What pastors can learn from the world's most dynamic organizations

Gary Hamel

We live in a world that daily grows more secular, materialistic and cynical. A million digital distractions make it easy to avoid life's deepest questions. The only god that is attracting new followers is the god of self, and it seems the only universally acknowledged evil is boredom. How, in this environment, does the Kingdom of God advance? How does the local church do more than merely hang on? What can a pastor—a single pastor—do in the face of all this? More than you think.

Despite the skepticism, commercialism and self-absorption of our age, the existential void is still there, and there aren't enough YouTube videos to fill it. The hunger is still there—and no amount of busy-ness will satiate it. And the questions are still there, the ever-insistent questions: Why am I here? Does anyone care? Where do I find hope? These questions won't go away. Circling like vultures, they wait for the inevitable moment when a seemingly carefree soul gets run over by reality.

It's a shallow age, but human beings still long for bedrock. Despite their comforts, they crave reassurance. Despite their disbelief, they ache for certainty. Despite their egoism, they yearn for someone who is bigger and more reliable than they are. And therein lies the opportunity for the local church—but only if it can reinvent itself for a world that is profoundly, radically, different than it was a century ago, or a decade ago, or even a
minute ago. In our hyperkinetic world, you can't take relevance for granted- it has to be earned through continual reinterpretation, reinvention, and renewal. God's truth is forever-but our church-borne traditions, rituals are habits aren't. And if we let them hold us hostage, we will fail God and all those who are seeking, however obliquely, to hear His voice and feel His touch.

Read the gospels in a historical context, and you will hear a message so unconventional and unexpected that it stretched the very limits of comprehension. It was a message out of time, for all time. Why would we believe that God expects us to be any less progressive or bold? If your church is not experimenting with new ways of delivering truth, mending souls, building communities, and bestowing compassion, it will slowly shrink into insignificance. This is the fate that already befallen entire denominations. Put simply, our churches need to be as vital, dynamic and timely as the message they proclaim.

Maybe you've never thought of yourself as innovator-in-chief, or pictured your church as a laboratory. Or maybe you've tried to challenge the status quo, and were thwarted at every step. No matter. There is a way to escape the inertia, denial and nostalgia that so often undermines organizational vitality. To do so, you have to ...

- Reset your aspirations
- Mobilize a pro-change constituency
- Inspire breakout thinking
- Exploit the power of the social web
- Unleash the natural leaders within your church

This may seem daunting, but having worked in some of the largest and most complex organizations in the world, I know it's possible, and in my remarks in Austin, I'll share what I've learned with you.

**Editor's note:** Professor Hamel will be presenting Monday, June 29 at the 9:00 am General Session of CALLED Pastor's Convention. Pastoral families may still register at the regular rate until March 31.