



## *If He's Creative, He Must Be a Little Crazy*

### **Why do churches and ministries find it so difficult to work with creative people?**

He showed up for work at the church office with a tattoo, a punk haircut, and jeans frayed at the knees. He had been hired as a graphic artist, and his resume and portfolio were very impressive, but the minute he walked into the office on his first day of work, people started freaking out.

First of all, he wanted to come in at 1pm and work until late into the evening. He said he did his best work at night, but that was completely contrary to the church office schedule. Second, he wasn't much for the dress code - rock band patches and army boots didn't really work in a church setting. And finally, his headphones. He always listened to music with headphones and he could never hear when you talked to him.

The fact was - he really loved the Lord, and wanted to do amazing design work for the Kingdom, but under the circumstances, he was just too much to deal with. The office staff was irate. Just having him there (or not having him there in the morning) was a distraction, and when finally everyone had enough, they contacted the pastor.

The pastor really had two choices. He could fire the young man and restore a sense of order back to the office. Everyone would love it, and things would be back to normal. Of course if he did that he'd be back to using Mrs. Blackwelder designing the church print materials, and Mrs. Blackwelder was creative as a doormat.

His other choice was to keep the artist, but throw the entire office into a frenzy.

So the pastor did an amazing thing. At the risk of upsetting some of the staff, he worked out a schedule for the young designer, so he could come in at odd hours. Then,

he found a place away from most of the staff, where he could work without his presence, clothing, or headphones disturbing anyone.

*And then he stepped back to see what happened.*

It worked. In fact - it worked so well, the entire perception of the church was changed. Through more exciting and relevant designs, graphics, and logos - people who had never thought twice about church attendance were suddenly attracted to the church. It actually started a revolution in that community that is still continuing today.

## **WHY ARE SO MANY CREATIVE PEOPLE WEIRD?**

It's a fair question, and just a short look at TV programs like Entertainment Tonight, or a glance at MTV confirms that there are some pretty strange creative people out there.

**There's no question that creative people are wired differently.** Their perception of the world, their reactions to events, and even the way they sleep is often dramatically different from most. Therefore, much of that behavior comes out of biological differences. So trying to change their behavior is often a futile and impossible task.

**Creative people have different priorities.** I've seen managers at both companies and churches fight political battles that never seem to end - for the corner office, access to the pastor, a company car, a faster computer, and on and on. But creative people? They're more interested in the color of their office, or being able to listen to music while they work. Few creative people care about the same things other workers care about.

**Creative people see different ways to achieve the same goals.** Most pastors or managers want to achieve goals, but often they are overly concerned about how to reach the goal. They are interested in rules, procedures, and paperwork. One Christian TV station executive I know has a "flow chart" for the station that looks remarkably like Dante's journey through Hell. Just reading it gives me the chills.

On the other hand, creative people are just as driven, but much less concerned about "how" they reach the goal. They are usually much more flexible, willing to try new techniques, or re-think the normal paths. That's why "breakthrough" thinking often

comes from creative people - they see the world differently, and are more concerned about achieving the goal than rigid, specific ways to get there.

## **BUT WHAT ABOUT MY SITUATION?**

The fact is - if you have creative people in your office, church, or ministry, you need to make a conscious effort to deal with them differently. If you can learn to respect their differences, rather than criticize them, it will make a dramatic impact in the way the office functions and the success you achieve.

So exactly how should you deal with "creatives"?

- 1) **Within reason, don't let their habits, appearance, or style bother you.** Sure - there are unavoidable office rules for smoking, suggestive clothing, breaks, etc... But if it's not absolutely critical to the mission of the church or ministry, cut them some slack! Let them have a little fun with their hairstyle or clothes, and you'll see their motivation dramatically increase.
- 2) **Give them flexibility in their schedules.** Who cares if they do their best work at night? In most creative functions, you can easily measure their output and the quality of the work, so worry less about how many hours they put into it. Monitor their projects closely, and as long as they keep up and are doing great work, what does it matter when they do it? Another suggestion is to pay them per project rather than by the hour. That way, as long as they meet the deadline, it doesn't matter if it takes them a day or a week - it doesn't cost you any more money.
- 3) **Learn the art of compliments and motivation.** Most creative people are easily hurt by criticism - it's part of their make-up. But if you can compliment and motivate them, you won't believe how the level of work will improve. Remember - a carrot always works better than a stick.
- 4) **Finally - learn to value creativity.** If we're going to impact this culture with a message of hope, we need the most creative people doing their best work. Can your church, ministry, or organization do things in a more creative way? Are you

doing everything you can to be relevant, cutting edge, and exciting? Are you reaching this generation in a language and style they understand? Are you always on the look-out for creative people to help you achieve your vision? Learn to manage creative people, then stand back and watch the difference it makes.

**RESOURCE SUGGESTION:** In the new book The Art of Innovation, Tom Kelly takes us through the workings of "IDEO," one of the most innovative and creative design firms in America. It will give you valuable insight into how creative teams work, and how managers can cultivate and encourage creative thinking that leads to breakthrough ideas.

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**Author's Bio:** Phil Cooke understands creativity. His works as a television writer and director has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times. Recently, his selected projects have been placed in the permanent archive on the History of Broadcasting at the Newhouse School of Communication at Syracuse University representing landmark work in religious and inspirational broadcasting. He has also recently completed a Ph.D. in Theology, writing a doctoral dissertation titled: *"Through a Glass Darkly: Revelation as a New Paradigm for Understanding Modern Cinema."*

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