

THE JOURNEY

Open Life's vision (doing life together while "leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus") was birthed in February of 2009 in the hearts of P. Thad & Dana Huff. Moving from willingness to official plan by April '09, they began to educate immediately. Moved by the reality that within a 5 mile radius there were 80,000 out of 91,000 people who did not have a growing relationship with Jesus, they rallied a launch team to make an impact on the 80,000 by June '09. This team collaboratively developed a vision for a missionally attractional church in Bonney Lake, WA that was an expression of the life verse of P. Thad.

*"We loved you so much that we were delighted **to share with you** not only the gospel of God but our **lives as well**, because you had become so dear to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:8, NIV84)*

In September of '09 Open Life soft launched in P. Thad & Dana's home. The soft launch was a culture-building season for a core of about 20 to 30 people (man, woman, and children). With this core a service was launched on January 10, 2010 at the Regal Theater in Bonney Lake. Since then Open Life has moved twice; March 20, 2011 to an Elementary School, then in August of 2011 to Bonney Lake High School where the church has grown to over 100 people.

THE LESSONS

1. Listening is Key

I had not prepped to be a church planter, so learning and listening were vital for our potential survival on this unknown path. We looked for places and opportunities to learn the culture of our city and discover the unique unmet needs that existed within the community. Breakfast with the mayor, chamber of commerce meetings, community coalitions, and reading the paper and Patch.com were key to discovering the pulse of our city. The common thread we discovered was the phrase, "how does that benefit the city." We took this on as a key element of what we designed, to be a benefit to the city. This became one of the key reasons for our strategic generosity strategy, partnering with organizations and agencies both local and global that are making a great impact in their community.

2. Be a Missionary

Realize a crowd is reached quickly, but a culture is changed by loving people who in turn love people. While growth may not be as aggressive as the big show, it will get there and when it does the foundation will be solid in their faith and devotion. Missionaries find themselves in culture reaching the lost from within their normality, where church leaders are often trying to cast a line into culture from the sidelines or a subculture. In essence we are the Shepherds going after the lost sheep, but realizing there are more lost sheep than saved sheep, therefore we are gathering the sheep within the culture vs. trying to lead them to another location before we bring them together.

3. Build critical mass

One of our greatest challenges was labor and finances. The reason for the financial challenge was we launched into the expense of a consistent gathering prior to having critical mass to sustain it both budgetary and volunteers. With our connections and

buzz within the community we trusted that if we built it they would come. This proved to be a false notion. We built it, and people have watched to see if what we said we were was proved true. The masses never came therefore the growth to reach critical mass to provide a volunteer rotation base and financial sustainability for monthly operational expenses was lacking and within 10 months all of our funding was used up, forcing us to make aggressive and swift choices to live within our means.

We realized the hard way that **launch services to build our momentum and leadership base** would have helped us go further faster! Stats say you need a base of 77 people prior to weekly gatherings to be sustainable.

We also learned to **think inside the box**. If our focus is always outside the box we will live in discouragement and envy, but if we work with what we have our box will increase eventually allowing us to experience the reality of our outside the box ideas.

4. **Be Sustainable over Relevant**

The most relevant thing you can do is work within your means. When trying to build it so they will come we stretch ourselves so thin that volunteers struggle to facilitate our vision. Do less excellently. People will be more excited about it and you can give your volunteers and systems something to build towards vs. feeling like they cant do what you envision.

Practically this has meant for us: not brewing coffee, combining Elementary and Pre-school, doubling up some of our first impressions with our communications team. But we have turned these into missional wins.

Another thing was we determined it was better to spend 30,000 to allow for a quick set up system to save rental and volunteer time in the long run than to try to do mobile on the cheap!

Often we just try and do too much with too little, putting at risk the most valuable resource we have...those we are reaching and leading into a growing relationship with Jesus.

5. **When you hear God speak...obey**

Three moments for us have been:

- a. Doing Big Give when we only had .37 in the bank!
- b. Going Mobile from the theater...buying a trailer without a driver
- c. Restructuring our finances to a percentage based historical actual model
- d. Casting the vision to double this Easter and taking the risks necessary to see this become a reality
 - Spending every undesignated penny on a mailer
 - Challenging our people to invite
 - Taking a global impact angle to draw unchurched into something bigger than themselves.