

## DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR YOUR CHURCH: WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO

Stephen A. Macchia

Published in BuildingChurchLeaders.com (Christianity Today, Inc.), July 2004

### WHAT TO DO

Some church leaders find planning a formidable exercise. In reality, the planning process is simple—*conceptually*. It can be described as answering seven key questions:

1. **Spiritual Needs Assessment:** What are the greatest spiritual needs of our church and community?
2. **Strengths and Weaknesses:** What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of our church?
3. **Opportunities and Threats or Barriers:** What are the most significant ministry opportunities for and potential threats (or barriers) to our church, given the answers to the first two questions?
4. **Ministry Options:** What appear to be the most viable options for strengthening the ministry of our church?
5. **Ministry Platform:** What is the primary ministry platform on which our specific ministries should be built? Included in the ministry platform are our statement of faith, vision statement, mission statement, philosophy of ministry, and listing of ministries.
6. **Ministry Goals:** What goals is the Holy Spirit leading us to strive for to enhance our church's ministry over the next year? The next two to three years?

*Action Steps:* What action steps must we accomplish to achieve these goals?

Getting your team to agree on the answers to these questions (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) may or may not be simple, depending on the circumstances and the relationships of leaders in your church.

### WHAT NOT TO DO

In New England, where I live, potholes are in abundance on most side roads. Some can be avoided, while others come upon you so quickly they are difficult to miss. On the avenue called planning, it's important to know the potholes to avoid:

1. **Making Planning Too Complex:** There are usually two or three key issues that will be discovered, and, if acted on, will lead to enhanced health and vitality. One church in Boston narrowed their planning to: (1) revising the organization chart, (2) enhancing community life, and (3) streamlining priorities. When these three issues were named, each ministry team could set goals for day-to-day ministry, based on them.
2. **Not Reaching Conclusions and Making an Action Plan:** Tie up loose ends along the way, and outline appropriate action steps.
3. **Not Keeping the Action Plan Simple:** One church I worked with had such a long document, with dozens of goals and action steps, that it felt overwhelming and didn't win approval. The objective is to create a plan that every member can articulate without having to refer to any documentation.
4. **Not Revisiting the Plan:** Your plan should be adjustable along the way, revised and renewed according to the needs and resources available to you. Keep your planning documents alive. Don't shelve them, file them, or formalize them in pretty documents. At Leadership Transformations ([www.LeadershipTransformations.org](http://www.LeadershipTransformations.org)), we hold our plans loosely, in a "white paper" format, with lots of room for give and take each step of the way.
5. **Taking Too Long:** Don't let your planning team tire and begin to complain about the value of doing this. Keep the group moving forward toward conclusion and celebration.
6. **Trusting Your Instincts apart from Prayer:** As a team, lean fully in God's direction to hear his voice, feel his heart, understand his will, and trust his empowering presence to lead you. Strategic planning in a local church is a process that God through his Holy Spirit must direct. Become a people of prayer as you trust him for his design for your church!