



The ABC's of a God-Driven Strategic Plan

A God-Driven Strategic Plan can help your ministry reach its godly potential. It acknowledges God's wisdom and timing, allowing it to work through your observations and ideas. The plan can help improve effectiveness, clarify expectations, capture unshared nudgings of the Holy Spirit, and reduce conflicts and misunderstandings. A God-Driven Strategic Plan is NOT writing a standard business strategic plan, praying over it and then ignoring the scriptures, people, and circumstances that indicate God may want you to change your plan in some way. Done carefully, it is truly a God-Driven Strategic Plan.

Before you start:

- Have everyone involved with your ministry pray for the young people you serve, their families, and your ministry. You may choose to have a special period of prayer and fasting before beginning the planning process.
- Decide who will be involved in capturing information provided by various sources and craft the wording for the final document. Ideally, this should be a committee that includes a wide variety of viewpoints.
- Conduct a Ministry Listening Tour that targets staff, volunteers, parents, students, and Church leadership. You may also consider including community members in your listening tour.
- Decide on a time frame for completing the initial God-Driven Strategic Plan and implementing the first action items.
- Determine how often the plan will be reviewed and any needed changes made. This should happen frequently to capture issues and opportunities as they occur.

Conducting a strategic planning session:

- The committee should plan to spend at least 2-3 hours in one session to create the beginnings of the plan. Several additional sessions may be needed to complete the plan.

- Prayer and meditating on scripture should be a major part of the process before and during the session.
- To make the process more efficient, create a large piece of paper for each category of the plan. Have sticky notes available so each committee member can capture their thoughts and place them on the current category being discussed.
- For each category, define what you want to know before allowing suggestions to be written and added to the sheet for that category.
- If you can, allow participants to share the thoughts they have written on their sticky notes with the committee. You will also need to add information gathered during the listening tour to the various categories.
- This initial process should not include critiques of responses. Instead it is an information gathering session.

Creating a God-Driven strategic plan:

- **The Problem**
 - List all of the problems the young people served by your ministry face that could keep them from building strong spiritual foundations and reaching their godly potential.
 - Don't assign responsibility for these problems. We all need to take some ownership for the issues facing young people. Attacking others does not help in solving the problems.
 - Have participants commit to praying over these problems for a period of time or indefinitely. (Nehemiah 1 gives a great example of this type of prayer.)
- **The Vision**
 - The Vision is your dream of the "perfect" world, where all of the problems you listed are solved. What positive things are now happening?
 - The Vision *must* accurately reflect God's vision for the young people served by your ministry.
 - The final Vision should be 20 – 40 words, clear and inspirational. Don't focus on that in this initial meeting. Have a talented writer in your ministry take your thoughts and craft the final statement.
 - Your Vision is actually more complex than the final statement. Create a space where those ideas are kept in view – a vision board of some sort, reminding everyone of the full Vision.

- **The Mission**
 - Your ministry cannot solve all of the problems you listed in order to create your vision. The Mission defines which problems your ministry is willing to help solve.
 - Remember, focus is important. If your ministry tries to solve more problems than it can realistically handle, you probably won't be very effective in any area. Dream big godly dreams, but let God guide them.
 - The final Mission should be captured in one or two sentences about the problem(s) your ministry is committing to help solve.

- **Core Beliefs**
 - These are the non-negotiables of your ministry and should be based on scripture. Everything else in your ministry should be checked to make sure these core values are being met.
 - Include important priorities like building strong spiritual foundations and baptism. If you don't include these, studies have shown your ministry will become secular over time.
 - If you choose to include non-biblical values like educational best practices, be sure to indicate these are not from scripture and can therefore be changed in the future if needed.
 - Watch for hidden agendas and be respectful of the decisions of your Elders. Keep I Corinthians 10:23 in mind as you finalize your core values.
 - Core values should be reviewed and discussed constantly with volunteers, parents and students, if you want them to be practiced. Otherwise, they will fade and your ministry is in danger of becoming secular.

- **Strengths**
 - What is your ministry doing well and what are your assets (including volunteers)?

- **Weaknesses**
 - What weaknesses does your ministry have currently?
 - Be careful not to make this personal. There may be a lot of reasons WHY you have these weaknesses, but personal attacks are not productive.
 - Examine your ministry carefully for systemic weaknesses in gift identification, training, feedback, support and/or self-discipline.

- **Threats**
 - Threats are things that could negatively impact your ministry. Some may be remote possibilities, but being prepared can lessen their impact should they occur.
 - Include outside factors like a military base or factory closing that could have a negative impact on population, as well as natural disasters common in your area.

- **Opportunities**
 - Capture every idea anyone has for your ministry. There should be no filtering at this point. Big godly dreams should be encouraged.
 - The Holy Spirit is often most evident in this part of the process. Encourage everyone to include every idea they have and look for patterns. At times, a new ministry idea will have occurred to several people and your congregation may have the right mix of volunteers and gifts for it to be successful. Often these ministries never happen because no one has had the courage to mention their ideas.
 - Opportunities can include improving or enhancing your ministry to those whom you already serve, or new outreach ministries targeting the community.

- **Goals**
 - Goals should be as specific and measurable as possible. God can do anything, but if you don't have measurable goals you can have unnecessary disagreements on whether or not you are reaching them. If your goals aren't specific, you may find everyone has a different idea of what the goal actually means, causing problems in a variety of areas.
 - Capture all long-term and short-term goals.
 - Prioritize your goals. This may occur later in the process of creating your plan, but it is crucial that at some point your goals are prioritized. Your ministry should be focused on no more than 3-5 goals at one time. As one goal is completed, you will add the next goal on the priority list.
 - Remember, goals are not action plans. Each goal may require numerous actions to complete. This will be addressed in the next category. Goals should be one or two sentences.

- **Action Plans**
 - This is a crucial area often missed. For each goal, every step needed to complete that goal should be listed.

- For the first 3-5 goals on your priority list, assign responsibilities for each task and deadlines. Without these, your action items may never be completed.
- Test new ministry ideas in small ways before investing a lot of resources. After the test, your ministry can make needed adjustments or decide to end the experiment with fewer negative consequences.

After a strategic planning session:

- Have someone type all of the information shared in a strategic plan format. Share this document with as many people as possible for their feedback.
- Conduct follow-up planning sessions as needed to incorporate feedback and refine your plan.
- Discuss how to communicate and implement your plan effectively in your environment.

After you have begun implementing your strategic plan:

- Regular assessment and feedback on your plan is essential. Don't let your enthusiasm blind you to needed changes.
- Remember spiritual assessment is difficult. Numbers aren't always the best or only ways to measure success.
- Conduct regular listening tours with staff, volunteers, parents, students and Church leaders to determine what feedback there is on your ministry.
- Humbly consider all feedback for accuracy and value.
- Make necessary changes to your plan.
- Remember, God's timing is perfect. Your initial goal may be in God's Plan, but for later. If a goal still has value, try it again at a later date.
- Reframe any perceived failures as directed by God. He is preventing you from wasting more valuable resources on something that was not in His Plan for your ministry.