



WILLOW CREEK ASSOCIATION NZ

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' – by Alan Vink

My 'article' this month endeavours to capture a few key questions that I or my team have been asked from time to time. I trust that in reading this you will gain a better and clearer picture of the re-engineered WillowNZ.

Question: Things at WillowNZ appear to have changed a fair bit, so what's the 'haps'?

Answer: Yes they have been changing over the last three years, and they will no doubt continue to change. To be honest, I thrive on change. I accepted the position to lead WillowNZ in November 2010. As I typically do when agreeing to a new ministry position, (and these days a Board position), I do my own due diligence and come up with a few asks or 'bottom lines' of the organisation that seeks to engage me. So I asked the Willow Board:

1. That all existing staff be 'let go'. (I know that sounds tough and in many ways it was but I had very good reasons for this). Further that I could recruit new staff as I deemed best.
2. That we immediately close the office in Albany Auckland and 'move' it to Hamilton (initially my home), even though we had six months lease left.
3. That Leigh Sartin be invited to become my new GLS National Events Manager. (I had already asked Leigh about this possibility and she agreed and is still with me today.) She is a class act.
4. I had a fourth 'ask' that I chose not to talk about but prayed and asked God if he would bring that about, which he did much quicker than I anticipated. Incidentally the answer to this issue was one important confirmation that God was leading me in this new direction.

So on 18 November 2010 I officially began as CEO and immediately embarked on a 'change management' programme. I was passionate to re-position WillowNZ for a whole new future and to do so quickly, actually very quickly contrary to my own advice and that of most textbooks on change management. As at today most of the new building blocks are in place and we are now very focused on first the delivery of a broader and better range of services and secondly building a stronger financial base.

Question: It seems you have departed from Willow's 'core' business namely leadership development and training'. Is this the case, and why?

Answer: Yes and no. It is true that Willow Creek Association is traditionally about Leadership Development and convenes the Global Leadership Summit as its flagship event each year to achieve this objective. This is still the case. In fact, after this year's GLS I am more 'pumped up' about the GLS and the possibilities before us than I have ever been.

When I first became a member of WillowNZ in 1994, I was the Senior Pastor of Hamilton Central Baptist Church. WillowNZ, under Graeme Paris's leadership, began at this time a season of 'republishing' a whole range of resources that Willow Creek Community Church had produced e.g. Promiseland, Contagious Christianity, Network, Good \$ense etc.

My point being that Willow NZ was at that stage already in the church resourcing business. Further, the content they produced was regarded by many as some of the best if not *the* best you could get anywhere. I certainly was one of those pastors. Twenty years on, that is still my vision for WillowNZ, but the way we have chosen to achieve this is a bit different. I am currently developing a new Mission Statement for WillowNZ. It goes something like this:

To become the premier Christian Leadership Development organisation for leaders wherever they may lead, and a provider of quality church resources that are affordable, accessible and transformative when carefully applied. (This statement is a work in progress).

That's why I have been very purposeful for WillowNZ to become the 'host' organisation for:

2012 *Faith@Home* - founder Mark Holmen

2013 *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* - founder Peter Scazzero

2013 *Shoeless* - founder Katie Boom

Question: You have developed or are still developing quite a different business model. Could you briefly outline what it is, and how it is working?

Answer: Yes I have, and it is drawing some attention by other not for profit organisations. This has been driven initially by necessity, namely lack of money, but now continues as a desire to experiment with a model that keeps overheads as low as possible, thereby freeing up as much money as possible for ministry.

The three operating ideas that I have worked with these last three years are:

1. Minimise overhead costs
2. Flexibility for staff
3. Careful application of new technologies

Let me briefly explain. The model we have developed is essentially a 'virtual office' model, nothing particularly new about that. As at writing we do not lease or own any office space or for that matter, warehouse space. All 9 staff work from their homes and in most cases, home offices. We have a post box in Hamilton and our office phone number can easily be re-directed wherever we want it to be. Most staff live in Hamilton or Raglan. This will change in the near future as it's likely we will hire more staff in other parts of NZ. All staff offer their home office space to WillowNZ for free. For 50% of our staff WillowNZ has supplied or bought their computer. I am very committed to provide all staff with quality 'tools of trade', which incidentally I would need to do anyway if we were all working under one roof. When it comes to the costs of running their offices WillowNZ pays for all costs or significantly subsidises their costs. This gives staff members a benefit in that they are free to use WillowNZ computers and internet and phone arrangements for private use – no holds barred. One last thing on this for now. Job descriptions for the most part are **outcomes** focused as opposed to a list of tasks, and I operate on a 'high trust' basis. (This sentence contains a lot of biblical and management rationale.)

Having explained this you can easily see the benefits:

1. Our overhead costs are about as low as you can go
2. Most of my staff are part time, and there is some flexibility around hours of work
3. We are certainly not a state of the art technology organisation but we are continually looking at ways to better enhance mobile phone deals, Cloud and Skype technology.
4. A few café's in and around Hamilton do pretty well from Willow staff as this is where we often meet. Having said this, larger group meetings are either in one of our staff homes or we 'hire' a suitable local church facility for a few hours on an as needed basis.

If you are reading this piece and it raises some questions for you, please feel free to call me on 021 562 743 / 07 825 8330. Hint: I do much better with phone calls than email....by a country mile.

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