

8 Nations of Innovation for Your Church

Great innovations come from great questions. The quality of your ministry will be determined by the kind of questions you have the courage to ask yourself. If you don't ask the right questions, you won't get the right answers. If you don't get the right answers, you won't build the right strategy for your ministry. And, if you don't have the right strategy, you'll never get the results you hope for. It is critical for you to ask the right questions!

Asking the right questions is a skill you can develop. And you can get good at it. I want to suggest to you eight questions of innovation. These questions will help you innovate—no matter your area of ministry.

I call them the eight nations of innovation, but these nations aren't geographic. They're nations of imagination. I've used these exact questions to build Saddleback Church, the Purpose Driven Movement, The PEACE Plan, the Global PEACE Coalition and a number of other ministries.

1. Termination: What do I first need to stop?

You can have so many irons in the fire that you put out the fire. The great Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter used to call this creative destruction. One of my mentors, Peter Drucker, used to call it systematic abandonment. When the horse is dead, dismount. This is a real key to success.

Here's an example: For many years at Saddleback Church, we had a midweek Bible study, and we had a thousand people coming each week. Despite that, we decided to end the Bible study. Why? *We weren't satisfied with a thousand people.* So we decentralized the study material and funneled it into small groups. And so today, because we terminated our midweek service, we now have more than 32,000 people in small group Bible studies all the way from Santa Monica to San Diego. There are cities all across Southern California where Saddleback small groups meet. This never would have happened if we hadn't asked the question, "What do we first need to stop?" Asking this question helped us see the necessity of terminating our midweek service.

2. Collaboration: How do we do it faster, how do we do it larger, how do we do it cheaper—with a team?

If you want to start a movement, you need a team. Your team can include paid staff, but the real path to success is to create a team of volunteers. One of the secrets of Saddleback's growth is that we've mobilized thousands of volunteers. A few years back, during 40 Days of Community, our church fed every homeless person in Orange County. We fed 42,000 homeless people three meals a day for 40 days. We couldn't have done it without volunteers working together as a team.

3. Combination: What could we mix together to create something new?

One way to innovate is to take two existing things and combine them together. Years ago we combined the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and the eight beatitudes of Jesus to create Celebrate Recovery. It's now the official recovery program in 17 state prison systems, and used by tens of thousands of churches. More than 15,000 people at Saddleback have gone through Celebrate Recovery. Why? We combined two existing things and created something new and innovative.

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