



Depth Perception™

Commentary from Design For Ministry™
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People connected to long-established or declining ministries—whether congregation, camp, school or missions program—often spend time lamenting that they have competition from newer or nearby ministries. Their criticism sounds like Aesop's famous "sour grapes" fable more than a reasoned critique. They say the new or nearby ministries are:

- *compromising key values;
- *greedy for more than their share;
- *mavericks who refuse to learn from the experience of others;
- *committed to size instead of depth and quality;
- *thieves of their constituency.

What people from established or declining ministries fail to grasp is that a commitment to ministry grows from opportunity to use one's talent in a useful manner, and during an exciting time in that ministry's life. Freshness and excitement fuels both connection and ongoing monetary contributions.

Yearning to be involved in a meaningful way connects people to new ministries. People get involved by creating something that did not exist before. Their deepest levels of giving are unleashed. We must admit: younger and newer surely attracts

attention and support over old and tired any day.

People involved with older and declining ministries may also overlook the fact that their desire to remain involved and relevant can bump up against creative contributions from newcomers. If I should fail to see their desire to shape and add to ministry as the fruit of my own creative acts, then I drive people away because they threaten my previous accomplishments. I become a root reason for the new church, the new school, the new camp or the competing effort in mission even though I don't want them to come into being.

And here is the awful truth: when I demand that my own creativity must be honored and I refuse the creative contributions of others, not only do I give rise to new ministry efforts, but those ministries are formed in reaction to my lack of grace. Even the new vision becomes clouded by a desire to prove me wrong. Thus the cycle will be repeated. Those who establish the new ministry will become the old guard themselves one day, offering their own resistance to those they have reached.

—mark I. vincent