CHAPTER 5
REPRODUCING ARTISTS

The Crucial Creative Class

BIG IDEA

Attracting and reproducing artists is essential to starting a missional movement.

- Artists Catalyze New Communities
- Artists Help Sustain New Communities
- Attracting and Reproducing Artists
- Creating a Culture That Attracts Artists
- Creating a Culture That Develops Artists
- Five Factors for Reproducing Artists

If you asked me to give you the absolute essentials for spreading a missional movement of reproducing churches, I would narrow it down to two things:

1. Reproduce more and better leaders.
2. Reproduce more and better artists.

Obviously, we need leaders who grow people up in Christ, mobilize them for the mission of Jesus, and apprentice the next generation. But we also need artists who can lead and facilitate the large group gatherings of worship and the celebration of our God. Yes, I know this is a gross oversimplification. Still, simpli-
fying it in this way gives us an important focus. I am convinced that if we can get these two essentials right, everything else will fall into place.

ARTISTS CATALYZE NEW COMMUNITIES

Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, presents his groundbreaking research to city planners and real estate developers, explaining that if they want to revitalize a region, they must begin by attracting the creative class. He writes, “The creative centers tend to be the economic winners of our age...in the form of innovations and high-tech industry growth. The [creative centers] also show strong signs of overall regional vitality, such as increases in regional employment and population.” Florida goes on to demonstrate that throughout North America there is a direct correlation between the size and concentration of the creative class and the vitality of the community.

There is a lesson here for the church: if we want to see vitality in our churches, we need to attract artists and others in the creative class. So how do we do that? Florida gives a key suggestion that is equally applicable to our church context: “Creative people are not moving to these places for traditional reasons: sports stadiums, freeways, urban malls and tourism...What they are looking for above all else is the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people.” In other words, we must become churches that make room for creative people to be creative!

Artists and creatives are often the ones leading the way forward, catalyzing the creation of new faith communities. In 2 Chronicles 20, we have this amazing picture of the Israelite army being led into a victorious battle over three heathen nations—by a choir! Or consider the story of Jericho, where God commanded the musicians to blow trumpets and march around Jericho for seven days until the wall came crashing down. Creatives and artists will often be the ones leading the way forward, taking
new territory for the mission of Jesus.

If you are still skeptical about what I’m saying, think about launching a new site or a new church without musicians, vocal-ists, or technical artists of any kind. It would be quite a chal-
lenge. Then consider what it would be like trying to start a new incarnational church without the help of missional imagination. I’ll be blunt: it’s not going to happen!

ARTISTS HELP SUSTAIN NEW COMMUNITIES

The same artists who help to catalyze these new communities of faith will also be the ones who sustain new reproducing church-
es. Currently, Community has eleven sites and twenty-nine adult celebration services each week. In addition, we have seven Student Community and twenty-one Kids’ City large group gather-
erings each week. We utilize the gifts of more than four hundred amazing artists every week so that people can join together and celebrate what God is doing in their lives.

As I look a few years ahead to the future, I anticipate that we will be adding at least two new campuses per year and four new celebration services each year. This means that there is an ongoing need for somewhere between seventy-five and one hun-
dred new artists each year, just to sustain this level of growth. If I look beyond our church to the NewThing Network, we’ll need a whole army of creatives to march ahead of us. Having artists and creatives on our teams will help to sustain these new com-
munities.

If hundreds of creatives are needed for a reproducing church, and thousands more for a reproducing network (and even more than that for a movement), then what is the key to attracting and reproducing enough artists to keep up with the demand? As Richard Florida has suggested, you’ll need to be a place that validates artists’ identities as creative people. We have found that the creative class will often gravitate to communities
where art and the artist are valued and appreciated. And wherever the creative class gravitates, there will be the creating of culture. These will be the physical and philosophical places where new communities of faith emerge.

ATTRACTIONG AND REPRODUCING ARTISTS

You might be thinking, “Attracting and reproducing is great, and I want to do all that, but what about excellence?” To some it might feel as if the idea of reproducing artists is too forced, lacking creativity, and that it will stifle artistic excellence. It’s sort of like the two ends of a tug-of-war.

Some view the process as a win-lose situation, like this tug-of-war. When you pull hard on the reproduction side of the rope, you get lots of new artists, but in the process you lose your artistic excellence. Conversely, when you pull hard on the excellence side, you will only be able to trust a few talented artists to do the work, and you will be unable to reproduce quickly. Those who adopt this paradigm will always end up sacrificing one value for the sake of the other.

I think there is a better model for attracting and reproducing artists. Think of the process like riding a bicycle. A bicycle has two pedals, and in order to create forward motion, you need to push both of the pedals, but you do it one pedal at a time.
Most of us are pushing only one pedal on the bike, and that makes it very hard to develop any momentum. We frequently find ourselves choosing either to limit the opportunities for stage and artistic expression to just a handful of accomplished artists or, in the spirit of artistic development, to let anyone have a chance to “give it a try.” I would suggest that neither option will effectively lead us to accomplish the mission of Jesus. We need to develop a process that allows both to happen. Excellence in execution tends to attract other artists, while excellence in reproducing helps us to develop more artists. Developing a movement requires that we learn how to push the pedal of artistic quality and the pedal of artistic development in tandem. As we gain speed, we will learn to alternate the pedals so quickly that it seems as though we are pushing both pedals at once.

Sounds great, doesn’t it? But how do we do this practically, while keeping our balance as we pedal? I have two key sugges-
tions for you, relating to *seasons* and *standards*.

1. *Seasons*. In every church, there are peak seasons when you have an influx of newcomers. Typically, these seasons are around “back to school,” Christmas, and Easter. During these seasons, you want nothing to get in the way of people finding their way back to God, so you intentionally focus your time and energy on excellence in execution. During other seasons of the year, you are free to focus more on the reproduction of artists.

2. *Standards*. It’s a good idea to create a standard of excellence that you will never compromise. This standard is in place to make sure that poor execution doesn’t distract people from the voice of God when celebrating. You should continue to hold up this standard while you are reproducing.

Now that we have a better grasp of the fundamental relationship between attracting and reproducing artists in our communities, let’s take a look at how to go about creating a culture that is attractive to artists and conducive to reproducing.

**CREATING A CULTURE THAT ATTRACTS ARTISTS**

There are five keys to developing a church culture that attracts creatives.

Cultural Key 1: Take Risks

The greatest gift we can give to any artist is a culture that is willing to take risks. My friend Eric Bramlett, who coauthored our book *The Big Idea*, taught me everything I know about the importance of letting artists take risks. I can still remember a Star-
bucks conversation in which he explained it to me this way: “Art by its very nature requires risk, the risk of expressing your most intimate creative thoughts and ideas on a canvas or dance floor or through music in front of large crowds. The crowds show up to watch the artist and can either cheer with raucous applause or boo and heckle with catcalls. Art is a risk!”

As I listened to Eric that day, I began to see why most churches tend to repel artists. Many churches are not known as great-risk-taking organizations. Some churches even pride themselves on wearing the label “conservative.” Churches would rather be right than risk failing. Churches like this will not attract artists.

We are now at a place in our church where we routinely take artistic risks. We have done musical theater, hip-hop, a full orchestra, and even a kazoo band. We have done services where we tattoo everybody—and services where we anoint everyone. Many of these risks have worked marvelously—and some have been huge failures.

Our Yorkville campus recently took a risk when they put together the now infamous Bass Extravaganza. What is a “Bass Extravaganza,” you may ask? Well, imagine every person on the stage playing a bass guitar, and you’ve got the picture. That’s right, all bass guitars. (And a drum kit, but we’ll let it slide. After all, it has a bass drum, right?) A whole lot of practice and careful arrangement of the songs were required to make this happen. The benefit of that extra time invested was that we not only had a rockin’ Sunday morning but also saw a strengthening of relationships within the band. Prior to this weekend, one band member was on the fence in terms of his time commitment. After being part of something this fun and crazy, he saw the value of his contribution and has been a key artist ever since. Artists love it when we take risks, and our people love it when we create interesting experiences for them to invite their friends and neighbors to.
Cultural Key 2: Develop Relationships

All of us are created by God with a strong desire to live and thrive in our relationships with other people. But I’ve noticed that artists’ need for connection is often greater than that of the average person. Their need for relationship is not just a basic desire to connect with others; it is often necessary for the development of their art, since much of creating art is a collaborative process. Theater, for example, is a collaborative form of art that requires not only other actors but also artists who design the stage and set. Music often requires collaboration between musicians playing different instruments. If you want to create a place for artists, it’s important that you develop a means of bringing them into relationship with other artists.

A great way we’ve found to do this is to hold an open mic night. Choose a bar or cafe where you and your team of artists can hang out with other artists. Not only will your relationships with your artists improve, but your artists will begin developing relationships with others, independent of you and your ministry. This is huge. Plus, the community you create in that place may even begin to attract other artists.

Cultural Key 3: Give Them a Role

On more than one occasion, I have shown up to speak at one of our locations and noticed a band member who looked new. I’ll say, “Thanks for playing with the band,” and then ask, “What’s your name, and how long have you been playing?” What happens next is amusing to me. First they tell me their name, and then they say, “This is my third week here. Last week I auditioned, and this week I’m playing.” Then they look at me and say, “And who are you?” And I just say, “Dave,” and leave it at that. We give artists a role on one of our teams as soon as possible. Artists contribute by creating art, so allow them to begin do-
ing so as soon as possible. ×

Cultural Key 4: Plan to Reproduce

There is an old saying you’ve probably heard many times: “Birds of a feather flock together.” I’ve found that this is probably more true of artists than of any other affinity group. Musicians want to be with other musicians. Dancers want to be with other dancers. Techies want to be by themselves. Oops, that is another story! To ensure that you are attracting artists, make sure that you create within your culture an expectation that every artist reproduces another artist. You may call it shadowing, understudy, second chair, or apprenticeship, but it is an understanding that we not only do art; we also bring other artists alongside us and help them develop their gifts. Develop an expectation of reproduction that will build on the natural inclination artists have to be together and gives them a missional direction and focus.

Cultural Key 5: Rock It Out!

Don’t miss this last one. If you want to attract artists, you have to rock! Don’t turn the volume down, rewrite the lyrics, and play it safe. Rock! Be good at what you do. Own what you do. Be passionate about what you do. Go all out with what you do! I’m not talking about a style of music here; I’m talking about giving your artists freedom to express themselves with passion. Go all out! Get excited about what they do. Cheerlead in the moment. Let them rock! Artists respect that, want that, and need that! If they have the opportunity to be in a place where they can really do what they love, you won’t be able to keep them away. When you think about your artists, remember the immortal words of Dewey Finn (played by Jack Black in the movie School of Rock): “Dude, I service society by rocking, okay? I’m out there on the front lines lib-erating people with my music.” ×
CREATING A CULTURE THAT DEVELOPS ARTISTS

It’s all well and good to read that you should expect your artists to reproduce other artists. You’ve probably come to expect that from this book by now. But deep in your heart you’re wondering, “How do you develop a strategy for helping artists reproduce and develop that actually works?” Well, let me tell you that you are in for a surprise! What you are about to read are three time-tested strategies that we have been using for several years in the development of hundreds and hundreds (if not thousands) of artists. In other words, this stuff works.

Strategy 1: Artist Leadership Path

The first strategy is a clear leadership development path for artists. You may be thinking, “Hold it, you just used the terms artist, strategy, and leadership all in the same sentence. Whatever it is you are talking about—it won’t work.” Yes, I realize that artists are different, but they’re not that different. The same leadership path that we use for developing our leaders can also be used for developing our artists.

\[
\text{Apprentice} \rightarrow \text{Artist} \rightarrow \text{Apprentice Leader} \rightarrow \text{Leader} \rightarrow \text{Coach} \rightarrow \text{Director}
\]

A great example of this is Tony Germann. It had been a very long time since Tony had been in church when he showed up at our Romeoville location. Tony had played in lots of bands and is a terrific musician, and he was really surprised to find a church that played “real” music, the kind of stuff he loved to play. I met Tony on his first visit to the church, and his wife “outed” him by saying, “Tony is an awesome guitar player.” Bill Carroll, who was our arts champion at the time, got his contact info and had
him auditioning for our band within a month. Tony moved right past the apprentice stage and was regularly scheduled as an artist. Tony not only was a very gifted musician, but he also showed some great leadership gifts, so over the next four years he advanced further along the artist leadership path. He started leading one of our bands, began coaching our band leaders, and is now the arts director at our Romeoville campus.

Developing and hiring artists from within the church has real benefits over hiring from outside. First of all, most of the congregation have already seen these people grow, have watched them move through the development path, and have been cheering them on. Second, you know these artists’ strengths and weaknesses, you’re prepared to help them grow, and you are excited to make them part of the team.

While Tony’s story is amazing, it’s not unique. I could tell you a similar story about Chris, BT, Jeff, Charissa, and many, many others. Use the leadership path to cast a vision for your artists and show them how an artist can not only continue doing their art but also begin leading other artists and reproducing.

**Strategy 2: Apprenticeship**

It is essential that you are apprenticing new artists. We try to bring every new artist into our ministry through an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship works with our artists in the same way that it works with our leaders.

*Step 1:* I do. You watch. We talk.
*Step 2:* I do. You help. We talk.
*Step 3:* You do. I help. We talk.
*Step 4:* You do. I watch. We talk.
*Step 5:* You do. Someone else watches.

If you came to our church this weekend, it would not be un-
usual for you to see the apprenticeship process played out live on our stage. You might hear Bill, who is leading worship, say, “I want to introduce you to my apprentice worship leader. Instead of playing backup, he is going to be leading this next song and I will be backing him up. So let’s all join in as Chris leads this next song.” Then you would see Bill step to the back and Chris come forward, and in front of several hundred people Chris would lead a song for the very first time.

An interesting dynamic occurs when you apprentice a new worship leader like Chris. First, it reinforces that we value and believe in artist development and reproduction. Second, we find that people are rooting for Chris to do well his first time onstage. He gets support and encouragement from the congregation. Finally, Chris gets the opportunity to lead worship in front of several hundred people, and that experience helps him to feel comfortable in front of the congregation.

In the case of Bill and Chris, we saw Chris go from being a gifted artist working as a bartender to being a regular on the band schedule, leading band rehearsals, and then overseeing other band leaders. Chris is now the arts director at our Plainfield campus. I just love it. And check this out—the last time I was at our Plainfield campus, Chris was onstage introducing Seth, an apprentice worship leader who would lead worship for the very first time himself.

Apprenticing like this can happen with musicians, vocalists, actors—even techies. Once the value of reproducing artists is in place and a clear path for development is explained to them, the reproduction of artists begins happening through apprenticeships.

**Strategy 3: School for the Arts**

It was one of those aha moments when I knew that what I had seen could help further the mission of Jesus. I had just come
from Naperville Music, where they were offering a “Rock School” (this was before the movie School of Rock, but if you have seen the movie, you’ll know where I’m heading with this). The Rock School was a semester program for adults and students who had some musical experience and had always wanted to be in a rock band. For example, if you used to play the drums in high school or if you used to sing in the school chorus, you could sign up and they would place you with other musicians and vocalists and make up a band. Over the next several months, one of the teachers from the school would work with your band on a weekly basis to help you and your bandmates perform a set of two to three songs.

Instead of a recital at the end of the semester, though, they would rent a local theater, deck it out with the best AV equipment, and add a few fog machines. There were about a half dozen bands each semester, with six to seven people in every band, so once everybody invited a few friends and family members to the final show, they would have a crowd of around two hundred to three hundred people. Then they would ask the local cable provider to put the show on cable TV. Add it all up, and what do you get? You get the chance to be in a rock band with lights and fog, performing before a big crowd, broadcast on TV—you can be a rock star for a night!

After seeing this, I kept thinking, “Wow, we have to do this!” I knew that if we could provide something similar to the Rock School, when it was all over, we would be able to offer people additional opportunities to keep playing through our Kids’ City, Student Community, and adult ministries. This had huge potential to help us develop and reproduce our artists.

So I shared this idea with one of our artists, Rachel Carroll, and she started our School for the Arts. We initially began with nine private music teachers in piano, voice, percussion, and guitar, as well as some group classes in painting, acting, and music theory. That first semester, we launched with about 90 students
at our Naperville campus. The school has now grown to 30 teachers and 410 students at four of our campuses. Additionally, the teachers are paid by the income from the school, which makes the School for the Arts self-funded.

Use any one of these strategies—or all three—and begin creating a culture that will reproduce the artists you need to launch a missional movement.

FIVE FACTORS FOR REPRODUCING ARTISTS

The following five factors can change the way you think about reproducing artists. A few of these insights come from Bill Carroll, who was one of our arts directors and is now in Paris, France, preparing to plant a NewThing church. Are you ready? Here are five factors that will help you reproduce your artists and creatives.

Factor 1: Think 30 Percent

I want you to remember the number thirty. That’s the percentage of people in your church who could be engaged in the arts. Three out of every ten people who show up every weekend could be playing, performing, or supporting the arts in your community. Does that percentage seem high to you?

Over the last few decades, the conversation about the arts and the expectation of artistic excellence in the church have dramatically increased. Correspondingly, the level of creativity and excellence has also increased. While this is a good shift overall, what is not so good is that many church leaders have bought into a false standard of excellence. They tend to think that there are relatively few artists who can meet the acceptable standard for good quality. But it’s just not true.

Think about all the people in your church who once played an instrument in high school or college. How many people were in dance troupes or theatrical groups or took painting lessons?
Think about all the people who used to play in a garage band or "back in the day" played in a local bar band. The best estimate is that about 30 percent of your people have some background in the arts, and they have the potential to be engaged, using those gifts and skills in ministry.

Factor 2: Say, “We Need Artists”

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard from new artists, “I didn’t audition because the artists were really good and I didn’t think you needed anyone else.” Keep in mind that while you want to have a high standard of excellence in the arts, artists need to be told that they are needed! Find different ways to say that you need them. Say it from the stage, in your weekly program, on your website, and even in casual conversation. However you choose to communicate with people (both inside and outside of your church), make sure you are letting them know: “We need artists.”

Factor 3: Insist That Your Artists Recruit Other Artists

We recently met with the lead team of a very large church that was struggling with artist development and recruitment. The number of new artists was greatly lagging behind the growth of the church. Their arts team admitted, “We barely have any new artists.” We asked their arts director, “What are you doing to recruit new artists?” She said, “I put a monthly ad in the church program.” Then, after a long silence, we said, “And...?”

Saying in the church program once a month that you need new artists will not get the job done. Such ads often get a response from a very small number of people, and they will typically be one of two types of artists: either those who think they are good and are not, or those who have performed with other churches. The former are no help to you, and the latter make up a small fraction of the artistic talent in your community. Re-
member, your focus is on recruiting that 30 percent who played in high school or college a few years back or those who played in the bar band before they got married and started having kids. We’ve found that the best way to get to those artists is through other artists.

Every one of our band leaders knows that as soon as a service ends, they need to scan the front of the stage for people standing around checking out the band’s equipment and studying guitar effects pedals. Those are your musicians. If you are trying to do all your recruiting through one person, you will never get the job done. Every member of the team needs to be out there recruiting and needs to understand that the development of new artists is a top priority.

Our artists know that they are responsible to keep their ears open for potential artists at all times. Often new artists are recruited when they say something like, “I used to play in this band...” or, “I loved dancing...” Many times it’s the spouse that will “out” them and talk about how good they once were. As soon as our artists hear something like that, they know they have found someone who needs to get more involved in the artistic community.

Factor 4: Follow Up Fast

Once an artist expresses an interest, you need to follow up fast. The only thing worse than not developing and reproducing artists is ignoring a gifted artist who expresses an interest in serving. I encourage every person in the arts to follow up no later than the day after a new artist expresses interest. Send them an email, give them a quick phone call, or drop a note in the mail telling them what the next step is to getting involved.

Every day that you don’t respond to an artist after he or she expresses interest increases your odds of not having that person involved by about 15 percent. So if you talk to a potential new
artist on Sunday and wait until that Thursday to follow up with them, the chances that they will get involved have decreased by almost half. Recruiting may be the most important thing you have to do that week.

Factor 5: Let Pagans Play

Many of our artists play in local bands and perform in theater companies. Since we encourage people at all stages of spiritual growth to use their art for God, we have lots of artists who are recruited by other artists and begin doing their art at our church before they become Christ followers. We’re not only okay with that; we encourage it. Our Romeoville campus has been very successful in encouraging people playing in outside bands to come to church to play in the worship bands. They have recruited two entire bands that way. Not only that, but as a result of the relationships that have been formed in these bands, a number of people in them have actually come to follow Jesus!

The next time you’re in a public place, take a look around. If you are in a public place right now, go ahead and take a look at the people around you. Think to yourself, “Thirty percent of the people I see have significant artistic gifts.” That’s three out of ten. And sadly enough, most of them don’t think they have a place in the church. Yet these are the very people that you need, along with your friends, to catalyze and sustain a missional movement. So go over and ask one of them to join you!

Now.

Seriously.

× The only reason we know about Richard Florida’s book is because we have breakfast with our friends Nick Ryan, a real estate developer, and Perry Bigelow, a home builder, every Wednesday.
—Jon
× One time we had a service where we took a creative risk using fire. The fire was so out of control, we had to evacuate the room. —Jon

× “I just say, ‘Dave,’ and leave it at that.” Those words are begging to be mocked. Please email me your best dig at Dave for saying that. Type “Dig” in the subject line and send to jonferguson@communitychristian.org.—Jon

× Risks, Relationships, Roles, Reproduce, and Rock—five Rs. Rick Warren will be proud.—Jon

× My junior high son, Graham, just participated in our “rock school” last week, and he loved it. The concert was held at an outdoor amphitheater.—Jon

× Even as we speak, Bill is probably strolling the streets of Paris, looking for a place to relax over coffee and a pastry. Church planting is so hard.—Jon

× One of my favorite worship leaders at the Yellow Box (one of our Naperville campuses) is a guy who started playing in our band long before he was a Christ follower. If he keeps tracking, he’ll be an arts director someday soon.—Jon