

Creative Thinking in Christian Leadership

At a mission conference, the Sunday school teachers wanted all of the children to understand what a missionary does.

A couple of the teachers, however, objected. They felt the five- and six-year-olds were too young to grasp the concept of missions.

The teachers conferred over the problem. One teacher had a shower curtain with a map of the world printed on it. During the conference, they took the shower curtain to the classes along with cans of shaving cream. They put some shaving cream on the part of the map representing the USA, along with a few other countries that send out missionaries.

The teachers said the cream represented the message about Jesus. They explained to the kids that those were the countries where the gospel is preached. Then they asked the kids why there was no shaving cream in other countries. They explained something about the people in certain countries and that they did not have the gospel. So somebody must take the gospel to them. How?

They had the kids take off their shoes, step into the piles of cream, pick up some on their feet, and walk it over to the countries in which there was none.

Toward the end of the conference, the pastor asked the five-year-olds, "What is a missionary?" The kids responded, "A missionary takes the message of Jesus to places where people don't have it."

Those teachers solved a problem some originally assumed impossible. They did it with creative thinking.

One of the key characteristics distinguishing genuine leaders from mere managers is creative thinking. It explains why some leaders seem content to maintain the status quo.

What is creative thinking?

We can define creative thinking as the ability to invent original ideas for accomplishing goals.

The source of creative thinking is our imagination. This is a faculty of mind given by God, which he expects us to use. Guidance from God often comes through the application of our own mental faculties.

Why are we poor at creative thinking?

Laziness

Thinking is hard work. Creative thinking is the hardest of all. Just ask a novelist. Most will tell you they only write three or four hours a day because it is too exhausting.ⁱ

Wrong theology about guidance

Christians sometimes have wrong concepts about the mind. They wait for God to give divine revelation, while God waits for them to use the faculties he gave them. Result: Nobody is moving, and nothing gets accomplished.

Repression of creative faculties

A high school teacher put a small dot on the blackboard. Then he asked the class what it was. The students all agreed that it was nothing but a dot of chalk on the blackboard. The teacher replied, "I did the same exercise yesterday with a group of children. One thought it was an insect egg or perhaps a bird's eye. Another thought it was the head of a bald man seen from an airplane."

Why the difference? In the years between kindergarten and high school, students were discarding their imagination. Why? They were learning to be "specific" about things, learning the "right answers," and learning what is "realistic."ⁱⁱ

Absorbing facts is not the same as exercising the mind. In some countries, the education system is based on rote memorization.

Students write down verbatim what the teacher says, then copy it neatly into a notebook at home. This is supposed to be education. It is not education. It is brainwashing.

Fear of failure or ridicule

Nobody wants to make a fool of himself. The temptation toward this becomes stronger as we advance in leadership. We think, "If this idea fails, we'll look like fools, and people will lose confidence in us."

Negative thinking

What is the difference between a leader who gets things done and those who only manage the work of others? The former ignores the reasons why it can't be done and does it anyway.

Great entrepreneurs rarely ask, “Is the project going to work?” Instead, they are challenged by, “How can we make it work?”

Comfort zone

We confine ourselves to comfortable limitations. It often feels easier to stick with what we know. Sometimes it is good to stretch our comfort zone and attempt what we may not feel *gifted* in.

Group brainstorming

At a meeting in a paint company, technicians were seeking new ideas for removing paint. One man humorously suggested mixing dynamite with the paint. That way, years later, they could toss a match at the painted wall and blow it off.

Once the laughter died down, the group took this bizarre idea and came up with a surprising solution: mix a chemical with the paint that could react later with the paint if pasted over it to dissolve it. This is how paint remover was invented.

Is there any reason a group of Christians cannot excel in brainstorming? A stroke of genius is sometimes *modified stupidity*. Knowing this may help us break through inhibitions.

Summary

Creative thinking entails using our imagination for inventing original ideas to solve problems. Barriers exist in this process. Effective leaders overcome them.

From this chapter we learn...

- God wants us to indulge in creative thinking because he gave us the faculty of imagination to do it.
- Numerous barriers to creative thinking exist. We need to be aware of them.
- Brainstorming is a useful way to practice our creative faculties.

ⁱ Isaac Asimov, the great science fiction novelist, said in a radio interview that most people could write a story if they concentrated on it hard enough. He claimed talent was secondary. A disposition to hard work was the secret.

I took this as a challenge because I felt he was underestimating the talent. So over a weekend I concentrated as hard as I could on a story idea. The result: A 6000 word story

on my web site I titled, Phobia. It is a lousy example of science fiction but that is beside the point. Azimov was right.

ii Illustration taken from A Whack on the Side of the Head by Roger Von Oech, Ph.D

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