



“Why plan?” George asked. “I just wait on the Lord and He tells me what to do.”

Many ministers believe that long-range or strategic planning demonstrates faithlessness and quenches the Holy Spirit. This is a misguided belief. In fact, the scriptures condone “the plans of the diligent” in Proverbs 21:5, and diligence in leadership in Romans 12:8. Strategic planning can be just as inspired as the daily, in-the-moment guidance we receive from the Holy Spirit.

Strategic planning holds many advantages. First, a strategic plan helps a ministry clarify its calling. It provides a detailed understanding of the requirements to accomplish God’s vision, and the tasks necessary to get there. Also, a plan is an excellent communication tool for sharing the ministry’s calling with others. A point of reference allows fewer detours and more impact.

Many ministry leaders are intimidated by strategic planning because it is unfamiliar, but it does not need to be. The goal is to streamline the large-scale, God-given vision into smaller-scale, manageable steps. Here is an outline of the process:

ACTION OUTLINE

PRAY

CHOOSE TEAM

PREWORK FOR THE PLAN

Organize a prayer effort for the planning process.

The strategic plan you are developing requires God’s clear direction and assistance. Prayer is the first step. A foundation of prayer ensures the planning process and outcome will be directed by Him. Pray that God will use the planning process and the plan to produce His desired outcome.

Select a team to plan with you.

Don’t be afraid to give up some control and use the gifts and experience of others. Doing all the planning by yourself limits what God wants to do in and through others and will restrict the size and scope of your ministry. Select

ACTION OUTLINE
CONTINUED

SCHEDULE
PLANNING
SESSION

key leaders who can provide useful input and vital involvement in the plan's implementation. Doing so will yield a better plan with a sense of ownership on the part of those involved.

Convene a planning session.

A strategic plan can usually be developed in as little as one or two days. If this is your first attempt at strategic planning, start with a full day. If this is not possible, start with a half-day session and continue a few days later or the following week with another half day of planning. If you don't get all the way through each step, you can always schedule another day or part of a day to finish up. Setting aside blocks of time for planning usually helps people focus and yields better results.

CHOOSE
FACILITATOR

Carefully and prayerfully consider who should facilitate the planning process.

Good planning requires skilled facilitation of the planning team. The role of the facilitator is not to control the final results, but rather to guide the planning process. The ministry leader may facilitate the planning process if he or she is a gifted consensus-seeker. Otherwise, appoint someone else with that strength. If your budget can afford the expense, hire a planning facilitator to lead the process.

SET VISION

Start with a God-inspired vision.

Vision is a clear conceptual picture of a desired future state. A vision statement is simply a concise verbal picture of how you believe God has called you to impact the world. A lack of vision is possibly the number one symptom of "burnout". If you want to truly "apprehend that for which you were apprehended", then you need a God-given vision. Write the vision God has given you in a few sentences Review it. Does it still express what God has put in your heart to accomplish? If not, pray over it, revise and rewrite it.

DEVELOP
MISSION
STATEMENT

Develop a mission statement or review the one you have.

Once you know the vision God has called you to fulfill, it is important to declare the mission or role your organization or church performs in carrying it out. A mission statement is a short description of who you are, what you do, and how you intend to realize your vision. It answers the question "Why does my ministry exist?"

Try the following format for your mission statement:

(Name) Church/Ministry is a (what or who we are, our identity), called/ordained/established/founded by (who gives us authority) to (who we are to serve) by (how we serve).

ACTION OUTLINE
CONTINUED

DETERMINE CORE
VALUES

List your core values. Core values are the internal guidance system of a ministry.

The core values of your church or ministry represent what you believe in and stand for, the way you conduct yourselves, your public worship and/or services and how you manage your affairs and make decisions. Core values describe the most important values you embrace. List what you believe are the essential core values of your unique ministry. Whatever values you list must be ones by which you are willing to live. Most core values lists will contain five to 10 key statements of belief.

CONDUCT
ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT

Do an environmental assessment.

An environmental assessment is an overview of changes in the community you serve that may affect your ministry. It identifies trends that may reshape the needs of those you serve, the manner in which you serve or even the ways in which the ministry is financially supported. For example, if you believe God wants to grow your church, then you may want to find answers to the following questions:

- Are people moving into your area or out of it?
- How many un-churched people are in your service target area?
- Is the age group of people who are attracted to your ministry changing?
- Do those you want to reach a different format for worship?
- Who are the givers now, and who will the givers be in two or three years?
- Do you see the need for your ministry increasing or decreasing?

PRE-WORK
COMPLETE

Thus concludes the pre-work necessary to begin the actual planning process. Next is an outline of a typical strategic planning session.

PLANNING
BEGINS

CREATING THE PLAN

CHOOSE KEY
RESULT AREAS

Choose your key result areas.

A key result area is basically a focus of the ministry. For example, a church may choose key focus areas by population, such as children's ministry, senior adults, and singles. Alternately, key focus areas might be arranged by department, such as worship, education, and outreach. A combination of departmental and target population focus areas is also viable. For best planning results, choose no more than five to seven key focus areas initially.

ACTION OUTLINE
CONTINUED

PERFORM SWOT
ANALYSIS

Perform a SWOT analysis of each key result area.

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. A SWOT analysis of each strategic area assists you in taking advantage of your strengths and the existing opportunities while minimizing the impact of your weaknesses and threats. List at least three items in each of the four areas of analysis. Remember, recognition of weakness is a healthy and necessary step to positive change.

HOLD
BRAINSTORMING
SESSION

Brainstorm future ideas.

All the previous steps in the planning process have been preparatory to this step. The Vision, Mission Statement, Core Values, Environmental Assessment and SWOT analysis established by the ministry will lend structure to the brainstorming session. No idea at this stage is “too crazy”. Afterwards, direct discussion toward the merits of the results, allowing individuals to clarify their input.

HONE IDEAS INTO
GOALS

Prioritize ideas into goals.

To achieve a manageable group of workable ideas, the group must develop and prioritize specific goals. Following discussion of the merits of the ideas, the participants should individually select their top five or six priorities for each strategic area. The facilitator then collates the results and produces a final listing of the top three to five goals for each strategic area.

ATTACH ACTION
ITEMS TO GOALS

Develop action plans for each goal.

You must now create an action plan for each goal created that assigns responsibilities and time frames for completion. An action plan answers the following four questions:

1) Specifically what do we want to accomplish? 2) How will we do it? 3) By when will we complete it? 4) Who has final responsibility for it?

For example, if a goal for adult ministries is “to assimilate more married couples into the church,” an action plan may be as follows:

Objective 1: Create a Family Life Class:

Plan: Name of class to be selected by February 1 by Senior Leadership.

Plan: Class leader(s) chosen by March 1 by Department head.

ACTION OUTLINE
CONTINUED

SUBMIT PLAN
FOR REVIEW

PUT PLAN IN
MOTION

RESOURCES:
Al Ells, M.C. with
Leaders that Last
Ministries

Plan: Adult Ministries Department head and class leaders to formulate vision and mission statement for class along with course content, description and procedures by April 1 for review by Senior Minister and Senior Leadership Council.

Plan: Class to start second Sunday in April.

Plan what to do with your plans.

After you develop your plan, be sure to forward it to whoever must to review it for final approval. Once the plan is approved, distribute it to all planning participants and any individuals who may need to know its contents. Also, establish review dates. The plan should be reviewed in its entirety on an annual basis, and department heads and administrative personnel should frequently refer to it to evaluate progress and make changes as needed.

Leaders that Last can help.

Navigating a strategic planning process can be overwhelming, especially if it is unfamiliar territory for you as a leader. It may benefit your planning team to hire a consultant to facilitate your strategic planning process. Leaders that Last Ministries has specialized in this type of work for many years. If you would like more information about strategic planning programs with Leaders that Last Ministries, please contact us at info@leadersthatlast.org.