

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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The Planning Cycle

When I first started working with churches as a consultant, it was common for me to assist churches in developing a five to ten year plan. In the fast changing world in which we minister today, long-range is most likely to be viewed as just two to three years.

Yet, even though the planning cycle may not be as far sighted for most churches as it once was, it is still important that churches plan for the future.

The typical planning cycle follows a ten step process.

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—Gary L. McIntosh

Step One: Establish a Mission

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Step Two: Establish a Vision

After the mission is detailed, it then falls to the leaders to craft a compelling statement of how big an impact God wants their church to make in the world. Where will the church focus its efforts and how wide and deep of an impact does the church wish to make on the community? Nation? World?

Step Three: Establish Core Values

Listing the essential morals, principles, or ideals that will support the overall ministry is the core values. Values are what a church holds on to no matter what happens.

Step Four: Establish Strategy

Church leaders evaluate the church's ministry context, resources, obstacles, demographics, and needs

both internally and externally. Out of such evaluation comes the ministry design (strategy) to fulfill the overarching vision.

Step Five: Establish Objectives

Objectives are the non-measurable statements of what a church will actually do. For example, “provide inspiring worship” or “excellent childcare” are two objective statements.

Step Six: Establish Goals

Goals are measurable, attainable, trackable statements of what is to be accomplished. For example, “train six new greeters by November 1st” or “purchase a new projector by May 15th” are examples of goals. Each can be measured and tracked to see whether or not they are actually done. All objectives must have several goals.

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Delegate action plans to a person, not a team.

Goals are measurable, attainable, trackable statements.

Step Seven: Establish Action Plans

These are detailed statements of when something will be accomplished and by whom it will be accomplished. Action plans always have target dates for completion and the names of specific people who will do the work. Action plans must never be delegated to a committee, as there is no individual to hold accountable.

Step Eight: Align Resources

Plans need resources for accomplishment. Aligning people, money, prayer, managerial, and facility resources to support each and every goal ensures the likelihood it will be accomplished. Too few resources, and the potential for failure increases.

Step Nine: Implement Plans

Of the ten steps, this is the most difficult one. Church leaders find the planning process to be thrilling, while actually doing the plan is a different story. My experience assisting churches to implement plans has convinced me of the following: The first year of planning and getting started on its implementation is the easiest. The second year of working through the difficulties and challenges brought on by the plan is the most difficult. The third year is where the fruit is harvested. The bottom line is a plan must be worked for at least three years if a church wants to see results.

Step Ten: Adjust Plans.

The best made plans encounter difficulties. Something might be overlooked, unexpected challenges may arise, crises occur, leaders relocate out-of-town, the list could go on and on. All this means a long-range plan must be monitored, audited, and adjusted each step of the way.

After two to three years, the planning cycle begins anew.

Recycle the Planning Cycle

One way to help keep a church focused on its mission is to hold a planning retreat every two or three years. By having a regular time when church leaders gather to rethink the mission, vision, values, strategy, objectives, goals, and action plans, these items are renewed as priorities for the church.

One of the challenges in any church is remaining focused on the right things. One leader said, "People think focus means saying 'yes' to the thing you've got to focus on. But it means saying 'no' to the hundred other good ideas that there are." In every church there are so many good things that could be done. It may be that some churches have too many visions. Working through the planning cycle every two or three years keeps a church focused on what it should be doing and what it should not be doing.

What has been your church's planning procedures and practices?

Where has your church found success and/or trouble in the planning process?

How often does your church review its plan?



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