

Leading the Church in the 21st Century

Part Eight

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(*Number 9, March 19, 2003*) What's your definition of a leader? In the *Leadership Connection*, I've been working through my definition of a Christian leader that will make up a new book entitled *Being Leaders* (Baker Book House). In this issue of the *Leadership Connection*, I want to explore the last element of my definition – the leader's direction. A Christian leader is a servant with the credibility and capability to influence followers in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction.

Leaders in today's churches must be directional. The reason is that they are tasked with keeping the church moving in the right direction – its God-given direction, the Great Commission. They know that people will never do ministry that matters until they know what matters. And it's up to the directional leader to help them discover what really matters.

Directional leaders know how to ask questions – the right questions. They take every opportunity to ask their people what are we supposed to be doing? What needs to be done? This is the direction question. It gets at what God wants them to do and where he wants them to go. Then they ask what can we do to be a part of this – to make it happen? What can we do to make a difference for the kingdom?

Thus, Christian leaders aren't aimless wanderers – they have about them a sense of direction. They are going somewhere. Hence, we call them directional leaders. However, they aren't going there alone. They're taking people along with them – they're journeying together, moving in the same direction. These are followers that understand their personal direction and work hard at owning and accomplishing the church's direction in obedience to Christ's command.

Make no mistake about it, people in ministry need and want clear direction, and wise followers want to know the organization's mission before signing on. They ask does the ministry's direction align with God's direction for my life? If the answer is "no" or "I don't know," they move on.

According to my definition, a Christian leader influences people-followers – to pursue their God-given direction. That direction consists of two core ingredients: Ministry mission and vision. They comprise what needs to be done, and they combine to give the ministry its direction.

Ministry mission is twofold and consists of both an individual and a corporate component. The personal component is the follower's personal ministry mission and the corporate component is the church's ministry mission. Each follower is responsible for both.

A personal mission is a statement of what God wants Christians to do with their lives. It accomplishes several things. First, it aids your people in discovering their life's ministry niche. It helps them to answer the functional question what does God want me to do with my life to best serve him? Second, it brings a sense of meaning and significance to their lives. It answers a second question: How can I, like David, serve God's purpose in this my generation (Acts 13:36)? Third, it brings focus to their lives. Fourth, it helps people to evaluate their lives. Their ministry mission provides them with a criterion against which they can measure their lives. The test is are they accomplishing their God-given personal ministry mission?

Ultimately, every believer has two ministry mission statements. His personal mission statement and the church's. The latter is a broad, brief biblical statement of what all your people as a group are supposed to accomplish for Christ and His kingdom. Your people will never do ministry that really matters until you and the leadership define what matters. What matters isn't your charisma. What really matters is the church's mission.

Therefore, the job of the leadership is to help the congregation define and know their mission.

Like the ministry mission, the follower's ministry vision consists of a personal ministry vision and the church's ministry vision. A personal vision is a clear, challenging picture of the future of one's life and personal ministry as it can and must be. While a personal mission helps your people know where they're going, a personal vision helps them see where they're going. It paints a picture of what the future will look like. As someone (probably Adam) once said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." A vision creates personal energy. Good visions are exciting and they energize people. They tap into passion and kindle individual fires in people's hearts.

A personal vision also contributes meaning to people's lives. They begin to see where they as individuals fit into the divine scheme of things. They discover that they're an important part of a bigger plan that God is working to accomplish his will in this world. Finally, it promotes personal ministry. As people discover their God-given and developed capabilities in your church, they along with a personal vision begin to realize the importance of ministry in the local church and beyond. And as they step out and attempt ministry, God blesses them and uses them as his kingdom builders.

However, every one in your church has two vision statements – his personal vision statement and the church's vision statement. It's vital that he or she sees and pursues both. This honors the Christian's own unique design, and God's vision for his life. The other honors his fellow believers at the local church level. A congregational ministry vision is a clear, challenging picture of the future of the church as it can and must be.

This definition consists of six key ingredients. First, a vision is clear because people can't act on information that they don't have. Second, a vision is challenging. Your people need a challenge – something to penetrate the deep resources of their minds and hearts. Third, a vision paints the picture. It's a painting that helps them see what their direction looks like before they arrive. Fourth, a vision is the future of the ministry. While

we can't predict the future, the vision will help us create our ministry's future. Fifth, a vision spells out what "could be." A good vision drips with potential. Finally, a vision is all about what must be. This introduces the passion element. A good vision fires up one's soul. It creates a critical sense of urgency. People walk away from a vision casting session talking about what "must be."

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