

The Cutting Edge Children's Pastor  
By Dick Gruber

WHAT IS CUTING EDGE, REALLY?

Oftentimes, Pastors call me when they begin looking for a Children's Pastor. In recent years, those searching for a Children's Pastor have described their dream person as someone that is "cutting edge." When I question the prospective pastor as to what he means, I get all kinds of answers. Some of the words used to describe the "cutting edge" children's pastor are young, exciting, entertaining, techno-savvy, and full of energy. Let me describe a cutting edge children's pastor to you. This person can be young or old. I know "sharp" ministers of all ages. The idea that a young person will automatically be a cutting edge person is ludicrous. There are some very well-trained, well-rounded Children's Pastors coming out of our six colleges that have made this ministry a priority. But, some of the most forward thinking creative children's pastors in America are over forty years of age. Jim Wideman, Bob, Hahn, and Billy Burns are some of the names that come to mind. Many of our older Children's Pastors have a great deal of wisdom, experience in administration, and a relational ministry with the children and their families.

I find the younger crop of children's pastors to be good entertainers. Pastoring children includes much more than running a fun children's church. The cutting edge children's pastor will build relationships with children and families. They will love and listen to children in and out of church. They will visit homes, hospitals, PTA meetings, recitals, and ball games. They will counsel, equip, and care for children, families, and those who work with the kids.

NON-NEGOTIABLE!

Exciting and entertaining are two words used to describe the "cutting edge" Children's Pastor. I am pretty certain that you can find exciting and entertaining children's performers that have no clue how to run a children's service. I know of young exciting Children's Pastors in our movement that do not even know how to give an altar call. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "Getting children to meet in the morning and the afternoon is a waste of their steps and yours if you do not set before them soul-saving, soul-sustaining truth." (Spurgeon page 30)

The cutting edge children's Pastor must know how to lead children in all the fun ways they enjoy. But it is imperative that he weave into this fun a depth of spirituality that will impact the children for eternity. George Barna writes, "Kids ages 2 to 7 average nearly 25 hours per week of mass media intake; the figure balloons to almost 48 hours each week among those ages 8-13. Evidence of the changing times and the new generation in place is the favorite medium of all, the Internet, according to 54% of kids under 8 and 73% of kids 8 to 12 years old." (Barna page 23)

A large number of children that are served in children's church are watching around 48 hours of TV, video games, or net surfing each week. We have them in children's church for maybe an hour and a half. There is no time to waste! The cutting edge children's pastor makes every moment count. The children's church becomes a singular message preached in a variety of ways. It always ends with a time of response.

EPHESIANS 4:12 PASTORING

I am computer-dumb. I definitely am not as techno-savvy as a prospective pastor may

wish. My son, Tim taught me how to use PowerPoint when he was eleven years old. What I know now about computer, video, and the internet has been learned by trial and error.

A friend of mine recently visited a children's church that had all the bells and whistles of technology. The team didn't minister using live costumed characters. Their characters were all shown to the children through the modern miracle of DVD projected on big screens. Songs, Scripture, and games were all projected for the children's viewing enjoyment. There is nothing wrong with showing an occasional video clip in children's church, but a cutting edge children's pastor cannot afford to be technology-dependant. The greatest long-term impact on an individual's life in the children's church or classroom is still generated through relationship and active involvement. Kids need to interact with real people.

Ephesians 4:12 encourages us as Pastors to prepare the saints for works of ministry. Jim Wideman writes, "Leaders come along side people and help them get better at what they do. They become coaches...A wise football coach wants to make each player outstanding at whatever position that player fills." (Wideman page 27) The cutting edge Children's Pastor will share the ministry, training and encouraging others to grow in the use of their gifts.

For a number of years I led children's churches ranging from a hundred to two hundred and fifty children ages 5 through 12. I used PowerPoint, video, overhead projectors and occasional Gospel illustrations with surprise endings. I trained my workers to have back-up lessons in case of electrical failure or the occasional "audio-visual demon." I also trained my workers to use children in positive ways to assist in teaching lessons. It is amazing how attentive a crowd of two hundred children will be when several of their friends are up front holding objects for the sermon.

The cutting edge children's pastor will use technology in creative ways. But he doesn't have to do it all himself. I have grown to trust volunteers to update the webpage, develop the presentations, and send out the e-mailings. When children are in need of a physical pastor to talk and to pray with, I cannot afford to spend an entire day tweaking the next mailing on PageMaker. Somebody in your church has a ministry in page tweaking. Let them soar in their ministry.

#### ENERGY, EXPERIENCE AND BALANCE

I am closing in on fifty years old. Frankly, it is a little bit harder to get up from behind the puppet stage, play soccer with the Royal Rangers, or stay up all night at the kids retreat. I don't blame a pastor for wanting somebody that is full of energy. I guess younger guys are more apt to fit this point in the "cutting edge" job description. But what the young Children's Pastor contributes in boundless energy is many times made up for by an older Children's Pastor in efficiency. Being full of joy does not necessarily mean bouncing off the walls. I know very productive Children's Pastors, young and old, that are exciting, enthusiastic, non-hyper leaders.

I submit to the Senior Pastor of today, that having a balanced, growing children's ministry is not "old school." The cutting edge children's ministry of today must include ministry to the total child; physical, spiritual, mental and social.

An exciting "Nickelodeon-style" children's service CAN indicate cutting edge leadership. The well-groomed entertaining leader may or may not be the cutting edge Children's Pastor you desire. Just because a leader or team can keep the kids from rebelling while

you preach to the adults does not mean you have the spiritual children's ministry your need.

The "cutting edge" Children's Pastor you are looking for may not be young, exciting, entertaining, techno-savvy, and full of energy. He or she may have something deeper that breeds eternal results. That person may be someone that loves children and families, uses creative methodology both old and new, and trains up an army of children and volunteers that know how to reach this dying world. That Pastor will generate long-term growth in your church and community through relationships. I challenge you to define your need in terms a bit deeper than "cutting edge." In your search for the perfect Children's Pastor, find someone with a heart for people young and old, an ability to preach a solid message to children, and a lifestyle of prayer.

Dick Gruber

[www.cmuo.com](http://www.cmuo.com)

[www.childrensministrytalk.com](http://www.childrensministrytalk.com)

#### Resources used for this article

Barna, George. Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions. Ventura, California. Regal Books, 2003

C.H. Spurgeon. Come Ye Children. Pasadena, Texas. Pilgrim Publications

Wideman, Jim. Children's Ministry Leadership. Loveland, CO., Group Publishing, 2003

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