

“Deliberate Simplicity”

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Notes by Dave Kraft

Kindle Reader, hence no page numbers

There is no growth without change, no change without loss, and no loss without pain. When it comes to great ideas, you’ll soon find that I am into not manufacturing but distribution. When you have something important to do, keep the process simple. The more complexity in the system, the more likely that implementation will fail. One of the things that made Wendy’s better was putting a limit on the number of ideas we would implement. — Dave Thomas, Founder of Wendy’s. Many churches today are over-featured and unnecessarily complex. The complexity is strangling their ability to grow. Jim Collins points out in his book *Good to Great*, “Most of us lead busy but undisciplined lives. We have ever-expanding ‘to do’ lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing — and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who built the good-to-great companies, however, made as much use of ‘stop doing’ lists as ‘to do’ lists. They displayed a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk.”

It is a simple task to make things complex, but a complex task to make them simple. By doing less of certain things, and stopping other things altogether, energy and resources can be reinvested in the few things really worth doing. By not being so broad, we can go deeper. The Clark Kent pastors are burdened, if not overwhelmed, by the complexity. Many are working to the point of exhaustion in an attempt to keep up. As Pastor Wade Hodges opines, “If becoming a part of a church places people in an environment that encourages them to live more frenetic lives than they were living before, then we are going about doing church the wrong way.”

It’s not about the hours you put in; it’s about what you put into those hours. As Howard Hendricks says, “The secret of concentration is elimination.” Why do the users of the iPod enjoy the experience? According to Jonathan Ivie, the VP for Industrial Design, “It’s all about removing the unnecessary. Our degree of dogmatism rises and falls with the degree of clarity in Scripture. Where there is more clarity in Scripture, we are more dogmatic. Where there is less clarity in Scripture, we are less dogmatic. When I say that there are not many things we need to know to be a follower of Christ, I do not mean that we should pick and choose what we believe. I mean that we should pick and choose what we emphasize. Some Scripture is informative; some is transformative. The greatest challenge in discipleship is implementation rather than information. Many Christians are trafficking in unlived truth. They are educated beyond their obedience.

Small groups is the way we stay connected. Outreach is the way we stay concerned. The key word when dealing with things is efficiency. The key word when dealing with people is effectiveness. The movement from big to small, from centralized to decentralized, and from passive to participatory has reached us. And by “us” I mean “us, the church.” At Christ the King we advocate ten plus ten — ten minutes a day in prayer, and ten minutes a day in the Word. Some may spend more than that, but we ask everyone at CTK to spend a minimum of twenty minutes per day interacting with God.

Sometimes an emphasis on excellence is just a product of unhealthy perfectionism. Sometimes it's evidence of a lack of faith that God can feed thousands with only five loaves and two fishes. By emphasizing adequate rather than superior functionality, the Deliberately Simple church creates opportunities for average people to go to heights they wouldn't think possible. “No, the church is not for us. The church is us, but it's not for us. We are here for the lost. Warren Bennis says, “All great groups believe they are on a mission from God.” People have to live to leave a legacy.

The greatest sin of the church today is not any sin of commission or sin of omission but the sin of no mission. When all is said and done, the key for Christ the King Community Church lies in its clarity of purpose and simplicity of operation. At CTK our mission statement calls for us “to create an authentic Christian community that effectively reaches out to unchurched people in love, acceptance, and forgiveness so that they may experience the joy of salvation and a purposeful life of discipleship.”

I hear addicts talk about the shakes and panic attacks and the highs and lows of resisting their habit, and to some degree I understand them because I have had habits of my own, but no drug is so powerful as the drug of self. No rut in the mind is so deep as the one that says I am the world, the world belongs to me, all people are characters in my play. There is no addiction so powerful as self-addiction. — Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*

As Reggie McNeal says, “The shift from ‘doing’ church at the clubhouse to ‘being’ church in the world is a paradigm shift that has apparently eluded many church leaders.” It's time for God's people to get out of the barn and into the field. It's time for us to quit standing in the barn doorway, inviting the crops to come in. We take people where they are; we just don't leave them there.” Open groups, on the other hand, are eager and ready to accept new people. They balance the impulse for community with the mandate to reach out. We ask every small group to be a lifeboat instead of a pleasure boat. The question, it seems to me, is this: is church a place you go to, or is church a place you go from?

This is the true joy in life ... being used for a purpose recognized as a mighty one. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations. — George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*. Sincere is a compound from Latin (*sine* + *cera*) that literally means “without wax.” Addition is the exercise of fools. Subtraction is the exercise of genius. — Tom Peters.

“My child, if you cannot trust Me with all, you do not trust Me at all.” The most miserable people I know are Christians wrestling with God over a key. Once all the keys are handed over, your life can begin. At Christ the King we like to say, “God will take you where you are. He just won't leave you where you are.” When Max Planck was awarded the Nobel Prize for his discovery of quantum theory, he said, “Looking back over the long and labyrinthine path which finally led to the discovery, I am vividly reminded of Goethe's saying that men will always be making mistakes as long as they are striving for something.”

A Latin phrase that fed Martin Luther's theology was *simul justus et peccator* (“simultaneously saint and sinner”). So be who you really are. God can take you from there. The conventional church has become so complicated and difficult to pull off that only a rare person who is a professional can do it every week. “When church is so complicated, its function is taken out of the hands of the common Christian and placed in the hands of a few talented professionals. This results in a passive church whose members come and act more like spectators than empowered agents of God's Kingdom.” — Neil Cole, *Organic Church*. In an organic construct, the pastor's role is to create and sustain an environment wherein the people of the church can carry out their ministry with minimal obstacles and maximum fulfillment. He is not so much to do the ministry as to see that the ministry gets done.

The theory: the bigger the building, the more people you can reach. The megachurch mirrors the big-box retailer. The Deliberately Simple church mirrors a restaurant chain. At Christ the King we don't like the word control. We like the word empower. Authoritarian cultures spawn passivity and create codependency. To combat that tendency, we train people in our organization to be ready and able to say, “Yes, sure, you bet. In our context, the role of the pastors and staff is to create and sustain an environment where the people of the church (the real ministers) can carry out their ministries with minimum obstacles and maximum fulfillment. The paid staff is focused on climate control. In other words, they manage the conditions of the system but not necessarily the behavior. Prosumers Instead of Consumers In a Deliberately Simple church, we ask the people who attend to be prosumers instead of consumers.

The word prosumer was coined by futurist Alvin Toffler to describe the psyche of a participant who actively contributes to the experience he or she is enjoying (as opposed to a consumer, who consumes the experience). When it comes to supporting individual ministry, there are four words in which every Deliberately Simple pastor needs to become fluent.

These four words are, “Yes, sure, you bet.” “Yes,” “Sure,” and “You bet” need to be spoken frequently to make certain that we are open to God’s plans, not just our own — to guarantee that we are empowering people instead of controlling them. The evolution from mainframe machines to the networked PC is one of the most significant cultural changes to happen in our lifetime.

It forecasts the shift from the monolocation church to the multilocation church that is socially atomized. At Christ the King we call our organizational philosophy “Freedom with handrails.” The handrails are our beliefs and our brand. Inside those two rails, we want individual parts to enjoy as much freedom as possible. Another analogy would be a necklace. There is a string that holds the beads together as part of a bigger whole. The string in the case of a multisite church is the church’s mission, vision, and values. Each bead is independent but, by coordinating with other beads around a common mission, is able to experience a more meaningful existence than a bead could in isolation.

We have to get urgency up, fear down, complacency down. We have to get predisposed to go anywhere, to go to anyone, and to go now. “Imminent execution,” says Samuel Johnson, “does concentrate the mind wonderfully.” The bottom line of the story is that God wants us to be adventurous. He charges us to be entrepreneurs. He challenges us to be creative. He calls us to be aggressive. He invites us to take risks. Jesus’ answer to how we are to live in light of his return is, “Go for it!” We’re not to wait around. We’re to get busy. We’re not to wait for instructions. We’re to take initiative. We’re not to live in fear. We’re to proceed in faith.

An expectation for leaders at CTK is “that you will be growth oriented and plan on serving twice as many people as you presently do. Organize with growth in mind. Plan for the future.” This expectation implies that we are pulled by vision instead of pushed by need. The Deliberately Simple church is committed to launching lifeboats — small groups and congregations — here, there, and everywhere. We are not on a pleasure cruise. We are on a rescue mission. Church is not a place you go to but a place you go from. One of the truly distinguishing features of a Deliberately Simple church is its ability to move from idea to implementation quickly. We follow a living, active God. A God who is on the move. The Old Testament tabernacle is a wonderful model of God’s presence in the lives of his people. The design was given to Moses by God. The key factor in the tabernacle’s design was its mobility. God is not a God who stays put. He’s going places. Our challenge is to follow. When the pillar of cloud and fire moves, we move. A great example of this commitment to

It is more important that we do the right things than that we do things right. The Deliberately Simple church, in contrast, could be described as a sports car. It is designed for risk and speed. It is smaller and built to hold only a few people at a time. It can make turns very quickly and responds rapidly to the direction of the driver.

If we were honest, we would all acknowledge that it often takes too much time to get things done. Large organizations are like mammoth tankers: the pilot can change course but it takes a long time for the tanker to respond. In today's world there's simply not enough time to wait for that change of course. We have to trade in our tankers for tugboats — nippy little workmanlike vessels that can zip in and out of harbor in no time. But there's more to a tugboat than just speed. There's strength, too, strength to pull an idea into port. — Frank Deprez, *Zero Space*. At CTK we like to say that we are fast instead of vast. We have even used the word FAST as an acronym for focused, authentic, strategic, and transferable. In explaining the difficulty of moving from idea to implementation, experts use terms like “institutional resistance,” “bureaucratic stifling,” and “inability to capitalize on opportunity.” But no matter how you describe it, the root cause is a failure of leadership. Leaders either cannot or do not lead.

In fact, at its root the word lead comes from an Old English word that means “go, travel, guide.” Leaders are goers. They need to be free to travel. They need to be allowed to guide. This means that the organization needs to allow leaders to lead. Everyone becomes cautious, calculating, and conservative. Instead of living tiptoe on the edge of expectation, Spiritual ends require spiritual means. If we want to see a vibrant, powerful movement, in which we are keeping the main thing the main thing, staying out of God's way, being extremely sensitive to the Spirit's promptings, For the most part, CTK is not the kind of church you go to but the kind of church you go from.

Left to ourselves, Christians quickly circle the wagons. We build towers and walls. We look to be blessed instead of being a blessing. I say “left to ourselves” because God's last, best effort to help us get the arrows pointed out was to send his Spirit to indwell us. God's answer to Babel is Pentecost. Kroc scaled McDonald's into an efficient system that could be reliably and quickly reproduced. He was a pioneer of organizational repeatability. “Relentless repeatability” was a phrase used by golf legend Ben Hogan to describe the driving force behind his professional success.

The kind of leader we are looking for is a “pastorpreneur.” A pastorpreneur (pastor/entrepreneur) is a kingdom-minded leader who has a heart for people and the ingenuity to reach them. Not all pastors are pastorpreneurs. The difference between a pastor and a pastorpreneur might be the difference between an employee and an owner. A pastorpreneur is self-inspired and self-directed to fulfill God's calling on his or her life. A pastorpreneur has an obsession to pursue his or her sense of mission and to make a difference in the expansion of Christ's kingdom. A pastorpreneur is comfortable being a trendsetter rather than a replicator. person I want to be, but not for lack of information. I've known for years that prayer is powerful and how to do it. I've just not prayed. In a Deliberately Simple church, we are convinced that the gap holding back most believers is not the gap between what they know