

How to Think and Act Strategically

By Aubrey Malphurs

(Number 12, March 28, 2004) For a number of years, The Malphurs Group has worked with congregations, helping them to navigate the various growth challenges they face in ministry. Most will fall into one of three situations – they are either growing, plateaued, or declining in numbers. What do we do in these situations? The following will give you some ideas on how you might approach these situations as you face them in your own ministries. I've divided what we do into three phases as summarized by three Ps: Preparation, process, and practice.

Preparation: Ready!

The preparation phase helps churches to understand how they're doing and how to prepare for where they're going. We have a saying at the Malphurs Group, "Preparation must always precede process." This phase consists of five steps.

Step #1 is a congregational analysis. This analysis is found in chapter 3 of my book *Advanced Strategic Planning* (Baker Book House). The analysis helps a congregation discover how its doing in terms of its strengths and weaknesses both internally and externally.

Step #2 is team formation. When we work with a church, we insist that they bring together a Strategic Leadership Team that consists of the key leaders of the church – whom I refer to as the E.F. Hutton people. We do most of our work through this team as they know the church and have the influence with the congregation to bring about change and the implementation of the plan.

Step #3 is congregational communication. Another saying at The Malphurs Group is, "If they don't trust you, you can't lead them!" We help the Strategic Leadership Team to

communicate what they're doing to the congregation because it brings the element of trust to the process. They communicate through announcements, town hall meetings, etc.

Step #4 is theological innovation. We believe that a number of leaders are slow to change because they don't know what should and shouldn't change. Consequently, we present a theology of change that covers the three Fs: form, function, and freedom. Briefly, the functions such as evangelism, etc. never change, but the forms they take must change if they're to remain relevant.

Step #5 is spiritual formation. The final step is to cover certain spiritual issues that may be holding the congregation back. These address such issues as unconfessed sin, broken relationships, gossip, negativity, etc.

Process: Aim!

The process phase helps the church determine who it is, where it's going and how to get there. It forces the church to think for itself rather than adopting some other successful church's ministry approach that may not work for them. This helps the church discover its identity by surfacing its DNA. It consists of four steps.

Step #1 is to discover the church's core values. A church's values explain why it does what it does and doesn't do other things that it should. We look for its actual values, not those that are aspirational. The idea is to come up with a values statement.

Step #2 is to develop a mission statement. The mission explains where the church is going and what it's supposed to be doing. The mission for the church will always be the Great Commission. We help the church develop a short, memorable statement that challenges the congregation to action.

Step #3 is to develop a vision statement. The vision statement is all about what could be. It paints a picture of what the mission statement will look like as God begins to work it out through the church in its ministry community.

Step #4 is to design a strategy to accomplish the mission-vision of the church. It consists of five key elements. The first is to discover the church's community and who it will reach in that community. The second is to develop a disciple making process. The third is to address the personnel who'll make disciples (board, staff, and lay persons). The fourth is to evaluate the church's location and facilities. Are they adequate to reach people in the community? The last is finances. How is the church doing financially? Does it know what good giving is and how to raise finances?

Practice: Fire!

The last phase is practice. It helps the church take action and adjust its aim to better reach its target. It consists of two steps.

Step #1 is implementation. This is a process that helps the church actually do what it plans to do. Without it, the vision-strategy remains only so many words on a piece of paper. It includes formulating implementation goals, determining priorities, assigning persons to implement certain goals, etc.

Step #2 is evaluation. In this step the church regularly evaluates what it's doing not only to improve its ministry, but to keep the church in a progressive change mode.

There you have it. You'll find much of this material in my book *Advanced Strategic Planning* (Baker Books) that's written to help you through the process. However, a number of churches have contracted with the Malphurs Group to help them through the process. Should you need such help contact us. It will make a huge difference in your ministry and outreach.

Please note that my book *Being Leaders* is out and available from Baker Books or your local bookstore, Amazon, etc. I wrote it to help you assess and develop your leadership abilities. The second volume in this leadership series is *Building Leaders* and it will be

out some time in April. Will Mancini and I co-authored this book to help you develop yourself and others as leaders.

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