the same. As leaders, we need to build relationships, model what we believe, and help each other live out our faith, passion, and love for Jesus Christ. We need a plan that engages leaders within our ministry. Today's postmodern generation wants access to leadership. They want to relate to those in authority and experience that their leaders, too, are real people with real faith who deal with real problems and issues.... We must *get real* to be *relevant* in postmodern ministry!

Discovering Leaders

In postmodern ministry, we cannot approach recruiting like in old days. Today, we must *discover* our leadership. They are often hidden—found in the 7th row of your auditorium, sipping cappuccinos at your local coffee shop, hammering away at Habitat for Humanity, or quietly nestled within your community. Most people don't see themselves as leaders. The truth may be that no one has ever realized their potential or given them an opportunity to step up, or perhaps they just never finished their spiritual gifts inventory. One of the easiest ways to discover people is to identify their passion and help them translate that into ministry. If you can help them live out their passion, then you can spend time developing them to be leaders through their passion. Ministry then becomes the forum in which we transform lives, rather than

the packaged product to reach our lost friends. Again, it's becoming involved, encouraging, empowering, pouring out, and saying "You matter and I care".

Treat a man as if he were what he ought to be and you help him become what he is capable of being.

—Johann

Investing in Leaders

I'm amazed at how much money we spend on retreats, equipment, and pizza. Yet one of the most important functions of the church often has a zero budget and produces the greatest return. What are we saying about intentionality? If we are going to develop leaders we have to invest in them. That includes time, relationship, training, and resources. Each year I take my leadership team to the mountains for a summit or retreat. I pay for the entire trip. It is a way to spend time with them, build community, and plan our ministry for the next year. It is also a time to reflect on our own personal faith and challenge them to go to that next level in their commitment to Christ. But don't limit it to just retreats. You can also invest in your leadership through your monthly meetings, materials and training resources for equipping. Normally, our most valuable asset is time. Buy your leaders lunch, take them to the movies, or simply write a note telling them how much you appreciate their work. Nothing shows you care as much as giving time out of your busy schedule to your leaders, reinforcing the fact that you do care and believe in them.

Remember: If you are a leader, your greatest challenge is not to just run programs, but to develop leadership in others. If you practice discovering people, you'll be surprised at just how many leaders are waiting to be called, who just need leadership and opportunity from you to spark a fire, to ignite passion, and go forth to make a difference.

Modeling Community

Modeling community is essential if we hope to keep those we bring in. One of our greatest needs is that of belonging. Your leadership team should become the

An extraordinary mark of a leader is the ability to bring out the best in others—to develop people into their potential. Recognize and utilize each individual's gifts and abilities to help the ministry reach its vision.

model for the rest of the people in your ministry. Even your meetings should not be just another time to inform and promote activities and programs, but an opportunity to nurture relationships and instill belonging. *If it is not happening in your leadership, then it will not happen with everyone else.* One of the requirements of emerging generations is to be a part of something bigger than themselves, yet maintain their own identity. That is why leadership should be very careful to provide meaningful ministry but to facilitate community through fulfilling relationships.

Your leadership meetings are a perfect place to model this community. In addition to the necessary business of meetings, have recreational activities like wall climbing, volleyball and other team sports. Bring your people together just for fun. Of course, having food is mandatory at every meeting. It is important to make "hang-out" time. This is where you're nurturing, and relationships are built—it also leads to more intimate friendships and accountability. The leader's time can be used for the normal review of the calendar, upcoming major events, and for sharing what is happening in ministry. If implemented effectively, your leadership will look forward to this time each month and will promote leadership attracting others as a result.

As a ministry leader, I have learned modeling community is an effective tool within my leadership team. We spend time living life together. Learning to pour my life into each member teaches them to pour their life into others. Our example is modeled, it's noticed, and it works.

Building Foundationally Sound Bridges

Unleash the creative energy and imagination of your leaders. Give them the opportunity to help shape your ministry and its future. Ask every new leader the ultimate question, "If this ministry could look anyway you could possibly imagine without regard to money, resources, facilities, and even people, what would it look like?" It is extremely important to understand that the picture they paint will probably be related to what they are passionate about in life. For example, if they are musicians, they will probably want more concerts and special music events. If they are into mission work, then they will ask for more service projects and humanitarian efforts. Get the picture? Their passion will be your tool for engaging them in leadership and ministry.

Empower them to live out their passion through creative ministry planning. Have a structure in place that will help them realize their dreams for ministry. Create ministry teams and leadership roles that use their dreams and passions as the basis for the ministry. If someone is interested in helping underprivileged kids, then form a ministry team with a leader and provide the coordination to help them minister to the kids. You focus on developing them as leaders, and allow them to focus on their passion being played out through ministry.

"Empowering means helping teams develop their skills and knowledge, and supporting them to use their talents."

—Kenneth Blanchard

Ownership is so difficult to give up, but is essential to reaching and empowering postmoderns. If they believe it is their ministry as much as yours, then they will take responsibility for its success or failure. If we attempt to control the ministry then we lose valuable untapped energy and gifts that will ultimately help us reach our vision. The greatest milestone I reached in ministry was when

I learned to give it away. More than just releasing it to others, you come to the understanding that you are really sharing it with those around you. A mentor of mine once shared with me that I would always enjoy ministry if I surrounded myself with friends to do it with. You know, he's right. We don't have to be lone rangers off saving the world with the entire burden on our shoulders. Remember that Jesus sent his disciples out by twos and commissioned the church to represent him to the world. He knew we couldn't handle it alone. Yet far too often we try to build the kingdom all by our lonesome and lose the chance to allow others to join us in the greatest adventure of all time.

Most of us have visions of grandeur of changing the world. We all want to leave our legacy and make our mark. But we weren't created to be remembered, we were created to prepare for eternity. Jesus took average, every day people from all walks of life and showed them not who they were, but who they could be, who He created them to be. They in turn changed the world through Him. It's time we realize our greatest purpose is not to build great ministries, but to build great people. Not to simply change the world, but to change lives, the lives of people who we encounter every day. Change not by judging, inflicting guilt and fear, but by loving and caring. Following Jesus' example, He poured His life into 12 least likely people, and He touched thousands whose names are not recorded in Scripture but exist nonetheless. Jesus walked this earth, and multitudes followed. He invested, He cared, He loved, He spoke truth. His countenance was of compassion and grace. He lived outside the box of the Pharisees and mingled amongst the most undesirable people on earth. ☺

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