

Service Planning  
Breakout Session  
UNLEASH 2008  
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*Sometimes we make things more complicated than they have to be...Shane tore a rental car apart looking for a switch to pop the gas tank open...all it took was his wife pushing the gas tank door to get it to open. Reality usually is that what we need we already have and it's right in front of us.*

#### The Creative Process – General

- Goal: Bring the vision to life
  1. What is the core vision of your church?
  2. Does your service reflect that core vision?
  3. What is the point of the service?
  4. What's the best way to get that point across? *Sometimes something simple is much more effective.*

#### The Creative Process – Specific

- Series Schedule

*Generally we are 6-9 months ahead on 'series' scheduling. The themes come directly from Perry's quiet time and occasionally from someone else on the creative team's suggestion.*

*We take the general ideas and put them on the calendar...planning around key dates that are important in our community (holidays, the school calendars, 1<sup>st</sup> of the year, Clemson football...yep). We can count on certain times of the year being up in attendance (home games, Christmas, Easter, Mother's day, 1<sup>st</sup> of the year) and certain times of the year being down (spring breaks, away games, summer time)...*

- Speaking Schedule

*Perry's speaking schedule comes directly from a meeting with his Senior Management team (sometime near the end of the year). In order to protect Perry they try and keep to these things:*

- *Have him speak 36-38 times a year*
- *Usually have him speak the 1<sup>st</sup> week or two of a new series*
- *Try and avoid him speaking more than 4-5 weeks in a row*
- *When he has time off, try and give him two weeks off in a row (rarely can you get the rest*

*you need in the 1<sup>st</sup> week, it's that 2<sup>nd</sup> week that helps it set in).*

*Once the schedule is set, it allows them to book teaching pastors and/or plan services around Perry not being there.*

- Series Branding

*We try and have the series branded 3-6 weeks before the series starts. The visual arts and communication team will usually get together early on the brainstorm ideas and bring to the 'service planning' meeting (3-6 weeks before we begin the series) a few options for names, general theme, looks, etc.*

*Once the brand is chosen we can decide what else may add to the series brand (stage set, atrium design, mass mailout, parking lot, props on stage?) and from there everyone moves on their appropriate action items.*

- Service Planning

*We try and plan services 3-6 weeks ahead. A service planning team meets weekly for this task. A general agenda for the meeting is this: One last walk through of the Sunday happening that week. It's already been planned 3-6 weeks before, but this walk-through is to be sure all details are in place and everyone's on the same page (usually takes less than ten minutes).*

*Perry will then walk us through the sermon he has planned for 3-6 weeks from then (right now we are 4 weeks ahead). Prior to the meeting (1-2 days) he sends the creative team his sermon notes (a general transcript of scripture passage, illustrations, points, etc) so that we can be prepared to give any input he needs at the meeting. Perry knows that if he can sell it to this team, he can sell it to his Sunday crowd.*

*During this time we discuss what will help emphasize a point...a certain song, prop, video, audience participation? We make it a point to not just add to add...only if it strongly supports and further emphasizes what Perry is communicating will we add anything.*

*We realize that people are saved by hearing the word of God, not by a catchy song or a prop on stage...Perry preaches the word of God...we want to be careful that anything we put in the service only points directly back to God's word.*

*Who is in service planning? Perry and a team of 6-8 people. There are 4-5 people that are the same each week and for the rest we try and rotate*

*different people through (depending on the subject material of the sermon...if it's finances, we may invite our CFO, if it's about parenting, we'd invite people with kids...same with singles, men, women, marrieds, etc).*

- Sunday Run Through

*This is a full production run-through that takes place twice a day on Sundays (once at 8am and once at 4pm...twice a day is necessary because our control room is staffed with one team of volunteers in the morning and a different team at night with 2-4 consistent staff members always present).*

*10 minutes before the run-through begins we have a meeting with all involved in the live production. In this meeting, we walk through the production sheet for the day...from top to bottom, every song, transition, video, etc and then we actually do the live production.*

*During the run-through someone stands in for any live speakers (the welcomer, the speaker) walking through any points, prayers, etc and the band does all of the songs.*

*Right after run-through we meet up again (briefly) to be sure no one has any questions and/or corrections.*

*Sometimes, we have to make cuts...to videos, to songs, to any part of the service that after watching in run-through we feel is just 'good enough.'*

*We have learned to fall in love with the process of preparing for Sunday services...not with the use of the final product, in doing this it makes it easier when something you've invested many hours in gets cut.*

*Right after this, our Creative Arts Pastor meets with Perry to confirm all points of his sermon (sometimes he'll need us to add/take away scriptures, etc).*

*We are ALWAYS EVALUATING...sometimes even cut things after the 1<sup>st</sup> service (when we have another meeting to discuss how things went).*

- Results of this process for us

*As a result of all of these things we have a healthy pastor who is confident in his team.*

*We have artists with time to be creative*

*We have well informed staff and volunteers*

*We have the ability to change on the fly if a national disaster strikes (Katrina, 9/11) or something culturally relevant comes up about the church (James Cameron's claims about the tomb of Jesus being found)*

*The biggest benefit for us in our planning is it allows us to clearly present who Jesus is...without clouding in any way.*

#### The Five Rules of Defensive Driving (and how they apply to us)

1. Aim high in steering: *look as far down the road as you can...keep your eyes on the vision...KNOW the vision of your church...and don't compromise it.*
2. Keep your eyes moving: *pay attention to details...ALWAYS BE EVALUATING*
3. Leave yourself an out: *be ready to change...don't hold too tightly to any aspect of the service...fall in love with the process.*
4. Make sure they see you: *work hard, live it out so those following you (volunteers...staff members) see this.*
5. Back up only when necessary: *don't make the same mistakes over and over...give yourself permission to fail, but MOVE FORWARD...fix the mistake and don't do it again.*

Bonus Rule #6: Don't swerve for animals: *when people swerve for animals, more often than not they end up hitting something else...sadly enough, this frequently ends in their death. In the church, you will have critics whose goal is to get you off the road, off the vision of your church. DO NOT SWERVE for them. You can slow down...try and help them understand the vision, stop for a minute, but if that does not work RUN THEM OVER.*

#### Q & A:

Have you ever tried to do Sunday run-through not on a Sunday?

YES...we learned this the hard way one Christmas...had a lot of new aspects in the service and it took much longer than expected. From that point on for major holidays (or services that have many new aspects) we started scheduling a 'dress rehearsal' one night earlier in the week.

How many services do you have on a Sunday? Are they all alike? How long are your services?

We have four services 9:15am, 11:15am, 5pm, 6:45pm, the 1<sup>st</sup> three are identical and the 6:45pm has two additional songs. The services are generally between 1:15 and 1:20. This directly corresponds with how long Perry speaks...he tries to stay around 45 minutes, but it does vary.

Why did you choose to do Sunday night services over Saturday night?

Believe it or not, college football is such a big deal in our town that Saturday night would not work in this culture...

More importantly, we want to protect our staff from getting too tired. If we do Saturday night services (even with a Friday off) they do not get a weekend to rest.

If you have two different team of volunteers that run the live production, how do you keep a spirit of excellence up?

Excellence is a part of who NewSpring is...if you come to any service...just as an attendee you should see this from the start (starting in the parking lot!). By the time someone decides to join and is then able to volunteer, it's a part of who they are too...if they get what NewSpring is about, they bring a spirit of excellence with them.

The production volunteers (specifically) go through a fairly lengthy training process and apprenticeship before going live on a Sunday.

We remind our volunteers constantly that if something goes wrong it is always our fault...even if they were in charge of executing it, it's still our fault...the staff takes the blame ultimately for everything that happens in our services.

Our volunteers absolutely love what they do...and they have fun! We aren't afraid to call for a commitment from our volunteers...to push them more toward excellence; more often than not...they're smarter than we are anyways.

If you're running two different teams of volunteers from morning to night, how do you keep consistency?

Having a core group of staff there all day and utilizing the 2<sup>nd</sup> run-through.

How do you communicate the vision of your pastor into your staff? It has to start in your pastor...if God has placed a white hot vision in him, it will come out in everything he does. Perry is **HARDCORE** about the vision God has placed in him...he is always speaking about where we're going. His Senior Management team hears this all of the time...and they in turn give it to their teams...and on down the line.

Over communication is key...some people will not get it...it may just take them a little longer...or maybe they are not called to be a part of the working out of the vision.

Have you ever had to change something mid-service? Not normally...sometimes Perry will decide to skip a point or go back to a scripture...or the worship leader will tag a chorus or drop a verse, but the volunteer team can follow this easily.

Who gets the final say about services? Ultimately the speaker (Perry in most cases)...but he is great at giving room to work it out.

Is your band paid? Do they play all services? What sort of rotation do you use?

Our band are all paid (contract employees) and they do play all services...their pay is for the Sunday and for their rehearsal time (once a week all together, but they are expected to come to that rehearsal knowing the music).

Because of our goal of planning services ahead we can schedule the band out as far as we have our services (and thus our setlists) planned out.

We are 2-3 people deep in each position as of right now and they rotate in and out as the Worship Director sees fit.

1<sup>st</sup> steps for churches who want to start a creative process, but don't have anything in place?

Invite people around you (if you have a very small staff), like friends, family members, volunteers to come together and brainstorm ideas...maybe do it at night...but let it develop itself into what works best for your church...it will probably be different for each church. And it all depends on the vision of your pastor and his willingness to plan ahead.

Keep in mind that the people that will most likely contribute the MOST to a creative meeting are waiting on an invitation from you...they won't invite themselves.

What sort of advertising do you do in the community?

Very little...occasional direct mail pieces (can go out to over 70,000 homes), billboards, radio/tv, but our MOST EFFECTIVE form of advertising is a PERSONAL INVITATION. Over 95% of people who join NewSpring started coming because they were personally invited. We try to equip our people with things like invite cards and a consistently God-centered, excellent, exciting worship experience to help them invite the people they do life with to experience it with them.

How do you handle the random and sometimes overwhelming amounts of creative input from people (who aren't necessarily involved in the creative team)? We listen to it...we've gotten a lot of great ideas from people that aren't involved in the planning sessions...when it comes down to it, though,

what Perry is learning in his time with the Lord drives it...and it always proves to be timely for what our people are needing to hear!

How do you handle announcements on Sundays?

We try and keep them as short as possible. Our main goal is to invite 1<sup>st</sup> timers to let us know they were here by filling out that portion of the bulletin (you'd be surprised how many more we get when we ask them to do it for us)...we only put people up for the announcements who command the stage. Sometimes we try and make it creative (with a video, etc) and sometimes we don't do them at all. We always promote big events but still keep it as short as possible. We promote literacy at NewSpring and encourage our people to pay attention to the information in their bulletin and on the pre-reels (before the services)

How do you get your senior pastor to plan ahead?

Do everything you can to help him understand the benefits of planning out...for HIM first of all, but also for his staff and ultimately for the congregation.

The pressures that come with the job of a senior pastor can NEVER be understood by anyone other than a senior pastor...be aware of this as you do ministry with yours...

Maybe there's a weekend where he can plan two sermons at once...that may seem little to you (in the scheme of trying to get 3-6 weeks ahead) but it's a GIANT help toward planning more in advance.

Before you do any of these things, PRAY for him...ask God to give him the inspiration and the energy to plan ahead.

How do you nurture creativity?

We make clear in every meeting that there are no bad ideas...you must come into that meeting with a thick skin...even though it's completely open for any ideas, yours still may not be taken. People throw out EVERYTHING in there...open forum.

Our service planning is AFTER our band rehearsal...does that cause problems if songs change in service planning?

Since the service we review at the top of our creative meetings has already been planned (3-6 weeks before) rarely do we have changes the week of.

Do you use drama in your services?

We've tried it a few times, but haven't really found that it's our style.

How do you handle baptism and communion?

We try and do communion once a quarter and we preach a sermon around it...making sure that it's clear exactly what's taking place. We do baptism more frequently but also very intentionally.

How do you find out about lifechange stories for videos?

Word of mouth.

Do you have a meeting for service evaluation?

Since we're always evaluating and we meeting several times a Sunday, going into Monday we usually know exactly what needs to be fixed. The Senior Management Team discusses the service in their Monday meeting as well.