Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend

Title: *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*

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Book Description:

With surprising candor and transparency pastor Andy Stanley explains how one of America's largest churches began with a high-profile divorce and a church split. But that's just the beginning…Deep and Wide provides church leaders with an in-depth look into North Point Community Church and its strategy for creating churches unchurched people absolutely love to attend. Andy writes, 'Our goal is to create weekend experiences so compelling and helpful that even the most skeptical individuals in our community would walk away with every intention of returning the following week…with a friend!' Later he says, 'I want people to fall in love with the Author of Scripture. And while we can't make anyone fall in love, we can certainly arrange a date.' For the first time, Andy explains his strategy for preaching and programming to 'dual audiences': mature believers and cynical unbelievers. He argues that preaching to dual audiences doesn't require communicators to 'dumb down' the content. According to Stanley, it's all in the approach. You'll be introduced to North Point's spiritual formation model: The Five Faith Catalysts. Leaders responsible for ministry programing and production will no doubt love Andy's discussion of the three essential ingredients for creating irresistible environments.

Book Quotes:

We don't grade ourselves on size. We grade ourselves on how attractive we are to our target audience. (15)

We are unapologetically attractional. (16)

By the time you finish the book, I hope you will be as convinced as I am that healthy local churches can be, and should be, both *deep and wide.* It's not *either/or*. It's *both/and*. Local churches should be characterized by deep roots *and* wide reaches. Churches should be theologically sound and culturally relevant. We should be bold in our proclamation and winsome in our approach. (18)

One of the fundamental realities of organizational life is that systems fossilize with time. (55)

The uncertainty and need for change in our current church culture underscore the need for bold leadership. Leadership that is willing to embrace the unchanging mandate prescribed to us in the first century audiences will understand and receive it. The church needs leaders who are willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure that we hand it off to the next generation in better shape than we found it. (55)

Do we have guidelines for benevolence and things of that nature? Of course. But they are guidelines. Not hard-

and-fast rules. We have virtually no policies and lots and lots of conversations. (79)

Other examples of our attempt to be a grace-and-truth church: We put people into leadership roles too early, on purpose. We operate under assumption that adults learn on a need-to-know basis. The sooner they discover what they don't know, the sooner they will be interested in learning what they need to know. We have virtually no formal leadership training. (79)

Once again, we opt for messy over easy. (79)

Our doctrinal statement is conservative. Our approach to ministry is not. (81)

We believe the church is most appealing when the message of grace is most apparent. (82)

Now, if the idea of embracing the mess is uncomfortable for you, remember this: Either you were a mess, are a mess, or are one dumb decision away from becoming a mess. (82)

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. (Acts 15:19) I love that statement. Years ago I printed it and hung it in my study. I look at it every day. I believe James' statement should be the benchmark by which all decisions are made in the local church. In other words, churches shouldn't do anything that makes it unnecessarily difficult for people who are turning to God. (90-91)

It is your responsibility to lead the church in the direction that Jesus originally intended. As a leader, your task is to protect the missional integrity of the Jesus gathering to which you have been called. It is your responsibility to see to it that the church under your care continues to function as a gathering of people in process; a place where the curious, the unconvinced, the skeptical, the used-to-believe, and the broken, as well as the committed, informed, and sold-out come together around Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. (92-93)

At its core, Christianity is an invitation to reenter a relationship of trust with the Father. (105)

We concluded that the best discipleship or spiritual formation model would be one designed around growing people's faith. (107)

The Five Faith Catalysts:

- Practical Teaching
- Private Disciplines
- Personal Ministry
- Providential Relationships
- Pivotal circumstances (109)

1. CATALYST #I: PRACTICAL TEACHING

   People are far more interested in what works than what's true. (114)

2. CATALYST #2: PRIVATE DISCIPLINES

Private spiritual disciplines tune our hearts to the heart of God and underscore personal accountability to our heavenly Father. (117)

God responds to our private acts of righteousness. (118)

The way you talk about the Bible on the weekend will determine their interest in the Bible during the week. You've got to make it accessible. You've got to give permission to read it before they believe it. (122)

3. CATALYST #3: PERSONAL MINISTRY

Since personal ministry is an integral component to spiritual growth, we are committed to involving as many people as possible, as young as possible, as soon as possible. (127)

4. CATALYST #4: PROVIDENTIAL RELAIONSHIPS

When people tell their faith stories, they always talk about the individuals they believe God put in their paths. (131)

Two things make a relationship providential; when we hear from God through someone and when we see God in someone. (132)

While it's beyond our ability to manufacture any type of relationship, much less one characterized as providential, what we can do is create environments that are conducive to the development of these types of relationships. (133)

What's relevant to our discussion here is that the value we placed on providential relationships was what drove us to build our model around closed rather than open groups. We decided not to leverage adult groups as a growth engine, but rather to do everything in our power to create authentic community. (133-134)

We market Starting Point as a conversation rather than a class. We limit group size to twelve. (135)

5. CATALYST #5: PIVOTAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The fifth and final faith catalyst is pivotal circumstances. When people describe their faith journeys, they always include events that could be described as "defining moments." (137)

As we shared our personal bouts with life's surprises and the effect those events had on our faith, we arrived at the following conclusion: It wasn't really the event itself that grew or eroded our faith; it was our interpretation of the event that determined which way we went. The conclusions we draw about God in the midst of our pivotal circumstances drive us toward or away from him. (138)

As I am constantly reminding our leaders, *the sermon begins in the parking lot.* By the time I stand up to deliver what is traditionally considered the message, everybody in our audience has already received a dozen or more messages. (157)

Our objective was to create *irresistible* environments. (160)

Embracing an agreed-upon standard of excellence is how you create a culture. More specifically, it is how you create a culture of excellence. (162)

We've identified three things that are mission critical when it comes to creating great environments. We refer

to these as our *three essential ingredients.*

- QUESTION #I: IS THE SETTING APPEALING?
- QUESTION #2: IS THE PRESENTATION ENGAGING?

  The second ingredient of an irresistible environment in our world is an *engaging presentation.* So we ask of every environment: *Was the presentation engaging?* Not, *was it true?* We assume that. Let's face it: Churches aren't empty because preachers are lying. Twentysomethings haven't abandoned the church because pastors have abandoned the Bible. The church isn't suffering from a lack of truth-talks. What we are missing is *engaging* presentations. The reason more people aren't engaged with the local church is…we aren't all that engaging. (172)

  We wanted engaging presentations to be the hallmark of what we do. In most instances, *the presentation is what makes information interesting*. (175)

- QUESTION #3: IS THE CONTENT HELPFUL?

  The third and final component of an irresistible ministry environment in our world is *helpful content*.

  1. Help people think biblically.
  2. Help people behave biblically.
  3. Help people contextualize biblical teaching. (182)

  In short, renewed minds result in changed lives. (183)

  Knowledge alone makes Christians *haughty*. Application makes us *holy*. (184)

Nothing is more mission critical than the weekend service. (193)

As in all things, *purpose* should determine *approach*. (193)

If you don't clarify the win for a team, they will do it themselves. And once a group falls in love with a ministry or style of ministry, they will find a way to convince themselves that what they are doing is essential to the success of your church. Whether it is or not. (195)

So we plan our weekend services with our inviters and their invitees in mind. Our service programming teams view themselves as partners in evangelism with our members and regular attendees. Does that mean we tailor the content to non-Christians? Nope. We tailor the experience to non-Christians. There's a big difference. (197)

The long-term win is *life change.* The long-term win is when individuals who attend our services on a regular basis shift their thinking and their behavior in a divine direction. (197)

Whereas our weekend experience is designed with the unchurched in mind, our message content is designed for life change. (198)

We've learned that tapping into a common emotion is often the best-on-ramp to influencing the way an individual views and approaches life. (203)

At the marco level our goal is engage the audience, *involve* the audience, and finally *challenge them*. (206)

As you know, if you offend someone *before* a service, it's going to be next to impossible to engage him *in* the service. (209)

One of the best things we did in this regard was to create a website where people, who have never attended, but who are planning to attend, can watch short videos of any of our weekend environments. (209)

The key to successfully engaging unchurched people in a weekend message has more to do with your *approach* and your *presentation* than your *content*. (230)

First: *my goal*. My goal on the weekend is to present the Scriptures in a way that is so helpful and compelling that *everybody* in the audience is glad to have attended and drives away with every intention to return the following weekend. (234)

When people are convinced you want something FOR them rather than something FROM them, they are less likely to be offended when you challenge them. (235)

Once they are thoroughly embroiled with the passage, I take one carefully crafted statement that emerges from the point of the text and do everything in my power to make it stick. (237)

- GUIDELINE #I: LET'EM KNOW YOU KNOW THEY'RE OUT THERE…(237)

…and you're happy about it. (237)

- GUIDELINE #2: BEGIN WITH THE AUDIENCE IN

MIND…

…not your message. (239).

Before I take people to the text, I want them to be thinking, *Oh my gosh. I'm glad I came today.* I do that by creating tension. (240)

- GUIDELINE #3: PICK ONE PASSAGE AND STICK WITH

IT…

…everybody will be glad you did. (241)

- GUIDELINE #4: GIVE'EM PERMISSION NOT TO BELIEVE… (242.

…or obey. (242)

- GUIDELINE #5: AVOID "THE BIBLE SAYS"…

(246)

…because it doesn't. (246)

> Our culture needs to understand that the foundation of the Christian faith is not an infallible Bible. The foundation of our faith is a single event in history attested to by individuals who lived and wrote during the days when this event transpired. (250)

- GUIDELINE #6: ACKNOWLEDGE THE ODD…

…it would be odd not to. (246)

> We do ourselves and the unbelievers in our congregations a disservice when we forget to pause and consider how weird some of what's in the Bible must sound to someone who wasn't raised in church. (252)

> Anytime I'm teaching a passage that unbelievers may object to as unbelievable, I take a minute to affirm their doubts and then offer a simple rational as to why they may want to reconsider. My simple rationale is this: Jesus believed this incident actually took place. Every time I mention Adam and Eve, I say something along the lines of: I'll tell you why I believe Adam and Eve were actual people. Jesus did. I'm a simple man. If somebody predicts his own death and resurrection and then pulls it off, I'm with him. I don't really care what he says. I'm with the guy who rose from the dead. I would like to do that someday myself. And he said those who believe, even though they die, they will live. So I go with what Jesus said. (255)

Every innovation has an expiration date. At some point, *new* isn't *new* anymore, regardless of what the package says. Eventually, new ideas feel like yesterday's news. Bread is not the only thing that gets stale over time. Every new and innovative approach to ministry has an expiration date as well. Every single one. Nothing is irresistible or relevant forever. (265)

While leaders are often quick to blame people for their stubborn unwillingness to change, Kouzes and Posner rightly point out that the problem is much deeper and more complex than inflexibility or stubbornness. It's a systems problem. Every local church is a complex collection of systems. (268)

The catalyst for introducing and facilitating change in the local church is a God-honoring, mouthwatering, unambiguously clear vision. (270)

While there's much that could be said about vision, most germane to our discussion is the fact that *vision is the place to begin every discussion pertaining to change.* Start the discussion anywhere else and you will experience resistance. (271)

The most ineffective way to begin a conversation about change is to talk about what needs to change. You should never begin a conversation about change by addressing where you are now. You should always begin with where you want to be. (271)

As a leader, your responsibility is to make the people in your church discontent with where they are by painting a compelling picture of where they could be. (272)

And it serves to illustrate a dynamic that every vision-laden church leader has experienced at some point along the way. Namely: *New ideas are good ideas as long as they don't require anyone to actually do anything new*. (278)

Over time, churches fall in love with their models. But models are meant to be a means to an end. Models are created to support the mission of the church. Once upon a time, every existing church model supported the

mission of the church. But then a generation fell in love with the model at the expense of the mission. Truth is, for most churches, sustaining the current model is the mission of the church. (279)

When a church fails to distinguish between its current *model* and *mission* to which it has been called and mistakenly fossilizes around its *model* that church sets itself up for decline. (284)

We do not want to spend one day babysitting a model that is no longer working. We don't want to become guardians of a previous generation's approach to ministry even if we are the previous generation that created it. We know that eventually all our new and innovative ideas will become institutionalized. (285)

From the beginning, we embraced a *Groups* model. Everything we do is designed to funnel people into small groups. (297)

The best way to think about programming, and perhaps the best context for discussing programming with your leaders, is to think of each program as the answer to a question beginning with the phrase. *"What is the best way to_____?"* Just about all church programming was originally introduced to address *what is the best way* question. This is an extraordinarily important concept to keep front and center as you develop your strategy for change. (288)

We evaluate programming on the basis of how well it serves our goal to involve members and attendees in group life. A program must be a group. Prepare people for group life, or serve as an *easy, obvious, and strategic* step into a group. (289)

The primary reason churches cling to outdated models and programs is that they lack leadership. For an organization to remain vision-centric, it must be led by a vision centric leader or leaders. Problem is, church boards rarely recruit and hire leaders. They recruit and hire pastors, preachers, and teachers. Then they expect those pastors, preachers, and teachers to lead. But pastors, preachers, and teachers are trained and gifted in…you guessed it…pastoring, preaching, and teaching. In most churches, the man or woman who carries the preaching responsibility is expected to carry the mantle of leadership as well. This is true whether he or she is gifted and trained to lead or not. (294)

The short version of all that: *In the church, do what God gifted you to do.* In the church, don't spend a lot of time and energy to do something God has not gifted you to do. (298)

Change requires vision. Sustained vision requires leadership. Leadership is a gift. If you have it, Paul would tell you to *lead diligently*. If you don't, discover the gifts God has blessed you with and lean into them with all your heart. (300)

Asking the right questions (and asking them over and over) will ensure that the vision of your church remains paramount while your programming remains subservient. So as we close this chapter, I am going to leave you with seven questions that cause managers to run for the hills and leaders to charge into the fray. (302)

1. Do we have a transferable mission or statement?
2. What have we fallen in love with that's not as effective as it used to be?
3. Where are we manufacturing energy?
4. If we all got kicked off the staff and the board, and an outside group (a group of leaders who were fearlessly committed to the mission of this church) took our place, what changes would they introduce?
5. What do we measure?

6. What do we celebrate?

7. If our church suddenly ceased to exist, would our community miss us? (304)

Those seven questions take me back to something I wrote years ago that I am apt to forget: *Write your vision in ink; everything else should be penciled in Plans change. Vision remains the same.* (304)