

December 20, 2010
Vol. 1, Issue 8

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Mary is the Mediatrix
of Advent Hope

(GSN) Stewards of God's
Gift of Marriage

(podcast) Parish Transformation

What is a Strategic Plan?



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What is a Strategic Plan?

By Michael Shumway, CFRE

In this space you have been reading a great deal of outstanding information about Mission and Vision. You might be wondering why we are spending so much time on these topics in a series about Strategic Planning.

Mission and Vision are central to our existence as Catholic organizations. They are our principles and our guiding lights. Without Mission and Vision, there is no need for planning. Conversely, without good planning, Mission and Vision are crippled.

The Holy Spirit guides us and fills us with zeal for the Mission of the Church and of our particular organization. That zeal must be harnessed and directed to most effectively realize the Vision we cast. That is where planning comes into play.

So, a Strategic Plan, in its simplest terms, is a set of specific actions and goals, accompanied by benchmarks, that provides the means by which we achieve a specific Vision.

Many terms and descriptions have been applied to this, including:

- Roadmap
- Benchmarks
- Action Plan
- Guideposts

Well, a Strategic Plan is all of these things and much more. The Church often speaks of plans. There is God's plan of Salvation and Redemption through Jesus Christ. A careful examination of the Gospels shows us that Christ's journeys with his Disciples wasn't random, it had a structure and a purpose. The timing of each step was crafted toward the ultimate destination of Jerusalem, Calvary, and the Resurrection.

For us a Strategic Plan is similar to the plan we witness in the Gospels. Christ's Vision for His time on earth was the redemption of mankind. His plan was carefully laid out to fulfill that Vision. Our organizations also must have compelling Visions that contribute

to the Kingdom of God. We, like Christ, must carefully set forth plans, guided by the Holy Spirit, to fulfill the Vision(s) we set for our organizations as we work within our Mission.

Benchmarks? Wait, if a Strategic Plan is analogous to Christ's plan, did Christ have benchmarks? Yes He did. The first miracle at Cana, the baptism in the Jordan, the raising of Lazarus, and so many more. Each of these specific actions and moments in the Gospels were telling of specific steps forward in Christ's plan of salvation. No less than Christ, we, too, are accountable through the proper use of benchmarks to hold ourselves accountable to the Vision we are striving to fulfill.

What IS a benchmark? It is a fixed point of reference which marks our position. It is a marker from which we can measure our progress. Do not mistake benchmarks with actions. Benchmarks are fixed points we agree upon or which are provided to us. They help us gauge our progress but are not elements of that progress.

As with Christ's plan, our Strategic Plans require leadership to form but also teamwork to execute. Strategic Planning is a process that must reach across all aspects of our organizations and involve a large percentage of our human resources. We see this in Christ's plan. He did not make his journey alone. He recruited the help of a team of flawed individuals. It was a team that made mistakes, yet still helped in the fulfillment of a plan that continues to bear fruit today.

This process requires leadership that understands the Vision and is committed to the Vision. With these two elements, leadership and teamwork, the planning process calls us to carefully consider our Vision and the road to its fulfillment. We consider first the major benchmarks that will mark our path to fulfillment of the Vision. Once these are agreed upon, we need to determine the interim steps that will mark our path to each benchmark. Finally, we must craft detailed actions that will accomplish each step of our plan.

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With the help of the Holy Spirit then, we build our map, with all its road signs, mileage markers and the rest to show us the way.

However, a strong Strategic Plan is a living document. It isn't static and is never meant to sit on a shelf. The exercise of planning must be organized and ongoing. A Strategic Plan must be reviewed regularly and often. It must be flexible and provide for changes to accommodate the changing circumstances that time may bring. While the Vision that the plan serves may not change. Conditions in the environment may cause us to re-think

how we will achieve the Vision. The plan still holds because it sets the strategic direction. However the plan must be flexible enough to allow us to adjust benchmarks and actions as needed to reflect our ever-changing reality.

So, what is a Strategic Plan? It is no more – and no less – than how we flawed humans seek to follow the example of Christ in carefully mapping our course to the realization of our Vision just as He mapped out a careful course to realize His Vision.

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