

i² – Becoming a Church of Irresistible Influence

Week #3: Overcoming Obstacles

Opening Exercise -

Talk about a time in your childhood when you face an obstacle of some kind.

Bridge Building...

Over time and generations, living on an island shapes the way you think and perceive reality. Isolation makes you different by definition, sets you apart. There is, in a highlighted fashion, a greater distance between here and there, and us and them. It's inevitable. Most islanders, in fact, wouldn't have it any other way. That's why they choose to live on an island.

Island living is often peaceful, serene, undisturbed, and largely disconnected from the greater span of the real world; it's a carefully measured existence, a way of life.

For centuries residents of Prince Edward Island, off Canada's eastern coast, enjoyed just such an existence. The island was once described as "two huge beaches separated by potato fields." Islanders were distanced from the chaos of the real world by nine miles of ocean. You could not drive there or back.

From the soil of such an unconnected serenity sprung Anne of Green Gables. Red-haired, pigtailed, freckled, and innocent, Anne became a powerful and defining symbol of the island's character. She was also fictional.

Paradoxically, it was Anne's rising fame that attracted outsiders.

In 1997, after a bitter and dividing referendum battle, the Confederation Bridge connecting Prince Edward Island to the mainland of Canada was opened, finally fulfilling the government's 132-year-old promise. The technology of the bridge, which consisted of 185 structural elements, each placed within one-quarter inch accuracy, was stunning. Constructed on land and transported by ship, the bridge cost nearly one billion dollars. Many residents say it cost much more.

With the completion of the bridge, the island was suddenly awash with tourists, foreigners to their cherubic, carefully cultivated lifestyle. Tourism doubled. Unsettling, disturbing, and deep changes followed. Near Green Gables, Anne's name is now used to promote dolls, T-shirts, potato chips, a golf course, restaurants, a wax museums, and bungalows. Many residents believe that Anne must be rolling over in her fictitious grave.

For many of the island's longtime residents, paranoia runs high about what lies in the future. Some are fiercely angry with those they perceive as having sold out. The island's capitalists, however, see new jobs, greater efficiency, and a welcome end to the often interminable waits for the ferry. Those caught in the middle believe they might just as well get used to it. With completion of the bridge, only one thing remains certain: the island, for good or bad, will never be the same. (Lewis & Wikins pg. 89,90)

The Church can be an island. We fail to build bridges. We even deconstruct old bridges that have been built in order to retreat from a world that so desperately needs that connection with us. We isolate ourselves from culture. Once that has been done, there are obstacles both imposed by us and on us to the process of reconstructing those bridges.

We all have personal experiences the shape our obstacles. We bring with us, previous church experiences. We bring our family experiences. We have our own obstacles in this process.

Obstacle #1: FEAR

Fear may be the greatest obstacle to personal ministry.

What are some of your fears in living an i² lifestyle?

What are some corporate fears that keep entire churches from being an irresistible influence in the community?

Read 2 Timothy 1:7

How can isolation breed fear?

What tools does God equip us with to fight fear?

Obstacle #2: CONFUSION

As we leave church every Sunday morning after hearing a moving message of the reasons we should move to become i² individual, we stand out in the world overwhelmed by the possibilities. It is easy to ask ourselves, “What now?”

What are the results of confusion and the “What now” attitude?

Obstacle #3: LACK OF DIRECTION

Often times it isn’t the questions of “how” or “what” but “what do I *want* to do?” We don’t know what we would be good at or where we will find purpose and meaning. Lack of direction leads to people becoming discouraged with i² living and then they give up serving others because they believe it just doesn’t make a difference.

What have you done or what can you do to find direction for our i² lives?

How can our church overcome similar bridge building obstacles?

PRAYER TIME

Spend some time praying for one another, not just in the real life issues each of us face, but for the obstacles we face in i² living.