


KINGDOM INNOVATION LEADERSHIP



The road to
relevance for
Christian ministry

By Marc Stein

ONCE UPON A TIME, TWO MINISTRY LEADERS were driving down a familiar highway. These leaders had much in common and were enjoying their time together. Suddenly the landscape changed. One leaned over and asked, “Where are we? Everything looks unfamiliar.” The other said, “Did we miss a turnoff or overlook something?” People looked different. They didn’t respond as they once had.

I think we can relate to those proverbial ministry leaders. In fact, it’s almost as if we’re riding along with them in the back seat. Our world has changed so quickly and significantly that it is hard to find our bearings. One of the frustrating factors of this misadventure is the realization that the small adjustments we once controlled can no longer get us back to the main road.

How did we get here?

We don’t need a map to discover that we have unintentionally merged onto a narrow downhill road with few turnoffs or opportunities to exit. Okay, I’ll be the one to admit it, “we’re lost.”

WHERE CAN WE TURN?

It’s not like we have not successfully driven this road many times before, but we are definitely not in Kansas anymore either. The everyday activities that all but guaranteed us relevant, fruitful ministry are just not working the same anymore. So, how do we get back on track?

To bend our ministry cultures back towards significant relevance and impact, we need to return to the main road, retracing the path Jesus walked, remembering whom Jesus cared for

and reflecting the ministry he modeled.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells about the final judgement, and he clearly lets us know whom he values and what he expects of us. In short, Jesus told us to look after those who cannot care for themselves. To make sure we do not miss this off ramp, he identified himself firmly with them when he said: “*The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’*” (Matt. 25:40).

Now that the destination is clear, we can put it into our GPS. But, there are many routes. Which one do we take?

We simply need to follow the Chief Shepherd’s path. It may look a little different now, but the trail is still visible to those who are seeking it. The key is to understand the times we live in and adapt his original model for here and now. Creativity will not be enough. Although not yet a familiar term in the ministry world, *innovation* is what is required.

Webster defines innovation as simply “the introduction of something new.” But, what?

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We must hold tightly to the lessons of Matthew 25 and venture boldly and courageously into unknown territory like the Joshua or Caleb of our generation. There may be giants in the land but we can know that our Lord is always with us. Kingdom Innovation Leadership is a transformational form of ministry that adapts the timeless truths of God’s Word to create practical solutions to address the unmet needs of those around us.

These three simple objectives can serve as our guideposts:

1. Gather an innovation mastermind working group of humble, highly gifted Christ leader/followers to identify underserved populations and practical needs in the community.
2. Create a high functioning, sustainable and expandable innovation environment to develop new perspectives, ideas and markets.
3. Collaborate with churches, ministries and Christian businesses that have the resources, network and influence needed to elevate the best concepts to real world application.

To accomplish these three objectives, we will need practical steps — mile markers if you will — to help measure progress toward our desired outcomes.

To accomplish the first objective, “gather an innovation mastermind working group,” you and a small group of like-minded individuals will need to prayerfully consider other individuals in your community, ministry sector or corner of the kingdom whom you can invite to create a working group aimed at bending the culture of your environment.

- Identify and attract kingdom innovators, idea generators and entrepreneurs from interrelated segments of church, Christian agencies and marketplace ministries.
- Invite thought leaders and/or change agents of compassion and mercy who can challenge us, teach us something new and expand our thinking.
- Gather courageous individuals who are willing to encourage new and unlikely collaborations and challenge traditional boundaries.

The idea here is not to assemble people who are trying to protect the status quo. On the other hand, we do not want anarchists desiring to tear down the entire system either. We want smart, Jesus-loving leaders, regardless of title, to unify for Kingdom Innovation Leadership purposes.

The second objective involves creating an “expandable innovation environment.” The goal here is to reach beyond the usual suspects, solutions and ecosystems to identify unmet needs within the communities we serve and determine practical steps to address the needs.

- Establish innovation platforms that encourage individuals to explore new ways to create, deliver and share mercy and compassion without assimilating into the greater secular community.
- Build real-life sandboxes within, or right next door to, traditional institutions in which a new generation of transformative ministry can be explored.
- Encourage the combination or uncoupling of existing ministry models as a means of creating new ways to express Christian identity, solve problems or deliver value.

The emphasis of the second objective is to survey for unmet

needs and offer practical products and services to the community without losing or hiding our Christian identity. In other words, offering services or solutions through Christian organizations and individuals for the benefit of the whole community, regardless of the beliefs or lifestyles of those whom we serve.

The third objective is to “collaborate with churches, ministries and Christian businesses that have the resources, network and influence needed to elevate the best concepts to real world application.” Since churches, ministries and Christian businesses are often seen as exclusionary to non-believers, this is an opportunity to express Christian service in a new way that all people can experience.

- Move quickly from concept to prototype to validation before landing on a new service configuration or model that works and is ready to scale.
- Create a real world demonstration to explore how the new ministry model or service offering works for people inside and outside the church.
- Find people and institutions who are receptive to kingdom innovation and then resource them with the tools and platform necessary to scale.

The road to Kingdom Innovation Leadership is paved with practical solutions to unmet community needs; we simply need humble individuals willing to innovate collaboratively to find them. The result will be a closer connection to our neighbors. It may even prompt a question of why we are serving this way and lead to deeper conversations. Like the early Christians, we could acquire a new and different identity as helpful and caring followers of Christ.

We can individually and collectively change how our friends and neighbors respond to Jesus and his church through our daily interactions. Our everyday activities can once again lead to relevant, fruitful ministry and outreach.

In conclusion, we can re-enter the path that Jesus walked and help others find it too. Simply by meeting the practical needs of our friends and neighbors in a Matthew 25 manner, we can help bend culture back towards Jesus and make the local church the center of the community once again. By engaging Kingdom Innovation Leadership, we can help rewrite the story of our cities, churches and people everywhere. ●

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