

8 PILLARS OF INNOVATION AT GOOGLE AND WHY THEY MATTER TO YOUR CHURCH - an article from unSeminary - Rich Birch editor - July 2016 Issue

Susan Wojcicki is the CEO of YouTube (Google's category-dominating video service). She has seen Google grow from the very start ... the company was once based in her garage! In 2011, Wojcicki authored an almost instant classic article entitled "The Eight Pillars of Innovation" about how the company pushes itself forward.

These Eight Pillars made me think about how we should be innovative in the local church:

HAVE A MISSION THAT MATTERS // "Work can be more than a job when it stands for something you care about." This should be the core of what drives the local church! A lot of churches lack a clear sense of what God is specifically calling them to do. In fact, if you pull out the vision or mission statements from most churches, they kind of all sound the same. How are you uniquely articulating what God is calling your church to do? Does your mission narrow your focus on what matters?

THINK BIG BUT START SMALL // "No matter how ambitious the plan, you have to roll up your sleeves and start somewhere." Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much ..." [ref]. This principle should permeate our leadership culture. Everything that has a big impact starts small. What small thing can we start today that could impact our church in the future?

STRIVE FOR CONTINUAL INNOVATION, NOT INSTANT PERFECTION // "Our iterative process often teaches us invaluable lessons." Lasting impact takes a long time to build up ... it doesn't happen instantaneously. Rather than looking for the hot new program idea that will be the silver-bullet fix for your church, work on making many improvements in a wide variety of areas. What innovations are you making today that will impact your mission over time?

LOOK FOR IDEAS EVERYWHERE // "Some of the best ideas at Google are sparked ... when small groups of Googlers take a break on a random afternoon and start talking about things that excite them." Good ideas come from the fringe. They are often found by combining two ideas from different domains to create a third, innovative approach. Encouraging your staff to stay connected to other churches is part of collecting great ideas, but awareness of businesses or organizations that are making an impact is also important. (Shameless plug: The unSeminary Podcast is a great way to stay connected with other church leaders who are making an impact.) Train yourself to ask what's working around you and how you can apply those lessons to your church.

SHARE EVERYTHING // "Our employees know pretty much everything that's going on and why decisions are made." In Eric Schmidt's book How Google Works, he talks at length about how open they've been with their team over the years. It's at a level that borders on reckless as they attempt to ensure everyone knows what's happening at the company. Google still holds weekly, open forum question-and-answer periods with the top executive, where any staff

member can ask any question. They reportedly share widely and have had very few leaks coming from these conversations. Sometimes in church leadership we hold our future plans too close to our chest, treating them like trade secrets that we don't want to get out. It's actually kind of humorous. What if we brought our people ... staff and key volunteers ... in on the plans and next steps we are charting as a church and asked for their feedback?

SPARK WITH IMAGINATION, FUEL WITH DATA // "What begins with intuition is fueled by insights." Churches are usually built around some core assumptions in the minds and hearts of the leaders. These intuitive insights fuel the ministry model they are building and infuse the way they communicate. Are our core assumptions marketplace backed up by data and reality? Is there a way to test if what we think is true actually is? There is a significant part of church leadership that lands in the realm of art, but we can apply some science to it too.

BE A PLATFORM // "... we believe so strongly in the power of open technologies. They enable anyone, anywhere, to apply their unique skills, perspectives and passions to the creation of new products and features on top of our platforms." This is a significant insight that probably requires a lot more space to consider the impact for local church leaders. Businesses that are making an impact today see themselves as a platform for commerce, not the direct providers of those services. Google provides a way for people looking for information online to find people who are providing information online ... that's called Google Search. Uber provides a way

for people with a car and time to sell their services to people looking for rides. Air BnB provides a simple way for people to rent their home to travelers who are looking for space. Google isn't trying to provide all the information in the world, Uber isn't out buying a fleet of cars, Air BnB hasn't built a single hotel room. But each of these companies is reshaping their respective industries because they provide a radical platform. Most churches see themselves in the "spiritual growth" providing business ... but should we instead see ourselves as a platform for growth? Is our role to facilitate the interactions that lead to growth rather than the direct interactions themselves? More questions than answers on this one ...

NEVER FAIL TO FAIL // "Google is known for YouTube, not Google Video Player." Fail fast, fail often, fail forward. Because the stakes are so high with what we do in the local church, we can be afraid to fail. When we put ourselves in a position where nothing we do can fail, we aren't risking enough to make an impact. Failure is part of progress. Organizations that make spectacular impacts often have a trail of spectacular failures in their wake. What are you doing right now that has the potential to fail? If you can't think of anything, you aren't risking enough.