



Church Media:

The Five Greatest Techniques for Helping the Pastor Catch Your Vision For Television

By Phil Cooke

Whenever I visit local churches and ministries, most of the time I'm faced with a frustrated local producer who's at his or her wits end. They're usually good producers, with extensive experience, and a real calling to use media to take the gospel to the culture. But in nearly every case, he or she is either burned out, upset, or ready to quit.

Ninety percent of the time, I get the same response - *"The pastor just doesn't have a vision for television."* It also comes in numerous other laments, such as *"Every time I try something new, the pastor hates it."* Or the tried and true, *"The pastor just doesn't get it - he doesn't even watch TV himself, so he doesn't understand how to use it as a tool to reach the community,"* and last but certainly not least: *"I've never had the budget I really needed."*

In the words of a former President: *"I feel your pain."* I've worked with enough pastors, evangelists, and ministry leaders over the last 25 years to know the frustrations and challenges that exist in this sensitive area. So over those years, I've discovered five critical steps to help you get in sync with the pastor, and hopefully give him a better vision for the possibilities of using television to impact this generation.

- 1) **Change your Perception from Being a "Techie" to Being a "Producer."** In most churches and ministries, the "media person" is perceived by the pastor and staff as little more than a "techie" - someone who puts "A/V stuff" together and is somewhat astute at electronics. But when the pastor views his media person only as a "techie," he's not likely to develop a friendship, share his personal vision, or view you as the person who can guide that vision to reality.

But how do you move from being a "techie" to a "Producer?" *Start with you.*
That leads us to number two:

- 2) **Start Thinking from the Pastor's Point of View.** I've been in meetings between pastors and their media staff, when all the media people talk about are wireless mics, video levels, tape formats, NLE's, and a million other terms about which the

pastor has no clue. His interest lies in words like *preaching, communicating, impact, storytelling, changed lives* - not non-linear vs. linear editing. All the fancy TV terms in the world won't impress him because that's not his passion. Until you can get on his wavelength, he'll continue to tune you out. Remember - people who can adjust video monitors, set levels, and run computer programs are relatively plentiful - but people who understand how to effectively use media as a vehicle for reaching the world with the gospel are few and far between. Make sure the pastor understands that's your heart and ultimate vision.

- 3) **Get Past the Budget Battle**. You work at a church - not a Hollywood studio, so get over it! Low budgets are a way of life! Instead of moping around constantly depressed - complaining about all the things you wish you had, start using what you have more effectively. I teach Directing classes in Russia, and needless to say, they have less equipment than most decent sized churches. But what they do have is vision - and a real desire to use the tools they have to make a difference.

Trust me - constant beefing about how little budget you have will not endear you to the pastor or administrator either. So understand that you have realistic budget limitations and adjust. Remember how much you hate crew members who constantly nag and whine? That's the way the pastor feels at every meeting with you.

When the pastor and administrator see how you handle a limited budget, they'll be much more friendly when the next round of funding comes through, so ease up and make the most with what you've got. And if you find out you just can't do that, then I suggest for your mental health you get another job - why be miserable for the rest of your life?

One positive way around a perpetually low budget is to get out there and raise money yourself. Independent producers do it everyday, and it works just as well for a motivated church or ministry producer. There are numerous Christian media producers around the country who have gone to local merchants, businessmen, and foundations to raise money for studios, equipment, and other funding. Do you have any idea the high esteem your pastor would give you if you suddenly brought in enough money to expand your television ministry? Think about that for a change.

- 4) **Become an "Idea Source"**. In many churches the pastor feels like everyone wants him to come up with all the ideas. Whether it's the youth department, teens, married couples, seniors, or the million other outreaches of a typical church, most pastors feel an incredible weight of responsibility for developing new programs and ideas. But when you begin offering him creative ideas on a regular basis, the pastor will feel that he has a real source of new concepts and inspiration. He'll more likely call you into important meetings, and listen to your advice for a change.

But to be a successful idea source, you have to understand one important principle

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Make sure your ideas are possible:

- **With the budget framework of the church.** Don't suggest you shoot the Christmas Musical in the United Kingdom with the London Symphony Orchestra, unless the church can afford it. Sure it may be a terrific idea, but what's the point if you can't pay for it?
- **Within the style and outreach of the church.** If your church is in a rural area, a hip inner city style outreach might be a wonderful idea, but not appropriate for your target audience. Always keep in mind who you're ministering to and trying to reach.
- **Within the ministry calling of the pastor.** Every pastor has a personal style as well as an overall calling and direction for his life and ministry. To ask him to dramatically deviate from that style of ministry is like asking Michael Jordan to enter the Olympics as a Downhill Skier - you're in for a lot of problems. Recognize the inherent spiritual gifts and expertise of the pastor, and use that in your creative thinking.

Start Thinking in Terms of the "Big Picture". To be a media director or media minister today is an awesome responsibility, but I find that many in the ranks think of themselves as little more than "audio visual guys." Until you think of yourself on a higher level, no one else will. Learn about product "branding" and apply those principles to yourself. Increase your perception in the eyes of those around you and you'll be amazed at the meetings you'll be invited to, the decisions you're asked to make, and the responsibility you'll be given.

I learned long ago that no one cares about your calling as much as you. Treat it with care, and God will expand your territory. But keep in mind one last important principle - **changing other's perceptions will take time**. You've spent years with the pastor and staff perceiving you in your current light, so it will take time to change. But there's no better time to start than right now. To help start with the ideas and insights you need, I highly recommend you read Finding Common Ground: How To Communicate with Those Outside the Christian Community... While we Still Can, by Tim Downs. It's published by Moody Press and it may be the most important book I've ready in a long time.

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