



In Your Eyes:

Creating Visionary Teams for Visionary Leaders

By Al Ells, M.C.

The church today is a world of high expectations and rapid change. For a ministry to function in this world, its leader must be committed to an inspired and unique vision of God's will for that ministry.

Inspired vision shakes up the status quo, and instills the drive to transcend the ordinary and achieve significance. Church observers say the lack of visionary leadership is the church's most crippling flaw. Researcher George Barna found that only one in seven pastors would rate their leadership skills at a high level. That means that the majority of our churches today are being led by people with a diminished sense of confidence and purpose.

While much attention has been given to the role of the pastor as a visionary leader, we need to remind ourselves—as Jethro did his son-in-law Moses—that one person alone is not meant to carry this load. In a 2001 *Church of Champions Update*, Dave Travis explained that too many visionary leaders operate in isolation. These leaders can easily burn out or fail without an equally envisioned support system. A synergistic leadership team is essential to a visionary leader's success.

Recently, church boards have emerged as a hot button issue at leadership summits. An envisioned, equipped and effective board should be the first ingredient of a visionary system of leadership. Most boards of directors are formed to handle legal and financial responsibilities, not setting a vision. However, when a board does not take ownership of vision, it either tends to blindly give the stamp of approval, or it falls into micromanagement of church operations. Either trait creates difficulties for the senior minister who is trying to carry out his God-given vision. In the end, a passive board will not shoulder the burden, while a controlling board will simply stifle it.

Consider the following tips on how to develop an effective, visionary board of directors:

The senior minister should not serve as chairman of the board.

The senior minister who is board chairman but also a board member will experience a conflict of roles and interests. The chairman's role is to assure that the board functions properly. The senior minister makes sure the staff and congregation are healthy. The senior minister who tries to do both overburdens himself while weakening accountability. One Nevada pastor said that by appointing a chairman of the board, he felt like he was giving the church back to the people, fostering a sense of ownership for the overall vision.

The chairman of the board should know his role.

My good friend Daryl has had the opportunity to serve on many local and national boards of directors, and has a good grasp on the role of chairman. Daryl says, "The chairman should understand that he has the responsibility to invest in each board member, but also to partner with the senior minister to ensure that all members own

the vision and know their role in its fulfillment.” A knowledgeable and dedicated board chairman is a great ministry asset.

Do a board profile as soon as possible.

A board profile is a way to document and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of board members. Profiling the board helps steer the recruitment and selection of new board members. For example, at my church, a board profile is done whenever vacancies exist. The profile lists board members by age, gender, ethnicity, governance experience and area of expertise as well as marital and disability status. The profile gives a good picture of current board membership and assists in proactive recruitment of members who can bring diversity and needed expertise to the board composition.

Clearly outline job descriptions.

In the secular world, job descriptions for every position are a standard practice. They are helpful tools that define the parameters of an employee’s responsibilities. Although the church is increasingly using job descriptions for paid staff, few ministries draft them for their board members. Doing so helps each board member to know the responsibilities and boundaries of his or her roles. A written job description also provides a good discussion tool that can lead to better cohesion among board members.

Each board member should know the Basic Responsibilities of a Board of Directors.

In Hebrew, the verb “to know” has many meanings, one of which is to have mastery of a skill. To be truly effective, board members need to intimately and skillfully master the basic responsibilities that God calls them to fulfill. These commonly accepted responsibilities are the measuring stick for successful board governance. They help board members focus on their governance role instead of messing getting distracted by things like ministry operations or staff leadership. I helped my church board and other boards of directors conduct annual board evaluations using these basic responsibilities. Deficient areas are turned into goals for improvement for the year.

Have a succession plan for the role of the chairman.

Visionary boards operate with foresight and knowledge, therefore grooming the chairman’s successors is of utmost importance. Developing an effective chairman requires time and experience to properly equip him to manage the board. Many effective ministries choose a vice chairman that shadows the current chairman for a year, learning the role before taking it over. An orderly succession plan eliminates repeated mistakes and unnecessary tensions while providing stability and continuity.

Establish a process for board mentorship.

Just as members are groomed or mentored for board leadership positions, new board members should be mentored in their role. Every new board member brings with him the mindset, expectations and culture of his previous church or possible leadership position. This can lead to unrealistic or flawed expectations and skill gaps. The best way to enhance their unique experiences while maintaining stability is to have older board members mentor new ones. A mentoring schedule with topics can be a helpful tool.

Establish an appeal process to address conflicts between the senior minister and the board.

My pastor friend Mark told me, “It is risky to give so much power to a lay board of directors who really do not know what ministry is all about. What happens if they overstep their bounds and prevent me from leading the church?” Visionary, dedicated leaders are often fearful of sharing power with laity. Advancing the Kingdom requires risk and change. If the senior minister is unwilling to risk creating a visionary leadership board, he will eventually stifle growth and limit his Kingdom effectiveness. A ratified method of conflict resolution that may include mediation by other local ministry leaders provides a substantial safeguard that balances out the risk.

Leaders That Last: Your Church Board Resource

If you would like more information about the Basic Responsibilities of a Board of Directors, or would like guidance in creating a mentoring schedule for your board, visit www.leadersthatlast.org or email us at info@leadersthatlast.org.