

How Strategy Will Drive Pivotal Decisions for Your Church

There is nothing more critical to leadership than strategic decision-making. And nothing is more strategic in decision-making than, well, strategy.

Recently our staff reviewed five of the more pivotal decisions we've made regarding strategy over the course of our church's life. We've certainly made more than these five, but these loomed large in terms of our church's foundation and formation. You may not agree with our decisions – in fact, I'm sure many of you won't. But that's what made each decision strategic; **it reflected a settled choice between competing ideas.**

Here were the five:

1. The weekend service is the “front door” of the church, and should be opened widely to the people we are trying to reach – specifically, the unchurched.

There are a number of outreach strategies that I have no doubt produce fruit. We've decided that the best is an “invest and invite” approach. Essentially, this is investing in friends and family, co-workers and neighbors, relationally – building the friendship. Then, in the context of that friendship, we invite them to attend a service or event that we've designed to be a good “front door” to the church and the message of Christ. We've decided to make the weekend services the primary front door.

2. Our small groups and serving teams are not primarily focused on discipleship, but spans of care.

Whatever small group system you have, and whatever role they assume in the life of your church, you have to determine whether they are going to function primarily to serve discipleship or community. I know, many will want to say “both,” and I would agree that they can. However, strategically, you should decide which of the two is the primary role of the small group. Our small groups certainly have a discipleship element, with groups going through content and studies, but we are not betting the discipleship farm on small groups. For us, that bet is being placed on our Meck Institute, which is a “community college” approach to classes and seminary, courses and learning. We are, however, betting the “spans of care” and “assimilation” farm on small groups and serving teams.

3. We made the decision to go “multi.”

It's currently in vogue to talk about going “multi-site,” but in truth, going “multi” is much more foundational. It means you're not going to stay “uni,” as in having only one of something. For us, this meant options. Going “multi” meant giving options. It started with going “multi-service,” offering multiple weekend service times on Sunday. Then it grew into “multi-day,” offering multiple services over multiple days. Then it became “multi-site,” offering services at multiple venues and locations. Finally, it became “multi-medium,” offering services through our internet campus and talks through our app for smart phones and tablets.

4. Children need separate programs and experiences to optimally serve their spiritual development.

There are two schools of thought when it comes to children and the church. One is that children should be with their parents at all times, worshiping and learning as a family. Another school of thought is that children have different levels of maturity, differing attention spans, and different needs, and should be served accordingly. We chose the second school of thought. While we intentionally create opportunities and events for families to worship and learn together – we call them “Family Nights” – our weekend services separate children birth – fifth grade from the service their parents attend in order to provide a unique experience and learning environment for their level of development.

5. There should be a gift-based approach to ministry

Again, there are two schools of thought when it comes to ministry. One might be called the “professional” school of thought. This is when you “hire” a minister to do ministry in and for the church. You expect them to marry and bury, visit and teach, reach out and develop. If the spouse plays the organ, all the better. The other school of thought turns ministry loose; the people are the ministers, and the pastors are more the administrators. Further, there is a deep belief that every follower of Christ has been given at least one spiritual gift to be used for the purpose of ministry in the life of the church (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, I Peter 4). So in this model, you help people discover their gift, develop their gift, and then deploy their gift. Then you have leaders leading, singers singing, counselors counseling, teachers teaching, and so on. And it’s not just the “clergy” doing it; instead, every member is a minister.

Of course, the best leadership teams understand that strategy should be held with an open hand. **It must be continually evaluated in light of whether it continues to be the best strategy.** If so, it should be affirmed with a deep sense of “why.” If not, new strategies should be considered and employed.

We remain convinced these five are good choices for this season of ministry.

Regardless, it bears repeating:

Nothing is more than critical to leadership than strategic decision-making, and nothing is more strategic in decision-making than strategy.

Read more from James [here](#).