# THAT WILL NEVER WORK

*Posted on February 21, 2020 by Eddie*

One of the problems of being a bloke in his sixties who has been involved in mission work and leadership in various parts of the world is that I've seen it all before...
**Category:** Observations

It is very easy to becomer rather cynical about innovations in the church and in mission. When people come up with a revolutionary new idea, it is very easy to point out that we actually tried that in the early 1990s and it didn't work then and it won't work now. Then again, if people do actually come up with something genuinely new and creative, the temptation is to point out that there is a reason why we've not done that before and why we shouldn't try it now.

Yes, of course, we need to change with the times, but there are good reasons why we do what we do and so while we need to change, we shouldn't actually do anything different.

A couple of days ago, I wrote about the importance of listening to the new rising generation. The problem is, that all too often when young people make suggestions about new ways of doing things, older and "more experienced" people will give a list of reasons why those ideas won't work. I know, I've been that older and "more experienced" person. It is very easy for leaders to squash the creativity and enthusiasm of younger people, without actually intending to. And the thing is, that just because an idea didn't work in 1993, it doesn't mean that it won't work now. Times change and ideas become more relevant as things move on.

In Acts 11:19-30, we read about what was probably the most important innovation in the history of the church and mission. In Antioch, some unnamed believers from the Jewish diaspora started preaching the gospel to Gentiles. Up till this point, Jesus followers had only reached out to other Jews (apart from a few isolated incidents), wholesale evangelism of Gentiles was something entirely new and unprecedented.

The Jerusalem Church, concerned about what was going on sent Barnabas to Antioch to check things out. Thousands of years of Jewish history were crying out that Jews and Gentiles should not mix. At the very least, Gentiles wanting to follow the Jewish Messiah should submit to the rituals of the law such as circumcision. This is what tradition and experience demanded. Barnabas, however, saw things differently. He saw God at work even though people were doing something that had never been done before. He encouraged the believers in Antioch and went and got Paul to help him work with the church. The rest is quite literally history.

It took a long time for Gentiles to be fully accepted in the church and a number of Paul's letters deal with the struggle. However, imagine what would have happened if Barnabas had been a different type of person and had insisted that the Antioch church stick with a tried and tested approach.

It takes a significant degree of humility and self-awareness for an experienced leader to accept new ideas and to listen to younger people. Those of us who are more "mature in years" need to cultivate the attitudes and skills that make space for a younger generation to thrive and to shape our mission for the future.

*I apologise to returning to Barnabas yet again...*