

Lightning in a Bottle

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and then being able to hold it
and show it to the world.*

Performing a rare feat.

A moment of creative brilliance.

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*A Case Study on “Will I be a good fit as an XP here?”
—with note pages at the end*

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*This article outlines the thought processes that I went through in March, 2013 as I was interviewing for the position of Executive Pastor at EvFree Fullerton. May it help you think through the various items to consider when determining fit for an Executive Pastor position.
~David*

The following are *initial thoughts* based on a week of meetings with some of the key leaders at EvFree Fullerton. There are many other elders and staff who would round out this report and, in time, they could also be interviewed.

Mike Erre, aged 41, came to the church as the Senior Pastor in September, 2012. In those five months, the church has grown by more than 1,400 people in the worship services.



Based on initial guesses, I estimated that there were 4,000 people in worship on Sunday, February 10, 2013. The actual number was 4,600 (this includes some duplication of people because that Sunday launched the evening service). In July 2012 there were 3,000 people in worship. In January 2013, there were 4,400 people in worship. In September 2013, there could be 5,500 people in worship.

Children’s ministry has grown from 300 to 800 kids. Youth have about 500 teenagers.

Worship Services

A \$1.5 million remodel of the worship center is planned and now being funded. High definition video screens are needed, as well as new chairs (already purchased). The new seating layout looks interesting, as well as the design of the room. Current seating capacity is 1,600 in pews. The new seating capacity will be 1,600 in theater seating, which gives greater real-time seating capacity than pews.

8:00 am Service

This service was pretty full of older people; 65% full is a guess. The worship leader was involved in most of the elements that day. The people are engaged in the blended worship. The worship was more blended than traditional that day; no hymns were sung. The announcements by video were well watched.

The people were mostly Anglo, with a few African-Americans and Asians—we saw a very few Latinos in that service. Few men were in coats and even fewer were in ties. Most of the people seemed to be well-educated and upper middle class, yet none seemed to put on airs of superiority.

The congregation was engaged with Mike and visibly loved the preaching.

One 80-year-old woman shared about at a midweek group with friends. At the event, another lady complained about Mike preaching in jeans and a black shirt. A companion said, *“Who cares what he is wearing. Listen to what he says.”* Gentle confrontation among friends is sign of great spiritual health.

One grandmother said about Mike, *“His preaching is so good. Why didn’t we hear this before? Didn’t the others go to seminary?”*

9:30 am Service

The service was very full with under 10% of the seats available. There was a clear sense of the 80% rule: *church growth slows and then stops when attendance reaches 80% of the room capacity.* For example, if a couple comes in late, there will be few seats available for them to sit together. Expansion will be difficult to impossible at this hour unless other measures are taken.

The worship was led by a band and featured a mandolin on that day (sweet addition!) The worship leader connected with the audience but it was not a personality-driven service.

The demographics had a broad range of ages—there was a goodly amount of younger kids in the service, dancing and getting into the lively worship songs. While the congregation was mostly Anglo, there were more Asians in the service than at 8:00 am. There also was a broader range of educational and economic levels in the attenders.

Few Latinos were observed. **Pero 35% de las personas cerca la iglesia se hablan espanol en casa** (*35% of people near the church speak Spanish at home*).

11:00 am Service

We did not observe this service but Mike Erre reports that it has more young people than other morning services.

New 6:00 pm service

February 10 was the first night for the new evening worship service, held in the amphitheater. At 15 minutes before the service we thought about leaving, only so that we could give our seats to the people streaming into the more intimate worship space. Ushers repeatedly brought in more chairs, even moving the speaker’s podium back 10 feet. Capacity reached and exceeded 100%; there were absolutely no seats available.

There was great diversity in ages and economic levels—perhaps because it was the first week. It also seemed to have even more young people.

Antonio, a second or third generation Hispanic, sat behind us and awkwardly greeted us at the welcome time. He was not shy in worship, vibrantly singing the songs (many of which he clearly knew).

I had hoped to speak to Antonio after the service but was unable. He was wearing a University of California Fullerton sweatshirt. I don’t know how engaged he was in the sermon, as he was behind me. Yet, it should be noted that as a fluent English speaker, he was comfortable in the service.

It is unknown if the service will have 100% capacity the second week, as many from the morning came to support the opening night.

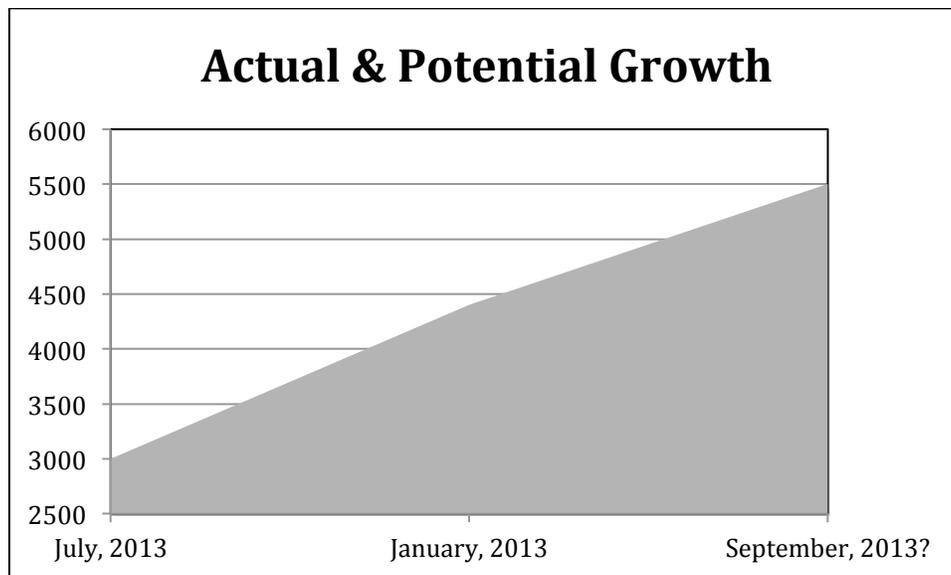
Worship Challenges

In the fall, Mike moved the contemporary service into the main worship center from another room. They moved the traditional service to the first hour and empowered that service to be as traditional as the people needed. Thus, there seems to be good signs of “worship health” at the church. Since the practice of worship is defined in the Bible along culturally conditioned lines, there is enormous freedom to worship in culturally significant ways. In other words, let there be a multiplicity of styles to worship God.

The enormous challenge is the numerical growth. At current trends, the church will be out of worship space in 6 months. The Conditional Use Permit (CUP) from the city of Fullerton only allows for temporary video venues on campus. This is due to parking concerns. Although the church recently spent \$10 million on a three-level parking structure, those spaces are now fully used. The church cannot revert to street-level parking in the neighborhoods, which caused an odious reaction from the neighbors.

Work needs to be done to understand where these attenders are coming from. Are they transfer growth? Are they new believers?

The following chart shows the actual growth to January 2013. With the existing trend line, it could be possible for the church to grow to 5,500 in worship by September 2013.



Immediate planning must be made for September 2013. **Options include:**

- Explore a temporary expansion of the Conditional Use Permit with the City of Fullerton. Use a room on Sunday morning for a concurrent video venue.
- Begin a second evening service, either with live preaching or recorded video.
- Launch a Sunday afternoon service with recorded video preaching.
- Launch a Saturday evening service. This a challenging issue for any preaching pastor. A Saturday service greatly changes the weekly flow of preaching, study, church and personal time.
- Launch a Monday night service with recorded video.
- Find locations for new multi-site venues.

Other areas of need at the church include:

- Onboarding of new attenders—assimilation, debt and money management for new believers and attenders, missional living, etc.
- Missional orientation of adult classes.
- Staff organization and support
- Constitutional and governance revisions

Mike Erre—Lightning in a Bottle

Mike is genuine in the pulpit and in person. He is very perceptive and spontaneous. Mike brings:

- **Chaos**—he has *tons* of new ideas and wants to run with many of them.
- **Adaptability**—as a "perceptive type" in Myers Briggs language, he likes to be spontaneous. By disposition, time is flexible for him and not to be mastered. People and events are more important than calendar time. By training, Mike knows the value of a schedule.
- **Authenticity**—he has been broken by some past experiences and is honest about life and himself in the pulpit and in person.

Mike is a compelling communicator who is greatly gifted by God for public proclamation of Christ's Kingdom. He gives solid exegesis from the Scriptures, which engages the audience. Having brought people to see the reality of Christ in the Bible, Mike then engages the heart of the listener. He calls each person to a personal confrontation with Truth and calls each on to personal change. As an authentic and transparent communicator, he has broad appeal to people who are "de-churched, dead churchd and un-churched."

My initial term for Mike is "lightning in a bottle." The Urban Dictionary defines lightning in a bottle as:

Capturing something powerful and elusive and then being able to hold it and show it to the world.

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Mike is a uniquely gifted leader. He is an innately, highly-gifted communicator. Mike knows that God has given him this gift. Because of knowing God's gracious gift, Mike values the giftedness of others. He is not an insecure leader.

Mike's XP Search Profile

In the fall of 2012, Mike brought in a handful of potential XPs. Some were too focused on finances, others only saw the ministry role in the position. Mike has values and standards in the search:

- **Someone older**—at 41, Mike realizes that this is his first role as Senior Pastor. He has been a teaching pastor at two other churches and seen those churches greatly grow. Yet, he is now the pastoral point leader. He wants someone with experience as an XP, not someone who will have to learn how to do the job.
- **Immediate Buy-In**—Mike wants to bring in an XP who can have immediate buy-in from the staff. He wants the staff to have a leader who both relates to them and whom they can respect.
- **Complementarian**—Mike wants someone to complement his gifts and abilities. He is the "command leader" whenever he enters a room. He is loud, boisterous,

fun-loving and catalytic—always injecting new ideas. Yet, Mike wants a strong leader who will bring perspective to his ideas. He wants someone who is also highly gifted and talented in organizational leadership. He needs an implementer of vision and a stabilizer of church staff and programs.

- **Structure**—while embracing Mike’s values and creative ideas, the XP will need to create “functional structures” (Christian A. Schwarz’s term from *Natural Church Development*).
- **Organizational Leadership**—the staff needs an organizational leader. Mike needs the freedom to focus more time on visionary level activities.
- **Stability**—someone who knows church governance and can help him implement all the crazy ideas that he comes up with (they planned and implemented the new Sunday evening service in just 5 weeks!)
- **Experience**—while Mike has been a teaching pastor for many years, this is his first Senior Pastor role. Leading the *entire thing* is a new gig to him.
- **Structure**—Mike is a strategic thinker but needs someone to apply it to the church and get it done.

Evaluating A Potential Working Relationship

Among other things, David could bring:

Structure—he has a rich history of working with Boards, governance and church structure. EvFree is intensely looking at simplifying its board structure and working through an excellent book on it. David helped the board at Northwest Bible Church in Dallas work through conflict, find harmony, develop an educational agenda, set a leadership path for new elders, etc. *Interestingly, Mike asked his security guy about the first impression that David gave. The security guy said, “David has a command presence with the smile of a pastor.” Those were some nice words!*



- **Resolving Conflict**—Through his relationship with Ken Sande & Peacemaker Ministries, David is committed to teaching and living out the fruit of the spirit of “love, joy, peace ...” David brings a process for biblically resolving conflict.
- **Change & Stability**—David is comfortable with change and knows the process of change management. At the same time, he values stability for staff and the congregation. Consider David’s *Rubber Band Illustration* for acceptable rates of change.
- **Large Staff Leadership**—David has managed a staff of 300. He thrives on empowering leaders (Ephesians 4). While enjoying change and being a creator of new systems, he knows that many people need a sense of structure and stability to perform best. He has initiated annual review procedures.
- **Lifelong Learner**—David is constantly learning and growing. He shares that with pastors around the country and world.
- **Operations Experience**—David has managed budgets of \$11 million with 3 campuses plus a 350-acre camp. He has renovated church communications structures and developed 10-year facility plans.
- **Mentoring**—David is an experienced mentor of staff and people in the community. David firmly believes in empowering others for effective ministry.
- **Governance Expertise**—David has a broad range of experience with governing board and working committees. His experience ranges from revisions of constitutions to drafting and revising policy.

Areas of Strength & Potential Conflict

Conflict is not a negative thing, unless it is not dealt with. Knowing potential limitations can be healthy and freeing. It shows that teamwork is necessary and that no individual has “all the gifts.”

- **Change**—both Mike & David like change. Mike is a motivator and David is a catalyst. Both know how to use power and resources to bring about change. Yet remember the rubber band illustration! If unchecked, or in times of stress or high-work load, these two could bring about too much change.
- **Boredom**—neither man does well with boredom. Mike will most likely stir the pot when he is bored, just to bring new dynamics into play. David will create new ministries if bored. Both of these reactions to “calm seas” might not be healthy—they might add too many “spinning plates” to the already full agenda of staff and volunteers.
- **Adaptability vs. Structure**—Mike is an adaptable extrovert who thrives on getting the most information before making a decision. David is a planned extrovert who likes to make his plans and stick with them. In times of stress, David could feel that Mike is too unplanned and spontaneous, while Mike could see that David is rigid in his structures. Honest discussion in stress times is necessary.
- **Competition**—each man has a goodly amount of God-given success. Normally this will make personal competition close to nil, as each man’s gifts are inherently different. In times of great crisis, either one could feel under-appreciated by the other. What is normally a great strength might become a challenge. The solution is to define the crisis and talk through the issues. Communication in a crisis is key.
- **Leadership**—both men are strong leaders. Mike enjoys leading from the pulpit and gets a great amount of significance in using his gifts there. While David can preach well, that is not his area of personal significance. He enjoys leading and guiding the organization through empowering each person. Conflict can come if the definitions of who is leading what event are not clearly defined—hopes and expectations should be defined.

We are just ending our week here in California. EvFree Fullerton is an amazing church. Mike Erre is “lightning in a bottle.” He is 41 and wants an “older” and “experienced” XP.

Mike is a compelling speaker to the older folks, who have fallen in love with him. His preaching attracts many new people. Most of the 1,600 new people are under 40. That is an enormous amount of people to absorb in 5 months. Just staggering!

Notes from Mike's Talk at the Seminar

Your thoughts & take-home deliverables ...

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2.

3.

4.

5.

