

To Make a Dream Come True

*Vision: The Most Important Aspect
of
Church Leadership*

Presented to

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Introduction

It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with the concept of organization in a secular sense, if it is right to think that there are a secular and a spiritual one. But it is important to consider the general concept of organization management and administration to get to a clear idea of the importance and the role of leadership in the church. It is not less important to consider that any reflection about management, administration and leadership may be applied, with some extent, to any non-profit organization.

The Administrative Process

The organization dynamics, within the context of the science of administration, comprises a system called “administrative process” that consists of four stages, which are planning, structuring, commanding and controlling. These four stages describe the whole process of the organization, as a live organism or system.

It is necessary to pay attention to the meaning of the process mentioned here. It has no sense at all if no major goal is clearly established and defined. There is no sense for an organization to exist if it exists for no purpose. Therefore, above everything is the overall goal, or the main goal, also known as strategic goal, and, to be more clear and specific, it is good to say it is what the organization was born, built or established for. Some say it is the dream of the founder; other may say it's the vision, and also others would say it is the purpose. For the purpose of this text, it is going to be considered as the overall goal.

How organizations are born

This is how the organizations are born. A dreamer, visionary, inventor or whatever name one's given for this, defines what he wants to accomplish; he establishes a goal. When it is very clearly established, he is ready to start working on the four stages of the process.

It is not surprise that Rick Warren sold so many books and is yet selling, because vision, goal, purpose is what life is all about. This is something everybody, everywhere, every time are dealing with, because without a purpose there is no mission, there is no

planning, there is no strategy, there no organization's birth. What would be it all for, if one doesn't know what to do or where do go to.

Organizations die when vision dies

Most of the time an organization, be it a church or a company, is dying because the vision is dying too.

Wheems (1993, p.38-39) says that it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are, and cites a prayer of an African-American church: *"Lord, we're not what we want to be, we're not what we need to be, we're not what we are going to be, but thank God almighty, we're not what we used to be"*. Further the same author says that *"if a compelling vision is not present or if the organization is not seeking a vision, then a vacuum is created. The result will be either no vision, or more likely, the presence of many small competing visions. In either case the result is decline"*.

Effective leadership, according to Wheems, comprises four inter and intra-related elements: Vision, Team, Integrity and Culture. Concerning the role of leadership, without vision all other elements have no meaning. Nobody build a team for no purpose.

Organizations are born when there is a dream to pursue

When a vision or dream is burning somebody's heart, it is going to motivate the person and something is going to be done towards that dream. This action is what is going to make the person a leader, because it contaminates others who are going to be led to engage in the process of achieving that goal or walk towards that vision, in regard to a lot of different kinds of rewards.

Back to the administrative process, a vision or dream will requires a planning process, where the main goal will be defined; strategy, plans, programs, projects, etc. are going to be established. Up to here everything are nothing more than ideas and dreams. In the next step, structuring, the skeleton is built and every piece of the organization will be defined. At this high, you can see the organization, but it doesn't have life. Only in the next step it is going to come to life, when people will fill all the spaces, functions and roles. It is in this scenario that leadership happens, because these people need somebody

that interprets the vision, the overall goal, to them so that they are going to know where they are going to.

As we talk about church administration and leadership, we've got to be aware of this.

It is all about vision

The "what" in leadership is "*sustained passion for and a commitment to a proactive, shared vision and its implementation*". Don Martin (1993, P.16). "*Your goals determine where you want to go. You can only get there by design, not by accident.* Don Martin (1993, P.18)

Just to give an instance, Talking about Christian Education as one of the main purpose or goals of the Church, *Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1993, P. 24)* says that "*the area of church life that has by far the most influence on faith maturity and growth in faith is Christian Education. So if our goal is to nurture faith and loyalty in the congregation, nothing in church life matters more than Christian education*".

Clear vision is so important, understanding what you are in, if you are a pastor, is in a church, don't think you are in a club. Tom Peters, in search for excellence, in quotation, (White, 2003, p.27) White Says: that the railroad barons didn't understand what business they were in .Peters observes: "*they thought they were in the train business. But, they were in fact in the transportation business*". *Time passed them by, as did opportunity. They couldn't see what their real purpose was*".

In organizations, "*leaders are paid to be dreamers. In fact the higher you go in leadership, the more your work is about the future*". (Finzer, 2000, p.184/185.

Talking about vision, KOUZES, James M. and POSNER say: "*there is no freeway to the future. No paved highway from here to tomorrow. There is only wilderness. Only uncertain terrain. There are no roadmaps. No signposts. So pioneering leaders rely upon a compass and a dream. /// leaders look forward to the future. They hold in their minds visions and ideals of what can be. They have a sense of what is uniquely possible if all work together for a common purpose. They are positive about the future, and they passionately believe that people can make a difference.* P.79

Conclusion

In Mathews 6:19-20, Jesus warn us not to store treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy, but build treasure in heaven. Further he says that “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”. This is a statement of vision. We do with the heart only those things we treasure. The overall purpose of your life is to build the Kingdom of Heaven and to build ourselves in it. This is what we’ve got to treasure most. The same way, the leader must have a vision, a place in the future, something he pursues with the heart, and he will contaminate people around him/her to walk towards that purpose.

Therefore, the most important aspect of leadership is to have clear vision of the Goal or main purpose to achieve.

An excellent illustration of vision can be extract from an interview given for academic purpose of Administration and Leadership to students of the Interdenominational Theological Center by Dr. Carol Scott, pastor of the Ray-Thomas Memorial Presbyterian Church about her ministries that took her to rethink the church and see it as “A House of Prayer for the Nations”. The interview is posted hereafter.

Interview with Pastor Carol Scott

Donna – We are informed by Alcenir that the church is multicultural, but is it two congregations? Or is it one congregation and two languages?

We are one church with two languages and are going to be two congregations with three languages. We have the Brazilian members as well as Anglo. Most of the Brazilians are members, others come to worship but are not members. They think of themselves as members of a fellowship, because the Brazilian group started as a fellowship.

Doing a backup to 2001, when it all started, we understood that we were not called to be the normal suburban traditional church. Things were changing. So we got together elders and other leaders and started a time of prayer to define where God was calling us as a church. That was January 2001. So we understood that God was leading us to immigrant ministry, but we had no idea of what it would be. We are here in East Cobb and didn’t know where immigrants were.

We contacted the Greater Atlanta Presbytery, after we contacted our Presbytery; Cherokee that told us “go to Great Atlanta”. They said: well, you should try to find something in the City of Roswell. They didn’t have any idea, we didn’t have also. The only thing we knew was that immigrant ministries usually happened as partnership. So, what we decided was to wait and keep listening. By July, the president of the Cherokee

Presbytery, Jimmy Choomack, called me and asked: can we have lunch with a man named Pezini? Then, I thought that it was what God was leading us to. I met with Pr. Pezini and Victor Azevedo, who is now our missionary in Brazil. We met on one Thursday.

Victor was leading a fellowship of Brazilians, which were meeting in a bank. At that moment was been thrown out and had no where to start meeting. They were simply asking if they could come and meet here. I didn't know them well and had no background on that, but I said ok. Then, I think this is what we were being prepared to. Pr. Pezini at that time had a feeling that churches should come together as one, and not just an immigrant community. His concerns are that, if they don't do that way, there would no place for the second generation.

So we went to the session and said we had space and we could receive this ministry. We did that in 15 minutes before the service in that great Sunday and the session said: ok, this is what God wants us to do.

Two weeks later they were here and everything began to change from that point on. We started to have some conflict because this is an Anglo church, they are Brazilian, and they've got a different style of worship. They do not sit in the pews only, stand and hold hands, they clap hands, they bring these sound equipments and have these loud music. Some people thought this was really what we should do, but others said it was not what was supposed to be.

We began to feel that as leadership we were being called to be more together. But we didn't have any idea of what should be the agreement; we didn't charge rent because this is God's church.

They didn't have much resource for their ministry and we started using more of our resources to support that kind of ministry and it caused more conflict.

We had to do a lot of education, because people didn't understand they were Christian, because of some different values they have. For example, they don't say the Lord's Prayer every week. So, we concentrated efforts in doing this education.

We found that one good way to get the two churches closer could be doing music together, which is a wonderful thing. Then we thought that the best way to do this would be by starting a contemporary worship and that it should be better with Levi, a Brazilian musician. Levi started coming to our worship and showing signs of being called by God in the community and he was willing to put together a group of music of Brazilians and Americans of the Ray-Thomas.

Things really started to happen after that. One of the things that happened was that we lost our traditional choir. They were becoming very upset with this strange competition. They were upset because more people were drawing to the contemporary music than they were to the traditional choir music, preferring this Latin style. And that was a crisis, because the leadership of the church wanted to support them, but also wanted to embrace the new. However, they thought it should be one or the other. And we said that we had to have the traditional, we had the contemporary and the Brazilian worship and nobody has to come to only one service. But then they decided to leave and go to a traditional homogeneous Presbyterian Church. That caused a lot of pain to the congregation, because they brought their family with them. And that was painful because when the Brazilians settled down, and we told them we wanted their representation in the session.

People became said because in order to do that we should have them to wait four years. In this case, they had to be new members, relatively speaking. But these people had gone to the Columbia Seminary for leadership training and they were gifted, but our people said “no”, they are Brazilian, they can’t be Presbyterian. It was really a struggle to make them understand that Brazilians could also be Presbyterian.

Donna – What the Brazilians see them as?

Well, some of them see themselves as members, as Presbyterians, but some are still trying to figure that out. We consider them members because we invited them, without requiring of them a huge understanding of what Presbyterians think.

We realized that there are people coming to Ray-Thomas which are not immigrants, because they are looking for values that are not exclusively Presbyterians. We are making a lot of education for them to understand what Presbyterians stand for. And those who really don’t want to be members we say don’t be, keep coming to the fellowship to worship without being member, there is no problem.

We had made a lot of shift to accommodate the services and the people. The contemporary worship for example is a struggle for the Brazilians to have it at 9:00 AM because they are not used to wake up early on Sundays.

We are observing and we may have to change the time of worship again.

The contemporary service is really something we are working on, and the Korean ministry is coming and they have an English ministry, we are planning to put together a contemporary worship of the three congregations together. It is going to be in English, but with Koreans and Brazilians interpretation. We yet intend to have services exclusive in English, Korean and Portuguese and whatever else God may envision.

It was only little more than a year ago after we had the Brazilians settled that we realized exactly what God really wanted us to be. It was the time a Korean church of our Presbytery heard about us; in fact the pastor heard a sermon I preached at the Presbytery meeting on the theme “*A Worship Place for All Nations*”.

They said they had that passion and that they had begun an English ministry in their Korean church. They are also located in East Cobb and they proposed us to get in prayer, as they also were going to do, for God to direct us about the possibility of having a partnership. Then that is what happened. In May, we made a partnership agreement to get together and, for now, we are going to have two congregations in one place. But the ultimate goal is to become one. They think that they first generation group is dying off. To start with, we are going to put this contemporary worship together.

We are going to put our children ministries together, our youth ministries together. We are going to have a full time youth director even before we become physically together in one place. We are going to vacation bible school together. We are going to put children of all citizenship together because for them it doesn’t make any difference.

So, God called us to be together and we are going to work on it to be together.

A couple of weeks ago we had a celebration, because we made that covenant, so, like a engagement or wedding party we decided to celebrate it. Everybody was here. We put the children together. At the begging they were hesitating. We usually have American and Brazilian children together and they thought the Korean would speak

English. After a while they realized that can speak English and 45 minutes later they were all playing around together, because the Brazilian children speak enough English to be ok.

Well, that is kind of where we are headed. Very different of where we were as a new church development. In fact we started 25 years ago.

Donna – Were you here since the beginning?

No. I am the first installed pastor after the new church development. And have been here since 1989. Actually, I came as a co-pastor of my husband. The church growth was about 70% in three years, what was too fast for a Presbyterian church. At that time it was very close to the moment the Northern and the Southern Presbyterian Churches had merged. We were from the Northern stream and this church was from the Southern stream.

Short after we arrived, we started having an influx from North and California. Later on people realized the church was heading to different direction of that the organizing people established.

It is very difficult to describe what was happening, but it had to do with homosexuals and imaging. A group of interdenominational women were discussing the image of God and wisdom (Sophia), feminist thinking and so on. And the Northern and California people were more on the liberal side and the other group of members was in the conservative side.

I tried to make it clear that this do not define what is to be Presbyterians and what Christianity is. Let's just live together and live with our differences and opinions. Nevertheless, it didn't work out so well because they couldn't find a way to stop discussing the issue. There was a group that was very, very conservative that was annoyed because they understood that homosexual couldn't even be members, not only that they couldn't go through ordination, but not even be members.

Well, membership was not an issue for discussion. Ordination was being discussed, but not membership. So, the bottom line is that in 1995 there was a rupture over that and we split. Half of the church went to the Roswell Presbyterian Church which had a wonderful growth suddenly.

So, what happened is that by 2000 we were feeling we were destined to be different. But for a church to be different, what we were supposed to be doing? So, there was instability there.

The other issue was that the sanctuary, which was built in 1984, had the financing based on the assumption that the people would come and pay for it. When my husband and I arrived, we found out that the plan was that when the new members came the older members bought stock bonds, which was on a rate of 11.5%. The new members were supposed to buy the 11.5% bonds from the old members. It was a situation, because nobody responded well to going into this bond program. So, the thing grew like a balloon and in 1999 it was like three hundred thousand in mortgage. The church had a group of people in good financial shape who said that they would put in some money in a kind of partnership, because the church could go on with that financial situation. I thought it was not a good idea, but the Presbytery said it was ok. Then they took over the loan for the church. Then when this group left we had a financial crisis. Then for five years we had to struggle with that.

Well, looking for the demographics around here, we see that people choose their church by recreation facilities for their kids and other programs, but we couldn't do anything like that because we had pay for the building.

So, we knew that God had something else in mind. It is very interesting how God work the things, because if we didn't have that kind of problem we wouldn't have a program like our immigrant ministry.

It is amazing the number of places the Brazilians went before they got here looking for a place even just to worship and they were turned away. And I talked with pastors who said that if I'd take immigrant ministries here I'd taking conflict. This is true! However, the Gospel is universal. But our people, tired of paying for the building, with a passion for ministry, suddenly it began to make sense. Some people started saying: well, we have this building, so let start using it for mission!

Something very interesting happened while pastor Teo, the Brazilian pastor, were praying before the Korean found us here and he said he had a dream with this place full of Koreans before they knocked at our door.

People couldn't believe this was the hand of God, that we'd be manipulating things.

Well, I've been busy. That is the kind of situations I've been through. And it was a real accomplishment in this last two weeks when the Korean came and the two congregations met and were praising and praying together. Our people were so amazed with how they loved what was happening and felt bad that the group that left didn't accept to stay to share now what is happening. What they envision is an image of the Kingdom, how it is going to look like, like seeing this entire people together.

In the worship, the songs were being sung in their own language at the same time, and all the other readings and prayer were being translated. People were excited saying lets do it every week. We can't do it every week, but we are planning to get all together once in a while.

The Korean will come, even before they start build. Also they have to sell their building before they start building. They will build in the volleyball area behind the church. They show real passion for what they are doing. It is funny because before they came we were thinking about doing something in Spanish ministry and they say they are supposed to bring in the Spanish ministry.

You would ask how you would do all this without a five year plan. What I have say is that we decided was just to easy down and pray asking God show us the way, show us what he wants. It doesn't look like anybody's five year plan.

So, we said God we are going to do it. And we really believe it is what God wants!

Donna - What is your membership in terms of number and how are your traditional services?

Our traditional is a real traditional, but like a high-high Presbyterian like that procession, and now we don't have a choir and so. We have at eleven two separate services, one Brazilian and one American traditional. The contemporary is at 9:00 and exceptionally today it with an unusually low attendance. But, anyway, it doesn't even look like what the contemporary Brazilian worship is, but it is really not a traditional.

Concerning the membership, technically we still have 500 hundred members including those who show up for Christmas or in some special occasion. And it counts the age from 13 and up. And it comprises all the services, Brazilian, contemporary and traditional. We've got 55 Brazilian and the rest are Americans.

Donna – You said you had to do a lot of education. How did you do that?

I did that in sermons, Sunday school classes, session meetings, bible studies.

I used frequently the lectionary to preach, even though I think it is not much good to do that way, and it was helpful because I wouldn't be accused of picking passage for an agenda. So, I thought it was very important to use the lectionary to deal with what I had to the best way I should. What was amazing is that week after week, after week the lectionary spoke. Spoke about multicultural ministry, about openness, about get through conflict together, being willing for change. This way I settled the educational part of the issue. Some of the Brazilian were a little nervous about the traditional Lord's Prayer, because for them it is Catholic, which for them is not Christian. Our people would look their services and say we didn't hear any Lord's Prayer, so it is no Christian. So, part of the education had to do with learning how to deal with these things, because we become so culturally used with these things that when it is not there we think it is not Christian. They couldn't imagine that being Christian in other parts of the world could be different of what is in America, especially in Georgia.

Donna – when it first came, how was your leadership team made up, when you started praying about?

My leadership team engaged in prayer for this was the staff and the elders.

The youth ministry is too small because the Americans are in college; there are some Brazilians but too little. There this youth minister coming at the end of the year. He is American born in Long Island, NY, of Korean and is going to be in charge of youth ministry. He speaks Korean and his duty is to minister for Americans, Koreans and Brazilians.

Donna – after all that happened, what are the things you thought of to engage after?

One of the things is leadership training that we are going to need a lot. It is not an easy ministry to do. We need very mature disciples. We are very firm in doing small groups for spiritual formation and development of leaders. We are not look for big numbers. Right now we are looking for the development of a group of leaders but we don't have enough resources, it is me right now doing everything. Sometimes I feel like those Tennis ball throwing machine throwing balls on me one after the other very fast.

We are going to have someone called Julie Johnson to lead spiritual formation and Pezini is going to help us with leadership program. What we are trying to do is to go out and bring in some experts to help us. Pezini is wonderful in leadership development. It is kind of interesting how God dropped Pezini and Alcenir here in the middle of what is going on.

So, our focus right now is to get prepared. The partnership issue is kind of helping. The Brazilian ministers are much better prepared in evangelism than the Ray-Thomas is. Our missionaries, not by accident, happen to be Brazilian.

We are trying to model the house of God in a way that fits for all that will come. We are going to share strength. For example, the Korean has three people prepared to work with children. Sharing strength we will build a strong church together.

Our strategic planning is praying.

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