

# Strategic Planning Made Easy

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**P**retend for a moment that you are a fly on the wall at your church's most recent leadership meeting. As you buzz around, you notice sleepy, zombie-like stares frozen on most of the leaders' faces. You wonder why, so you make a 180-degree turn, dive bomb the lectern, and land on the pastor's coffee cup just out of his sight. You hear him say, "We're glad you've joined us in our Leadership Community meeting this morning. You leaders make the difference at our church. Today we will discuss strategic planning, the key to our future."

"As you open your 10-page-multi-colored-tabbed-binder, please follow along as I review our agenda. First, I will discuss the difference between our mission statement and our vision statement. Next I will outline our values and differentiate between aspiring ones and actual ones. Then I will explain our strategic framework—not to be confused with our strategic action plan. I will then outline why we must not prioritize more than three critical success factors. I will also cover the importance



of BHAGS, which are not haggard-looking bags but rather our big goals for the year.

"Once everyone gets a handle on those, we'll evaluate our position descriptions, including our universal responsibilities, sub-results and leadership distribution matrix. We'll finish in less than two hours."

As you buzz off toward the refreshment table to sample a cheese danish, you now understand the zombie stares.

## The Reality

I must confess that such a fly-on-the-wall description would characterize some of my past leadership meetings. In

my zeal to communicate sound church planning, I often overloaded my leaders with complicated diagrams, flow charts, and leadership jargon. As a result, many leaders who were not versed in the latest planning terminology gave me those zombie gazes.

After many mistakes I've learned that when I simplify strategic planning, more people experience its powerful impact on church health. Now excitement, interest and renewed passion replace those zombie stares.

Whether you're new to strategic planning or just need a simple way to share it with your church, consider this uncomplicated visual. It makes strategic

planning easy to understand and remember. After I took five minutes to show it to one of our administrative assistants, she drew it from memory.

## The Visual

The strategy for effectiveness is shown through a triangle reflecting three questions, three answers, and three metaphors. When implemented well, this triangle strategy can energize a church's leadership team.

### Question 1: What?

Management expert Peter Drucker asked the key question, "What business are we in and how's business?" This key question is now applied to church planning. Leaders must stay clear on the church's business. They must clarify the church's aim, crystallize its purpose, and focus its efforts.

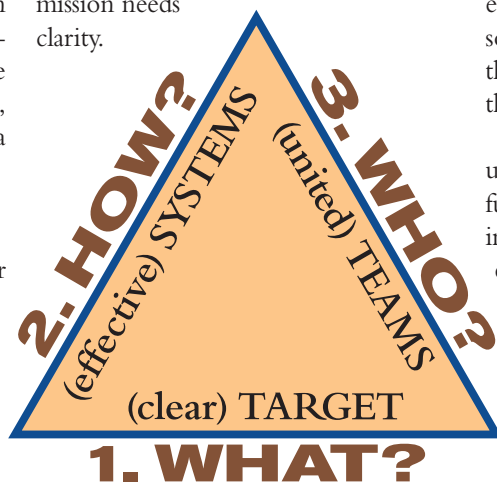
Clarity helps create intentional ministries rather than reactive ones. Without this clarity, leaders may celebrate any activity or program whether or not it fulfills the church's mission.

### Answer 1: Target

The church's target determines where a church should invest its energies. Sam Walton, Wal-Mart's™ founder, kept his company's target clear by regularly communicating that employees must take care of the box (the store and its contents). Willow Creek Community Church's target is "to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ." Saddleback Community Church in California clearly states its target: "to stay purpose-driven." A church's target includes not only its mission statement but also its values and goals.

Consider using the "elevator test." Take church leaders to a building with

an elevator. As the elevator closes, ask each leader to describe the church's mission before you reach the top floor. They will have to think quickly and their responses will show if they know your church's true mission or if the mission needs clarity.



### Question 2: How?

This question reveals how a church will organize its efforts to hit its target. Sometimes a leader can assume that a church's programs provide the answer to this question. Programs do matter, but leaders should think on a more basic level. The "how" question focuses a leader on intentional, uniform processes that help the church fulfill its mission.

### Answer 2: Systems

Peter Senge, one of the country's top leadership minds, calls systems "the fifth discipline" in his book by the same title. He describes systems thinking as an art that enables leaders to see how an organization's parts fit together and how they affect each other.

We live in a world of systems: the solar system, the highway system, the cellular phone system, and many others. The skeletal system, muscular system,

circulatory system, and the respiratory system function well only when they cooperate with each other.

Ministry systems reduce chaos and simplify ministry by creating clear, intentional steps and processes within each ministry. They produce long-term solutions to ministry challenges rather than temporary fixes. They help create the future and diminish reaction to it.

Systems-thinking helps leaders understand how individual ministries function together. Systems in a church include assimilation, spiritual formation, evangelism and leadership training.

An effective system clarifies what you want to do, why you want to do it, how it should be done, when it should be done, who will do it, and how you will measure its success. Effective systems help deliver quality ministry to those in your church.

### Question 3: Who?

This question focuses on the people who carry out your church's ministry and create ownership. However, when a church expects the pastor and staff to do the ministry, it functions unbiblically (Eph. 4:11-16). For pastors who feel perpetually exhausted from workload, the right answer to this question will offer much relief.

### Answer 3: Teams

The Bible describes the church as a community instead of a collection of individuals. When a leader equips and empowers the church to serve in teams, powerful ministry results.

Team ministry creates a manageable span of care, relieves overworked staff, builds relationships through shared ownership, and naturally reproduces itself.

When I lived in Georgia, our yard



backed up to a spillway from a small pond. Natural ferns often grew on the spillway's shady side. Each fern frond held numerous identical tiny fern leaves that repeated the larger frond's pattern. This replicating pattern pictures how a team-based church reproduces more teams. The wise leader builds a mind-set of duplication into every ministry team in his church.

### Putting It All Together

1. Keep your target clear.
2. Stay effective with your systems.
3. Remain united on your teams.

When a leader implements strategic planning, he or she will need to unpack each section in greater detail, but the diagram provides a starting point. It's not enough to know what to do. A church will become effective only when it implements and frequently reviews its progress.

You'll find how easy it is to plan strategically, even when a fly munches on your Danish. ■

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## Strategic Planning Resources

### Books:

1. *Mapping Your Church Strategy* by Mark Marshall
2. *Managing Sideways* by Price Pritchett (a short handbook that clearly summarizes how to create a system)
3. *The Fifth Discipline, the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* by Peter Senge
4. *The Power of Alignment: How Great Companies Stay Centered and Accomplish Extraordinary Things* by George Labovitz and Victor Rosansky
5. *Master Planning: The Complete Guide to Strategic Planning* by Bob Biehl
6. *Doing Church as a Team* by Wayne Cordeiro
7. *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

### Organizations that assist churches in strategic planning:

1. **Masterplanning Group**, Box 952499, Lake Mary, FL 32795, 1.800.443.1976, [www.masterplanning.com](http://www.masterplanning.com) (provides consulting, seminars and resources)
2. **Ministry Advantage**, P.O. Box 851407, Mesquite, TX 75185, 1.800.314.9883, [www.ministryadvantage.org](http://www.ministryadvantage.org) (provides an excellent 18-month mentoring programming that includes five three-day workshops at Willow Creek Church, materials and weekly coaching)

