

1. What is a strategic plan and why is it important?

A strategic plan is simply a series of goals, and the order in which they will be undertaken, to help a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be.

It is important because:

- Without it...a vision may seem too big and unachievable.
 - A strategic plan breaks a vision down into key steps that enable it to be achieved.
- Without it...a congregation may be diverted by things that are not relevant to the vision.
 - A strategic plan will guide day to day decisions and the formulation of the annual budget.
 - It is a lens for the analysis of possible new initiatives, helping to highlight any that do not serve the vision.
- Without it...there is no substantive reference point for the evaluation of progress.
 - A strategic plan will help with the measurement of forward movement. In so doing it will help identify when the plan itself may need to be adapted.

One could think of it in terms of planning a road trip. Someone making a long car journey may break the trip into more manageable sections. They will identify places to stop for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and any overnight stays. Doing this allows them to rest, eat and refuel the car. The plan may even include dropping in on friends en route. The goal, of course, is to reach the destination, but this is achieved with the help of a set of more manageable objectives.

One could also think of it like a boat tacking in the wind. When a boat tries to sail to a certain point it is unable to do that in a straight line if the wind is blowing against it. So, the method it uses is to tack from one point to another, zig zagging its way forward. This series of small steps allows it to negotiate the wind and reach its destination. It was with this analogy in mind that someone said, "The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects the wind to change. Good leadership adjusts the sails". A strategic plan is a way of "adjusting the sails". It is good leadership to work to such a plan.

c) A good Strategic Plan is S.M.A.R.T

A good strategic plan will break the “journey” towards achieving the Vision into attainable legs by outlining:

- the strategic priorities for the period of the plan
- key objectives/ministry initiatives – what is the plan seeking to achieve?
- key enablers – which people and resources will be important to achieving the objectives/ministry initiatives?
- key accountabilities – who will “run point” on each and who will assess their progress?

The objectives contained within a strategic plan are usually Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-specific (S.M.A.R.T).

- A good strategic plan will be Specific

It will clearly describe:

- Objectives/ministry initiatives
- how these relate to the priorities
- the key accountabilities
- what enablers will be required

- A good strategic plan will be Measurable

It will allow those managing it (usually the key governance group) to evaluate progress.

- A good strategic plan will be Achievable

While it may well be ambitious, it will not be unrealistic!

- A good strategic plan will be Relevant to the Vision

It will help the church towards fulfilling its Vision rather than distracting from it.

- A good strategic plan will be Time specific

It will cover a set period - 3 years is a good timespan for a church’s strategic plan.

It may also include timeframes for the key objectives/ministry initiatives.

It may prioritise objectives, so denoting the order in which they are to be undertaken.

It may well form part of a series of strategic plans that eventually result in the realisation of the Vision/ Vision Pictures.