



INNOVATION
Series

INNOVATIVE PRACTISES AND MODELS |

9 Fresh Approaches to Innovation That can Change Everything

By Corey Nieuwhof

So you think of yourself as an innovative leader.

You just wish your church or the organization you're a part of valued innovation more.

How do you change the innovation game where you work?

I was recently at a two-day event in Silicon Valley that featured speakers from tech companies in Silicon Valley and innovative church leaders. I was fortunate to be invited as one of the speakers, but even more fortunate to be able to take notes for two days.

The conference (hosted by [Leadership Network](#)) rocked my thinking on innovation.

If there's one thing the church needs today, it's more innovation in our methods. The mission never changes, but frankly, the methods have to.

Here are some ideas on innovation that, stapled together, kind of blew my mind. Maybe that's no surprise.

As Erwin McManus joked, to be a futurist in the church, you just need to see the present clearly. (You can listen to my fascinating conversation with Erwin ([here on Episode 163 of my leadership podcast.](#))

Look, I'm a huge supporter of the church's mission (as is Erwin), but sometimes the best gift we can give ourselves is an honest assessment of where we're at.

Sometimes what we think is innovation isn't. It's just a slight variation of what we're already doing.

I hope these 9 ideas around innovation, combined, can shift your thinking about what is truly innovative and what isn't.

They certainly helped my thinking surge forward.

1. BUILD YOUR FUTURE AROUND A PRODUCT, NOT A PERSON

Too often in the church, we build the mission around a person, not a product (our mission).

And before you start slinging stones at well-known megachurch pastors, just know that far more often, small churches are built around the leadership of their pastor who does 'everything' (a problem [I help churches tackle here](#)).

In small churches, if you remove an effective pastor, things fall apart very quickly. Ironically, the exit of [two founding megachurch pastors](#) under trying circumstances at NewSpring and CrossPoint churches didn't result in the collapse of those churches. While each took a significant hit, they are very much alive and moving forward 18 months later.

It's tempting to think that innovative tech companies build their future around a person. We just think of Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg and assume one person created all that success.

While great leadership is essential to a company's future, to think one person did it all is naive thinking.

Apple has [tripled in market capitalization](#) since Steve Jobs died in 2011. It has also released a bevy of new products. You can argue all day long about whether Jobs would have made it better, but the truth is by almost all the numbers, the company is stronger than its ever been.

And while you may be able to name the CEO of Facebook and Apple, can you name the CEO of Lyft?

What about the founder(s) of LinkedIn? Nest? Airbnb? Square or even YouTube?

If you build your future around a product, not a person, you'll have a stronger future. (I discuss my personal succession plan for our church with my successor in [Episode 110 of my leadership podcast](#).)

If you make yourself more important the mission, you've lost the mission.

2. 100X THINKING

Many leaders suffer from incremental thinking.

We ask questions like "What could make this 10% better?"

[Craig Groeschel](#) challenged us to embrace 100x thinking... or if that's too much for you, try 10x thinking.

In other words, if your church reaches 300 people, start asking the question about what it would take to reach 3000 or 30,000.

Will you get there overnight? Of course not.

But it will force you to look at problems through a whole new lens, and you'll start taking exponential leaps in your approach to everything you tackle.

You may not get 10x growth right away, but you might start to see 30% growth rather than 3% growth.

100x thinking will force you to consider things far beyond what you believe is possible, but then again, we serve a God of the impossible.

Incremental thinking brings incremental results.

You might also take into consideration the fact that Craig leads the largest church in America, with over 90,000 in weekend attendance at 27 locations (soon to be 31).

3. FLY BY INSTRUMENTS

A friend at the event told me that one of the concepts he learned was learning to fly by instruments.

Pilots, apparently, learn to fly by sight. They get up in a Cessna and learn how to navigate take off and landing visually.

But before they get their final certification, they have to learn to learn to fly by instruments. At 30,000 feet with nothing but cloud and fog below you, flying by site doesn't help much.

Too many leaders lead only by sight: we trust what we can feel, see and experience.

That's good, but if you really want to grow and scale, you need to learn to trust the data.

Data doesn't lie like your feelings do.

It will tell you whether you're gaining ground, losing ground, how well things are (or aren't going) and help you plot trajectory: your probable destination based on current velocity and direction.

Pay attention to your gut, but just know it's far too easy to manipulate, ignore or spin data. Leaders committed to progress don't do that.

There's no such thing as bad information... it's just information. If you don't like it, change course.

4. CROWD SOURCE IDEAS

We is always smarter than *me*.

Yet too many leaders want to call all the shots.

We had a fascinating session at the event by Chris Chan on hackathons and crowd-sourcing ideas. (You can watch [his Tedx talk here](#).)

The world of innovation is flat, and it's a meritocracy... the best ideas from a wide variety of backgrounds win.

It's also the opposite of the way too many leaders lead.

Crowd-sourcing ideas is also a fantastic way to avoid HIPPO syndrome.

What's HIPPO? It's the Highest Paid Person's Opinion syndrome—that phenomenon where, you know, everyone has to bow to the boss's viewpoint.

If you run a church or organization where your opinion wins all the time, you will stunt your organization's growth.

Over lunch, Craig Groeschel admitted to a group of leaders that most of the best ideas his organization is known for (from You Version to Church Online to Multi-site) were not his ideas.

Which, of course, makes him an even better leader than if they were.

Personally, I've crowd-sourced [book titles](#), [course titles](#), [sermon series ideas](#) and subjects in ways that completely changed the course of what I was producing.

If you always have the best ideas in the room, it's time to get a bigger room.

5. IDENTIFY YOUR REAL COMPETITOR

In my keynote on change, we looked, among other things, at the strange case of Kodak.

Kodak actually invented digital photography. You would expect an iconic brand synonymous with photography that invented the digital camera to thrive. Instead, it went bankrupt in 2012.

Case studies show that there was a bitter war inside Kodak between the digital division and the print establishment. The top executives were fixated on getting people to print their digital photos. The digital division said people didn't care.

There's more than a little irony in the fact that in 2000, Kodak also launched an early photo upload website, OFoto. But as the [Harvard Business Review notes](#), instead of making it a place to share pictures, they dedicated the site to getting people to print their pictures.

It feels an awful lot like churches who use their social media to drive attendance to a building, doesn't it? (We'll say more about the digital disruption happening in and coming to church world in this space in upcoming months.)

So many church leaders still think their 'competition' is the mega-church down the road or across town. Nothing could be further from the truth in a post-Christian culture.

What's killing your church isn't another church. It's indifference.

It's ideas and beliefs that for many, feel more compelling. It's the lure of bacon, breakfast in bed, yoga classes, ski hills in the winter and the beach in the summer.

And your response is likely to treat the internet like a bulletin board, not a community.

Think about it.

What ultimately killed Kodak wasn't another camera company. It was Instagram.

6. CREATE YOUR OWN OPPOSITION BEFORE SOMEONE ELSE DOES

Brian Tome from [Crossroads Church in Cincinnati](#), America's fastest growing church, has set up a Skunkworks project that has set a group of innovative thinkers free to radically critique and try to destroy Crossroads (in the SWOT analysis sense of 'destroy').

It's a variation of the steel man idea.

Most of us set up a straw man that we knock down when we want to prove a point.

Better thinkers create a steel man—the strongest possible opposing ideas that you have to overcome.

Guess what produces more resilient thinking and organizations? Steel-man thinking. Skunk work projects. The strongest opposing ideas that can lead you to critical breakthroughs.

There's not nearly enough healthy debate in church world among top leaders who are on mission together.

I'm *not* talking about toxic opposition and angry people who hate your church.

I mean healthy debate by people who are committed to a common mission and vision but who maybe have drunk too much KoolAid on strategy.

It's much better idea to kill your own stale ideas before the culture does.

7. TEST VORACIOUSLY

Most churches don't test ideas and concepts nearly well enough.

Even if we think of ourselves as innovative, we just do something new and leave it there to sink or swim.

Silicon Valley doesn't do it that way.

One of the fun parts about being alive in the digital era is that A/B split testing has never been more available.

Almost every headline you read in your email inbox from top marketers has been A/B split-tested. Here's why it matters... what if you could get more people to read what you wrote simply by experimenting with the title?

Here's a recent sample of two email headlines I split-tested

Find Yourself Banging Your Head Against A Wall? (Some Hope)

Maybe It's Less Mysterious Than You Think

Guess which one performed better? Prior to split testing, I would have picked the first one.

I was wrong.

Here are the results:

Find Yourself Banging Your Head Against A Wall? (Some Hope) **48% open rate | 3.0% click rate**

Maybe It's Less Mysterious Than You Think **54.5% open rate | 5.6% click rate**

That may seem small, but almost twice the number of people clicked and 13.5% more people opened the email based solely on the headline change.

When you're sending an email out to 38,000 people, that's a big difference.

I've split test so many ideas only to learn that my gut isn't always right.

Split-testing is a variation of crowd-sourcing, and it can give you much better insight into what's going to connect with people and what won't.

If you could reach twice the number of people by split-testing, why wouldn't you?

8. RETHINK MOTIVATION

The art of leadership is in many ways, a study in human motivation. Your job and my job as leaders is to motivate people toward a preferred, common future.

The question is how.

Yu-kai Chou is a leading global expert on gamification theory, and he shared eight motivations that drive all human behavior.

You can access the [framework here](#) and watch his [TEDx talk here](#).

While Chou's theory is too complex to explain in this blog post, the take away is this: most of us appeal to one or two core human motivations, not all eight.

For example, I naturally appeal to meaning, accomplishment, and ownership. All of these are noble, but they tend to produce long-term committed followers.

I naturally avoid the motivators of scarcity, avoidance, and unpredictability. Interestingly enough, these are the motivations that produce viral growth and massive scale.

Fascinating, isn't it?

It also raises this question: Why should Instagram, Minecraft and Star Wars have greater momentum than the church?

The point is that if you understand the nuances of human motivation, you can motivate a group of people to take massive action. (The scripture, by the way, uses all eight.)

9. EMBRACE FAILURE

Ultimately there's no success without failure. Why? Because experimentation always involves failure.

Too many churches try something, conclude it didn't work and back off.

Ever played Angry Birds? Rovio, the company that created it, [had 51 failed projects](#), was almost bankrupt and had shrunk down to 12 employees before it released Angry Birds, which went on to gross hundreds of millions of dollars.

[Life Church](#) failed in its first video venue. It failed in its early ventures into multisite, having to close locations because they didn't work at all.

The point is: neither Rovio or Life Church gave up.

As mentioned above, Life Church now at 27 locations in 2018 will add four more. And it will likely see attendance pushing 100,000 people a weekend in the near future.

[YouVersion](#), a free Bible app developed by the team at Life Church, also failed in its first iteration. They launched it as a website that almost nobody visited.

Shortly thereafter, they relaunched it as an app. It's now been installed almost 300 million times around the world.

Success is moving from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.

THOUGHTS?

Although this is anything but a short post, I hope this summary and study will help you and your team process change and broker innovation at your church.

About the Author: Carey Nieuwhof is a former lawyer and founding pastor of Connexus Church. He's the author of several best-selling books, including his latest, *Didn't See It Coming*, and speaks to leaders around the world about leadership, change and personal growth.

The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast and Carey's blog at www.CareyNieuwhof.com are accessed by millions of leaders each year.

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Postscript from the Author:

Posts like this can be fun to read, but think you think, who even has time to implement this? Nobody.

Think again.

There's a proven system that has helped thousands of leaders get far more productive at work AND spend more time at home with their family.

The High Impact Leader course, is my online, on-demand course designed to help you get time, energy and priorities working in your favour.

Many leaders who have taken it are recovering 3 productive hours a day. That's about 1000 hours of found time each year.

Maybe you're suspicious and think "there's no way I'd recover 1000 productive hours". Well, let's say you got 3 hours a week back, not 3 hours a day.

Well, that's 156 hours a year, which works out to almost a month of work weeks. Which is kind of like giving yourself four extra weeks of vacation.

All of that can happen and has happened through the High Impact Leader. If you want to start leveraging time, energy and priorities to help you lead better at work and at home, visit www.TheHighImpactLeader.com to learn more.