



The Secret of Creativity

We Could Transform the Media for Christ if we Followed Gideon's Example

By Phil Cooke

I've had the opportunity over the years to win a number of awards for writing and directing television commercials, music videos, and feature length television programs. In most cases, the awards were for various forms of "creativity" and "innovation". To succeed in television and motion pictures today requires enormous amounts of creativity, simply because the competition for the minds and hearts of the audience is so keen. However, it doesn't take much viewing to see that most Christian efforts in the media are remarkably devoid of creativity, often causing me to wonder if many Christians even realize how critical this skill really is.

Although I do believe that some are born with a predisposition toward creativity, my personal experience has shown me that much of creativity is a learned skill, and with a little training, nearly anyone can be creative.

The fact is, the single greatest challenge facing the church today is the way we think. It's not lack of money, resources, enthusiasm, or even churches and ministries. We are losing the culture war because we're losing the mental war. Simply put, we have to learn to win back the hearts and minds of the culture around us, and to do that, we have to approach the culture from a creative point of view.

Since God is the ultimate Creator, when I teach creativity to media professionals, I often go to the story of Gideon in Judges Chapter six. How God dealt with Gideon in a desperate situation, is an amazing blueprint for how to develop creativity in life.

First, the background: For seven years the Medianites had been raiding the Israelites, and they were so oppressive, the Israelites had fled to mountain caves. The Medianites destroyed crops, animals, took their women, and left the Israelites devastated.

Finally - after crying out to heaven, God sent a divine messenger to a young man named Gideon.

Follow these important steps, and you'll transform your approach to creativity.

1) Go in the Strength You Have.

- Verse 14: The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

15 "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

How often we forget that God has already given us all the strength we need for any challenge He gives us. Stop thinking "I'm not creative enough." Don't wait for a raise, a better education, or a new position. I learned a long time ago, my dream of directing television and film projects wasn't going to come to me - I had to attack it myself. I couldn't wait for money, or studio help, or distribution - I just had to act.

2) Prepare an Offering.

- Verse 17: Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. 18) Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."

And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

In that culture, an offering was often made to mark a place where God met man. The altar was a physical testimony that the encounter was real - God was in that place, and something important happened.

Today, we need to take that kind of action and go "out on a limb". Someone once said we need to do something that is so big, without God's intervention it would fail. Make an offering - build an altar - create a starting point. Practical examples would be to

take a class to learn something new, hire someone, get an insurance policy, get an office, expand for the task, tell people about it, just start the process!

3) **Do Some Damage Yourself - Eliminate the Altars of the Past.**

- Verse 25: That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. 26) Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."
27) So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him.

We have to make a clean break with past ways of thinking. My experience in consulting with Christian media networks, ministries, and churches is they often want to do new and innovative things, but they have very real problems actually breaking away from their old ways of thinking. Re-think the department, change people's positions, re-structure the schedules. Don't be afraid to change. The point?

Fix it so you can't go back.

4) **Gather your Resources.**

- Verse 34: Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

Find out the resources you do have. Free interns? Friends who believe in you? Christian conferences where you can network? Find others that think the way you do and start sharing your ideas with them.

I believe to make an impact in this culture, we'll have to do projects so big that it will take many Christians working together to make it happen. The solo days of Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and others is largely over - to transform culture today, we have to start working like a team.

5) **Don't Worry about Size.**

- Chapter 7, Verse 2: The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3) announce now to the people, `Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

I've done projects with some of the largest Christian organizations and ministries in the world, and I've discovered size often gets in the way of their effectiveness. I have a distant relative who is the pilot of an oil tanker. He was brought in to pilot the Exxon Valdez into the port after her accident. He says that to turn an oil tanker, you have to begin 15 miles before the turn. Why? Because it's so big and heavy.

Being small can be frustrating, but it also means being nimble, free, and having little or nothing to lose. Some of my largest ministry clients are actually paralyzed by the fear of doing something to upset their ministry partners. It's simply bondage - they don't take risks, can't be cutting edge, and are always behind the creative curve - in spite of the fact that they have great financial resources.

6) **Have Vision - Think Creatively and do what Others Don't Expect.**

- Verse 16: Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.
17) "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. 18 When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, `For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

It was a strange idea - but it scared the wits out of the Medianites. After all - in today's culture, perception is more important than reality - and there are times when we can actually use that to our advantage, just like Gideon did. But you have to have vision - *the big picture*.

Farmers cutting rows in the field keep them straight by looking at the horizon. They don't get so focused on the plow that they never look up. This is one reason Christians rarely use the media successfully - we don't see the big picture because we're so caught up in the immediate work of the ministry. I often have pastors and ministry leaders who could make an incredible impact nationally, but they are so caught up in small, local problems they don't make time to address the challenges that would allow them to have a much bigger platform. They don't have vision...

If you'll think about these six critical steps the next time you begin a project, it will revolutionize your thinking and energize your effort. But it's important you begin thinking like this every day. Remember the famous advertising agent's quote:

"Creativity is like shaving - if you don't do it everyday, you're a bum."

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