

Execute, Manage Strategic Ministry Plans

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Reaching the summit of a challenging mountain is an exhilarating experience that awakens the body like nothing else: breathing the smell of cedars, feeling the brisk air hit your face, hearing the wind force its way through the trees and seeing a view that inspires even the faintest of hearts. To achieve a successful climb is truly rewarding, as is effectively executing a strategic ministry plan that will forever influence people's lives. However, those who have toiled diligently on a strategic plan often fail to execute and manage the process. Instead of a mountaintop experience, they experience the frustration of being stuck on a molehill.

For church leaders, execution and management will determine whether they experience a mountain or a molehill. The following 11 steps can keep you focused on the plan during your ascent.

- 1. Keep accountable.** The leader and manager of the strategic ministry plan needs to make him or herself accountable to others involved in the process. That accountability may take place in the form of staff meetings, as people involved in the plan will expect periodic updates. However, staff meeting might not be enough. The execution and management of the plan needs to encourage a progressive, dynamic culture, as opposed to a maintenance-type mentality. Instead of staff meetings, a monthly leadership meeting, quarterly board meeting or quarterly church meeting may be better.
- 2. Lead the leaders.** The execution and management of the strategic ministry plan can be an opportunity to lead the leaders involved. An example of leadership is a mentoring experience. Plan participants see a plan effectively carried out in the organization that brings real results and real impact. Also, the leader and manager of the plan should allow others to participate to the point that they feel ownership in it. Potentially, the leader and manager of the plan need to delegate sections of the plan to those who have matching giftedness in those particular sections. Tasks can go to those within the organization who have current areas of responsibility that best align with specific sections of the plan.
- 3. Maintain commitment.** If the commitment level of the primary leader and manager of the strategic ministry plan begins to diminish, the decreased commitment helps give unspoken permission to others involved in the process that they too can begin to diminish their interest and priorities in completing the plan. The commitment level of the plan leader and manager must remain high. Otherwise, a decreased commitment may be the beginning of the end for that plan.
- 4. Stay motivated – keep the end in mind.** The leader of the strategic ministry plan can remain energized and motivated about the plan by constantly looking into the future and seeing the ministry's vision become reality. By keeping the end in mind, the leader is able to keep focused on the overall goal that keeps the embers of passion burning. There seems to be nothing more motivational than imagining the impact of that ministry's vision being played out in future months and years.
- 5. Overcome the obstacles.** With the execution and management of a strategic ministry plan, there will be changes. Any time change occurs, there are obstacles to overcome. There may be obstacles like a lack of motivation of participating individuals concerning the execution of the plan, risk-averse mindsets and lack of resources. Behind every obstacle, there is an opportunity to overcome it. It is a matter of prayerfully seeking wisdom and guidance from God related to the numerous issues that can arise while executing a plan. God may also provide wisdom through other colleagues in ministry that may have experienced similar issues.
- 6. Remain flexible.** Managing the strategic ministry plan process includes being flexible. When needed, adjust the plan. However, changing the plan and overcoming an obstacle are different solutions. Flexibility relates to making adjustments to goals when they become unrealistic or when they need to be adjusted because new information is revealed. Also, the plan may need to change if new opportunities present themselves that were not evident when the plan was developed or if opportunities that were present no longer exist. Remain flexible when needed.
- 7. Monitor the timeline/schedule.** One of the most important variables to managing and executing the plan involves monitoring its progress. By sticking to a written timeline or schedule, you can keep yourself accountable to its progress, as well as help yourself see the plan successfully completed thus far. That provides motivation to move to the next step. One idea is to set aside 45 to 60 minutes one morning a week at the office outside the normal hours of operation so that time can be uninterrupted, concentrated effort on the plan. While using the plan and/or a checklist, make notes about the progress so far and brainstorm on the steps needed to accomplish the next step of the plan. Based on the contemplated outcomes from this alone time, potentially further considerations can take place in a regular meeting. Overall, develop a routine for this crucial monitoring step that works for you.

8. Allow time to execute. Just as you need time to monitor the process, you also need to allow for the actual execution – or at least the delegation – of the next step. This is also part of the leader’s routine. Whether that means scheduling time on an actual calendar or daily/weekly list, it needs to fit into your normal system for the accomplishment of tasks. One possibility is to work on the various responsibilities for the next step at the weekly staff meeting, as well as delegating of some of the responsibilities. By delegating, deadlines must also be set for the various aspects of that step to be successfully completed by the team. As a side note, this participation helps build the team as it learns to function and work together for the sake of the team achievement versus individual achievement.

9. Praise and present requests. During the leader’s daily personal prayer time with God, praise Him for the successes of the plan thus far. Also, verbalize these successes in the weekly staff meetings and prayer times. Concerning your personal prayer time, pray for one need a day that is necessary to properly lead and manage the execution of the plan successfully. For example, some of those needs and specific days of prayer may be wisdom (Monday), stamina (Tuesday), guidance (Wednesday), passion (Thursday), participant morale (Friday), humility (Saturday) and adequate resources (Sunday).

10. Communicate with all constituents. Constantly communicating the details of the plan, such as the vision, the mission and the progress, is key to constituents who are buying into the strategic ministry plan. Constituents include leaders of the organization, participants in the plan, the donor base (including the congregation in a church setting), partnering parachurch ministries, previous members/participants and the community. You may be questioning the importance of communicating to the community the status of the plan. However, such communication could be a visible demonstration of the faithfulness of a ministry achieving its underlying plan providing credibility in the eyes of those watching from the outside. This credibility could lead to evangelism opportunities. Provide some type of visual display to all constituents of the plan’s progress and the future steps that the ministry will be undertaking to achieve the overall plan.

11. Celebrate successes along the way. Even small accomplishments warrant congratulations throughout the execution of the plan. Celebration helps to build morale and provides time for building unity with the participants as they experience the importance of “we” instead of “me.” Also, celebrating successes may help keep the impact or influence of vision killers (individuals that are negative towards the plan) to a minimum, perhaps even force them into hibernation – at least for the time being. Celebrate the successes along the way. It is beneficial for everyone involved. Use a checklist to help you stay on track and balance the various needs of executing a strategic ministry plan. With a genuinely challenging plan, there is much at stake. There are lives to be touched, communities to be changed and God’s Kingdom to be impacted.

There is another important result that can occur throughout the process that relates to “you.” Throughout the process, you may grow spiritually in your relationship with God as your faith is stretched and your dependence on Him deepens. Consider the rewarding experience of reaching the mountaintop with your Lord leading you all the way. Consider the spiritual growth that can be gained by a faith-filled journey to the summit. Now consider the alternative result that can be experienced from a half-hearted effort at executing and managing a strategic ministry plan: the molehill. There is no comparison. The summit waits for your arrival.

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