

Strategic Future: God Wants to Do a New Thing!

by Tony Morgan

We highly recommend the PDC-friendly book, [Simply Strategic Stuff: Help for Leaders Drowning in the Details of Running a Church](#), by Tony Morgan and Tim Stevens (Group Publishing, 2003).

As a leader, do you often find yourself in reaction mode? Are you just responding to people, problems, and your ministry environment, or are you trying to develop a strategy that will help your church move in a new direction so that your congregation will have a growing impact on people's lives?

God promised us in Isaiah that he has a new path planned for our lives and our ministry: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." (Isaiah 43:18-19)

The challenge of sharing Christ with this postmodern world seems overwhelming at times. The church must pursue a "new thing," by constantly analyzing whether or not yesterday's **methods** still bear fruit. There is a way that God will reveal, but we must actively pursue Jesus and his new direction for our ministry.

Fortunately, we serve a God who loves new things. There is no one who's more creative; no one who has greater wisdom. Our God has promised a plan and a vision for our next steps - a strategy for our future.

David shared this understanding when he explained: "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:8-11)

So what path does God have in mind for your ministry? Here's one model to help you identify the next steps for your church:

Step One: Identify Your Purpose

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Proverbs 19:21)

This is the step that helps you answer the question, "Why do we exist?" Answering this critical first question will help you define the mission of your ministry. Though you may identify several biblical purposes God has

given your church, ultimately the mission of your ministry must be clearly and briefly summarized **so everyone knows why you do what you do.**

At [Granger Community Church](#), our mission is simply stated, "Helping people take their next step toward Christ ... together." Those next steps are clearly defined by helping people connect with the church, grow toward spiritual maturity, serve in ministry, share their faith, and surrender their lives to Christ (*The five biblical purposes as expressed by Rick Warren in **The Purpose-Driven Church and The Purpose-Driven Life***).

At Granger, we expect that these steps will be taken in community. That's why we don't accept lone rangers in our church. It happens that way because our mission communicates that steps in our spiritual journeys should take place "together" with others.

Step Two: Protect Your Principles

"A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps." (Proverbs 14:15)

What do you believe? These principles are the unchanging values and statements of faith on which your ministry will not waver. Plans, programs, and people will change, **BUT there are biblical principles or values that define who you are, and in these areas, you cannot allow compromise.**

Scott Bedbury, former marketing executive for Nike and Starbucks, explained Nike's core values in an article for [FastCompany.com](#). He identified them as follows:

Authenticity - Nike is authentic in everything it does.

Athletic - Nike appeals to serious athletes.

Performance - Nike's products must meet the highest specs.

It was out of these core values that a marketing campaign encouraging people to "Just Do It" was launched and the Nike brand was revived.

Once you've identified your core values, everything you do must be aligned with them. There must be a connection between what you believe and what you are doing.

Concerned that a staff member or volunteer isn't on the same page as the rest of the team? Alignment with the core values is the first place to look. Most often, this is where personnel problems begin. Use your core values to insure everyone is pulling in the same direction.

Step Three: Paint Your Picture

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18, KJV)

Without a planned destination, no one knows where to go. In churches, that leads to people doing ministry without a purpose. Programs drive these churches because no one has determined where the church is going. A vision statement paints a picture of the ideal future of your ministry and focuses prayer, energy, and resources.

Part of our vision at Granger is that we will be a church where 10,000 people gather by 2010. What does that do for our ministry?

First of all, it sets expectations. When people connect with us, they know that our church intends to grow. That's a completely different spin on church for some people. Because of this, our ministry culture is very dynamic. People don't challenge change; they expect it.

Second, this vision for the future helps us make decisions today that are intentionally designed to have a specific outcome. We know that in order for our church to have 10,000 gathering, we need to continue to seek God for answers and direction related to team development and campus development. We know that, in those decisions, we'll have to stay ahead of growth in order to increase our capacity to minister to that many people.

Additionally, this picture or vision of the future helps us define priorities. There are many valid and valuable ministries that our church could initiate. Not all of them will help us take steps toward fulfilling the vision to which we believe God has called our church. With limited resources and energy, vision statements help us maintain a laser focus on the "main things" God has called us to accomplish.

Step Four: Establish Your Process

"When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order." (Proverbs 28:2)

When you establish the process for how your ministry operates, you're defining how you're structured and what systems you have in place to make decisions and minister to people. You need to define how you will be organized.

And you need to keep in mind that how you are organized will change periodically over time. **We've found at Granger that our organizational structure changes every 18 to 24 months.** Growing churches require different types of organizational structures. The same structure that allows a church to grow from 100 to 300 will not allow a church to grow from 1,000 to 3,000.

As an example, right now, we only have one committee. It's our church board to whom the Senior and Executive Pastor report. Beyond that, all other lay people are plugged into a ministry role. Besides multiplying the people we have involved in ministry, limiting the number of committees was also necessary to remove barriers in decision-making.

A church our size can't afford to wait for purchasing decisions from the finance committee, staffing decisions from the personnel committee, or ministry decisions from the education committee. We have systems in place to process these decisions with appropriate accountability established to monitor results. **If your church is not growing, a critical question to ask is whether or not the structure is prohibiting growth.**

Beyond staffing and committee structures and systems, another critical area that needs to be developed is the process for people to connect with your ministry. If someone attends your weekend worship services, how do they get plugged into a small group? How do they learn about ministry opportunities and find the one that best matches how God has wired them up?

If they accept Christ, how do they find out more about their new faith journey? These are all systems issues. When your church is smaller, it's not as critical for these systems to be clearly defined. As your church grows, though, these systems are essential.

Let me provide a word of warning here. It's important for you to maintain an appropriate balance of creativity (chaos) and improving efficiency (order). If you begin to lean heavily on creativity where everything is constantly changing and nobody knows what's coming next, people will become worn out and may withdraw from your ministry.

On the other hand, if you only focus on efficiency, you'll become good at what you do currently, but you'll never change. Your ministry will eventually become irrelevant to the culture. So, I'd encourage you to bring order to the chaos, and then create more chaos.

Step Five: Develop Your Plan

*"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."
(Proverbs 21:5, NLT)*

Now the foundation has been prepared. It's time to determine what you will do today. What's next on the agenda? Your plan defines your action steps.

The challenge is to help your ministry move beyond the plans that revolve around the daily grind of "doing church." If you haven't noticed, people like routine. And if you don't watch it, your ministry will fall into a routine where

incremental changes and improvements occur, but for the most part, life goes on today just like it did yesterday.

Instead your action plans need to include hot projects. It's the big stuff - the faith-building efforts that only God can pull off. In any given twelve-month period, there may only be two or three of these in process. It may be pulling off a community outreach event, launching a new weekend service, or completing the next phase of your facility. These are the projects that everyone isn't necessarily heavily involved in, but everyone knows about them and is praying for God to provide resources, wisdom, and success.

Step Six: Measure Your Pulse

"The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out." (Proverbs 18:15)

So, how are you doing? Do you really know? Here's another place for systems. **You need to create methods for measuring the impact of your ministry.** This goes beyond tracking dollars and attendance - though these are important measurements of the spiritual steps your people are taking.

Measures help an organization determine what has happened. Based on that determination, leaders can decide to press on with the current ministry plan if the results are positive. If not, decisions and actions can be initiated to help correct and redirect future results.

This evaluation process is important for several reasons.

Good measures:

- Allow you to determine whether or not the ministry is aligned with your mission, vision, and values.
- Focus people's attention to the priorities.
- Fuel growth - because numbers communicate momentum and momentum generates numbers.
- Encourage people to focus on results rather than effort. Are the outcomes of your ministry programming consistent with their perceived value?
- Facilitate teamwork. When there's a scoreboard to watch, there's an opportunity for the team to work together to achieve success.
- Reduce the number of surprises a ministry will face. Good measurements will help you not only analyze the present condition, but you'll also be able to forecast the future health of your church.

In addition to attendance and offerings, you need to develop measurements that will help you track whether or not you're accomplishing the mission and vision of your ministry.

Once the measurements are in place, learn how to analyze them so you move from snap shots to comparisons to trends. It's when you begin to see the trends that are taking place in your ministry and in your community that you'll be in a better position to make good decisions.

These six biblical steps for implementing a new strategic direction for your church do not form a magic formula for ministry success; however, they certainly will help you more easily identify God's plan for you and your congregation.

Pray for God to reveal his will and direction for your ministry, then take the appropriate next steps to identify what God has called you to accomplish in your communities.

We serve a great God who's ready for us to fulfill a Great Commission. What are you going to do today to reach more people for Jesus? If you're not sure, go to "step one." Perhaps this diagram will help.

Development Steps	Defines Your	Answers	Changes	Proverbs Proof
Purpose	Mission	Why do you exist?	Never	<i>"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." 19:21 (NIV)</i>
Principles	Values	What do you believe?	Never	<i>"A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps." 14:15 (NIV)</i>
Picture	Vision	Where are you going?	Periodically	<i>"Where there is no vision, the people perish." 29:18 (KJV)</i>
Process	Structure & Systems	How are you organized?	Periodically	<i>"When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order." 28:2 (NIV)</i>
Plan	Actions & Objectives	What will you do today?	Regularly	<i>"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty." 21:5 (NLT)</i>
Pulse	Success	How are you doing?	Regularly	<i>"The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out." 18:15 (NIV)</i>