**“Kidminnovation – Unleashing Your Creativity”**

A s I travel, I hear it all the time from so many Kids Ministry leaders…

“How do you guys do what you do?”

“I could never do that!”

“I’m not creative.”  
“I wish I could be more creative, but I don’t have it in me.”  
“Why are some people creative and others aren’t?”

If I had a nickel for every time I’ve heard those statements or questions…

**The truth is everyone has creative potential.**  We sell ourselves short thinking that creativity is some mystical ability that few are blessed with.

A large part of the problem is that there is an air of mystery and mysticism around the creative process. Because people assume and reinforce the idea that some have creative potential and others don’t, those that do harness their potential and work through the process become all the more “different.”

**THREE “CREATIVITY KILLERS”**

1. **PROCRASTINATION**

A big key in the success of HVKM is that we are NEVER doing the preparation phase in a last-minute fashion. We plan ahead – always. We already have our entire list of teaching series for the entire year of 2012. It’s always up for change, but by working ahead, we are able to look for creative ideas along the way.

There’s an epidemic of procrastination in Kids Ministry. I can’t believe how many times I hear people saying that they don’t even begin to start their preparation for Sunday until Saturday Night.

I was shocked this year when I wrote a downloadable Easter Lesson and put it on our website – and there were over 50 Kids Pastors who downloaded the lesson between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They were still downloading the lesson up until 10 AM ON EASTER SUNDAY!!!

Correct me if I am wrong – but, Easter didn’t exactly “sneak up on you.” You’ve known it was coming all year long. It’s the biggest day of the year with the most guests and the most potential to impact children for the Kingdom of God, and you waited until the day before – or even the DAY OF to plan for it? Inexcusable.

I’ve heard a lot of reasons why:

FULL-TIME: “My week is so full of other church assignments that I don’t have time to prepare my lesson until Saturday.” (yet I get all kinds of Twitter jokes, Facebook updates, and countless requests for help growing their turnips in Farmville all week)

VOLUNTEER: “I work all week, so I don’t have time to prepare for Kids Church before Saturday Night.” (did you watch any TV this week? Then, you just made a decision that your favorite show is more important than the spiritual development of your kids).

SUPER-SPIRITUAL: “Well, I don’t prepare too far ahead of time because I prefer to be led by the Spirit.” (Really? So, the God who knew everything about your children before time began can’t inspire you today for what He wants to do in the lives of your children three weeks from now?)

**Nothing will kill your ability to be creative like procrastination.**

You might be thinking, “Well, sure it’s easy for you to prepare and work ahead. You’re at the big church with a large staff.” Nope! Yes, I am at a big church. But, I don’t have a secretary or an administrative assistant. I have ME and one other kids Pastor – the only full-time members of my team. I do have two high school students that work on videos for us in the afternoons after school. We’ve been doing this for 10 years. I did the first four volumes of curriculum when it was JUST ME.

YOU CAN DO IT! Work ahead! Prepare. Make time for creative thinking. Get alone and pray. Allow the Spirit to inspire you NOW for what He wants to do down the road! It is THE most important part of the process.

**2) DUPLICATION**

When you are a young adult (with no children of your own) tasked with the assignment of leading children in their spiritual journey, you feel like a fish out of water. You aren’t sure what works and what doesn’t work – what will be effective and what will fail miserably.

**So, I made a huge mistake that many others in Kids Ministry make…I decided to just copy what others were doing.** **I opted for duplication rather than innovation.**

This classic mistake of choosing Duplication over Innovation is not one that is unique to me. This phenomenon happens quite often in the church world. We go to a conference, attend a seminar, watch a YouTube video, or read a blog as someone shares a great concept or strategy. We think, “What an amazing idea!” Then we run straight back to our church and try to duplicate it.

We hear reports of what God is doing in the church down the street or the “hot church” in our denomination, and we try to chase their ideas instead of asking God for His ideas. We do this for a lot of reasons:

* **Duplication is easier**

When we opt for duplication, we avoid the tough work of seeking God for a vision and strategy to grow our ministry. It’s a lot easier to steal someone else’s “good idea” than invest time seeking a “God idea.”

* **Duplication is faster**

It doesn’t take any time at all to get plenty of cool ideas from church leaders in every kind of ministry. Type the words “Children’s Ministry growth ideas” on your browser, and you’ll get over 19 million hits. There are books upon books and conferences upon conferences that provide a ton of great ideas.

Don’t get me wrong. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with books and conferences. I’m a firm believer in attending conferences, networking with other ministries, and reading great books. However, books and conferences can easily become a substitute for seeking God and trusting Him for guidance and creativity.

You see, duplication may be easier and faster, but the problem is…

* **Duplication rarely produces eternal results**

Jesus told His followers, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33)*. What do we “seek first”? Is it conferences, books, message boards, and ministry networks, and then do we go to God only when all those things begin to lose their punch? Instead, we should begin on our knees, seeking for His idea that will change our lives and ministry.

In Kids Ministry today, I see so much duplication going on. Innovation is happening in SOME churches, ministries, and pockets of the Kidmin universe. But, as a whole, we have been reluctant to embrace the idea of EVERY Kidmin leader as an innovator.

**3) Disqualification**

Some immediately disqualifiy themselves and say, “I can’t do it! I’m just not wired that way!” They allow themselves to believe the six word lie that I despise. ***Here are the six words – “I’m just not a creative person.”***

Many Kidmin Leader sell themselves short when it comes to their ability to think creatively and innovate. They have decided that God only gifted a few key leaders to be able to create and innovate. We have turned the innovative process into some mysterious, spooky, hokus pokus type of activity.

Some of you have yourself convinced that I must have his own personal “bat cave” type lair where he receives downloads from the angel of Innovative Kids Ministry – and our only hope is to duplicate whatever he is doing. I tell you – he has no such cave. ☺

I have news for you – YOU can be an innovator. How do I know? Because you are CHILD OF GOD!!!

We serve a Creative God with limitless creative ability! Even the most naturally innovative and creative minds are finite. The term finite means “having bounds or limits; not infinite; measurable.” But God is infinite. He is “far above all,” not limited by any boundaries at all. **When we draw only on our own creative resources, it’s like drinking from a thimble instead of the Great Lakes.**

You were BORN for creativity and innovation! The most innovative people I know? KIDS! It’s true! When were kids we could turn the most common-place stuff into toys that would keep us occupied for hours.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you found one of THESE? *(hold up the paper towel holder)* If you ever got ahold of one of these, you could turn it into…

* a telescope
* a megaphone
* a sword
* a drumstick
* whatever!

When you were a kid, all you needed was a cardboard box and a stick. **You were born a creative innovator.** Somehow, we allowed society to suppress our creative juices and we began to be conformed to the mainstream. We are afraid of getting outside the box. We allow fear to dominate our minds and hearts and we never become the Kidminnovators God wants us to be!

Many Kidmin Leaders never innovate simply because of FEAR. Fear of failure! Fear of criticism! Innovation takes Courage! Every leader has to face very real fears. And, it’s important to understand: **Courage isn’t the absence of fear, but the willingness to take action in the face of fear.**

I say it’s time for Kidmin Leaders to stop allowing the enemy to use FEAR to keep them from stepping into what He has planned for them. Stop allowing fear to keep you from taking the leap into the world of Kidminnovation.

I believe the time is coming when every Kidmin Leader will believe in themselves enough to be able to tap into the innovator that lives in each of them. When that happens, we will change the world!!

**It’s time for a revolution of what I am calling “Kidminnovation**.”

“Kidminnovators” are simply this – someone whose heart and mind is open enough to allow God to birth something in them that will change their community!

**It’s time to move away from duplication and into innovation!**

Now, understand something: I’m not asking all of you to start writing your own curriculum or to go start your own ministry resource company. When I speak of innovation in Kids Ministry, I am talking about taking a fresh look at what you are doing in your churches and ministries, evaluating what is working and what isn’t, and allowing God to lead you on a journey to develop YOUR vision, YOUR strategy, for YOUR ministry. Not just duplicate what you see others doing.

**What does a “Kidminnovator” look like?**

1. **Kidminnovators question everything.**

Innovators are constantly questioning the status quo. They don’t settle for “what’s always been done.” They never say, “That’s the way we’ve always done it.” They are constantly questioning methods, practices, and strategies to ensure they are taking the best possible approach.

Be willing to question EVERYTHING in your ministry – even the things that you think are going wonderfully! You say, “Wait! I thought I was supposed to live by the motto ‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it!’” Here’s the problem with that. In ministry, oftentimes something has been broke long before we ever get the memo.

If you don’t have a habit of questioning the methods and strategies in your ministry, you may be so oblivious that something may be broke and you’re convinced it’s never been better.

A couple years ago, I began to truly poke and prod and question the effectiveness of our Sunday Morning Kids experience. Now, understand, we’ve never had more kids attending than we do now. We have Kids Pastors from all over the country travel to our church to see and learn what we are doing. If I went by those indicators alone, I never would have questioned anything we were doing.

But, I began to question and evaluate – and without going into all the details I came to the conclusion that our Sunday Morning Experience was broke. Everyone else was convinced that it had never been better, but I knew it needed an overhaul. So, I put together a team of strategists and thinkers to help me redesign everything from the ground up. We launched our new approach – and it ROCKED!

If I hadn’t been willing to question, I would never have gotten the ministry to that place. **Kidminnovators are consummate questioners. Question EVERYTHING!**

Too often, we don’t question or evaluate because we are afraid of what we will find. We don’t want to face the fact that it might be time for an overhaul. Don’t allow yourself to do this! QUESTION everything!

1. **Kidminnovators look everywhere for ideas and inspiration**

A great idea might be found in a commercial, a movie, on-line – absolutely anywhere. The key is: **always have your “finder” turned on.** Always trying to sense it in whatever setting you are in.

1. **Kidminnovators are bored by duplication.**

They can’t stand doing the same thing the same way for long. They are constantly looking for new ways, better ways to accomplish God’s purposes for their Kids Ministry.

It IS about looking for new ways to do things as often as possible.

1. **Kidminnovators take more criticism.**

Innovators take more criticism because they are blazing a trail, challenging the status quo, and making others uncomfortable. They take more criticism because they are sticking their neck out and “going first.”

Want to avoid criticism in ministry? Don’t do anything new! Copy what’s already a success and you’ll never be criticized – but, you also probably won’t make an eternal difference either.

1. **Kidminnovators make more mistakes.**

They make more mistakes because they are trying something that hasn’t been done before. If the fear of failure and making mistakes is what has kept you from innovating – understand this. **Failure is “part of the deal!” You’re going to fail. You will either fail when you try something new – or you will fail to ever try anything new!** I would rather be known for the former rather than the latter!

You look people who have success and think, “They’ve never made the mistakes I have. They’ve never blown it like I have!” Are you kidding me? We’ve ALL made mistakes. I wrote the book on making mistakes. No, literally – I wrote the book. “I Blew It!” ☺

The difference is, *Kidminnovators study their mistakes.*

Don’t waste a great failure. Study it. Dissect it. Find out why it happened and where you went wrong. Then, apply what you learned to your next innovation.

1. **Kidminnovators are constantly looking for clues in their culture.**

You had better understand Kid Culture in Kids Ministry. The older I get, the more I ask questions – “What’s hot? What are the current trends? How do kids think?” I’ve been getting this for free for many years because of the ages of my own two children, Ashton and Jordan. My kids are teenagers, now. I’m working hard to find out what Kid culture is all about.

Kidminnovators realize that context and culture drive ministry, not merely what some other ministry or church is doing.

1. **Kidminnovators value those who will tell them the hard truth.**

Innovators want their innovation to WORK. They don’t surround themselves with “yes men” who will tell them “you are the greatest, most creative person ever.” They want to know if they are thinking wrong. They want to know if their idea isn’t going to fly.

Kidminnovators surround themselves with those who will tell them the truth, even when it’s not comfortable.

1. **Kidminnovators need administrative people around them to help make ideas a reality**

The fact is, Creative people tend to not be the most organized people you’ve ever met. Often, true innovators will get another idea while trying to flesh out their previous idea. This often leads to abandoned projects. Not all innovators are successful implementers. They need those who are detail oriented to help them get the ideas moving.

1. **Kidminnovators are intensely driven.**

Innovators get fired up by the idea of doing something that has never been done. They inspire others with their burning passion. People rally around an innovator that has a passion for something that’s never been done. On the other hand, they also can make their team tired – because they are always on to the next idea. Learn to find your balance.

1. **Kidminnovators innovate from a desire to make a difference.**

It’s not about coming up with the “next big thing” that everyone will want to buy. It’s not about packaging or branding. It’s about making the difference in the lives of the kids and families of your community. It’s about souls.

Why are we talking about innovation at a Children’s Ministry Leaders Conference? **There are over 6700 people groups in our world who have never heard the name of Jesus.** That’s millions and millions of kids. Somebody is going to have the idea that enables us to reach them. It may as well be YOU!

Why am I talking about innovation? Because we have to do this! We have to WIN! This generation is depending on us!

**What could you create or innovate that could change the world?** You say, “I’m from Possum Trot, TN. How could I ever change the world?”

What could you create or innovate that could change your community in Possum Trot, TN? What could God birth in you that would change the kids in your city? What could God birth in you that could spark a revival in the schools of your city?

**You can do this! You can be a “Kidminnovator!”**

God’s power, love, and plans are beyond anything we can imagine. If we cultivate an attentive heart, we’ll tap into His limitless capacity. We’ll never come close to the depths of His greatness, but we can take several steps closer!

In his beautiful prayer in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prayed,

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”* ***(Ephesians 3:20)****.*

What’s the biggest dream you can imagine about how God can use you in his kingdom? Seriously, take a moment and think about it. Got it? Guess what. You just undercut God. Your greatest and grandest ideas don’t compare to God’s limitless plans and resources. God is not limited to working with our imagination. He goes well beyond it—immeasurably beyond.

**God wants to inspire us with so many innovative “God ideas” that we’ll never be able to implement them all.** Do you believe that? Do you believe that YOU can be an innovator in your own church and ministry?

I want to ask you – will you do it? Will you take the leap and move from duplication to Innovation? Will you conquer the fear that has held you back from the Innovative Leader God wants you to be?

Don’t duplicate. Innovate. This generation doesn’t need a bunch of cloned copies. This generation needs a group of fired up, hungry Kids Ministry Innovators. So, step up – and step into the world of “Kidminnovation.”