

10 Rules of Raw That Will Make Your Church More Relevant, Part 2



If you have not seen the first part of this series, check out the explanation and illustration of the [first five Rules of Raw](#). The post was spawned by the last 5 years of seeing the patterns of churches that do an excellent job reaching the 18-29 year olds. These churches display not a certain “worship style” per se, but an atmospheric tone that I describe as “raw.” I am using my recent visit to [Austin Stone](#) to illustrate some of these points. If you have read the first post, here is the refresher of the first five:

#1 Integrity of self-expression is stylish. Raw = Don't try to hard

#2 Honesty is the new quality. Raw = Be vulnerable

#3 Influence is proximate or not at all. Raw = Get closer than comfortable

#4 Bold is beautiful. Raw = Magnify reality

#5 Direct gains respect. Raw = Don't spin, don't schmooze

Okay, let's unpack the next five:

#6 Keep it simple or throw it away. Raw = Make it obviously usable

Our culture is increasingly ruthless when it comes to functionality.



At Austin Stone, I was impressed with two things that highlight this point. First, they do a great job of turning a high school into a church. No small effort goes into making the facility itself usable. For example they use large blue banners to make the long, labyrinth-like journey, totally clear. I mean, they use lots of banners to create a highly visible popcorn trail.

I also observed their groups placement process for missional communities. They made the “how of connecting” incredibly simple. People, videos, maps, and easy-to-navigate kiosks all contributed to a seamless and user-friendly experience.

For example, groups had a clear decision-making pathway: **Choose geography first, then weekday preference, then affinity interest.** I could talk with people in the groups selection process, or could work the group selection filters privately and easily on iPad.



#7 Challenge is expected. Raw = Go hard core

Some of our churches need to think more like cross-fit trainers. People, generally speaking, are wanting to be pushed and challenged more than we think. As inferred by the book directed toward students, “Do Hard Things” a **whole generation is sick and tired of a dumbed-down, expect-less faith.**

Here are some of the final imperatives in the message I took in:

- *Do you want the presence of God in your life? Repent often!*
- *If you are you in a missional community, then renew your devotion!*
- *If you are not in a missional community, repent of not giving yourself away to others!*

#8 No acceptance, no good. Raw = Take everything “as is”

Churches have been talking for a long time about creating a “come as you are” culture. We have seen mantra’s like “no perfect people allowed” and creating a “safe haven” for people seeking God. If you have progress with a culture of acceptance that’s awesome. But keep pushing the throttle. **A 20-something will hit the eject button on your church if they sniff the slightest hint of judgement- even levels of judgement considered prudent by previous generations.** The litmus test these days is your church’s posture toward gays and lesbians. How are you progressing at extending gospel-centered acceptance to people despite their current lifestyle or sinful choices?

#9 Young is smart. Raw = Let the rookies play

One impressive upside to the various aspects of “raw” these days is an openness to people development. There is a cutting edge of getting people in the game, not just with all the stuff we

over-recruit for at church (greeters, set-up, children), but with more extensive leadership functions. This is immediately experienced at Austin Stone by a teaching team presence, visible pastors of “leadership development” and open invites into leadership opportunities. The day I attended, the lead pastor didn’t preach. Yet it was one of the “most important” Sundays of year for the senior leader to be visible, from a traditional viewpoint. **In a raw culture, we cling to people development more than production excellence.**

#10 Feel something. Raw = Move me

Perhaps the greatest sin in the pursuit of “raw” is to be boring. In a day where our media-saturated lives are bombarded with lots of stuff, **please don’t miss that the stuff is more story rich, humor-savvy, and extreme “sportified.”** The news gets to us faster with less filters. We don’t read about the what happened yesterday in Iraq. We see it live. iTunes doesn’t just sell music online, they host a 30-day global music festival in London for free. The “Red Bull effect” is in full swing and your church can leverage it for the gospel.

In some ways the last element of raw is the culmination of the first nine. **When I am accepted and hear the gospel with humble transparency; when I am challenged and invited to a more real life; when people get close and imperfect people really are important— I am moved.**

Don’t be afraid to be louder and truer. Take the risk to be more honest more often. Be bold but be yourself. Try out some “raw” and see what happens!

Read Part 1 [here](#).

Read more from Will [here](#).