

Vision, Mission, and Strategy

“God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack God’s supplies.”

(Hudson Taylor)

Introduction

We are here to talk about three concepts that are essential to leading any organization: Vision, Mission, and Strategy. The words themselves have become buzzwords, and many people, even experienced leaders, often use and confuse them. These concepts frequently overlap or even swap places, depending on whom you’re listening to. The lack of clarity in this domain is widely acknowledged, and I will give only two examples. Decades ago, *The Economist* famously observed, “Nobody really knows what strategy is.” More recently, a CEO specialising in corporate goal-setting suggested we should “stop using these terms” entirely because of the confusion.

So, if you struggle to clearly define where one concept ends and the other begins, you are not alone. Accordingly, as part of the M3 section, *Leading in Organisations*, this module — “Vision, Mission, and Strategy” — is to **bring clarity** about vision, mission, and strategy. Thus helping you in your work of clarifying the corporate mandate of your local church, your department, your ministry organization, maybe even to your current project.

Note: other modules are needed, specifically focused on the “how to”. This one is to limited to bring clarity about the concepts and to see the differences and connections between them.

The Questions

The question for us is: Do we, as a Church, have a vision, a mission, a strategy? (Or should we even need them?)

The reality is, go to any major meeting, from local church elections up to a General Conference Session, and you will see the confusion manifest. Debates over modifying a single word in a statement, emphasising one element that is key in a specific local context, and then moving an item to a vote, all these give the impression of jeopardising the entire direction of the ministry. This friction reveals that we may have different versions of the “vision, mission, and

strategy”. And this leads to the critical point: If we cannot clearly define what Vision is, what Mission sounds like, and what Strategy truly is, how can we call ourselves servants of God, leading His people?

The Scriptures

Before we delve into our presentation, let us ground ourselves in Scripture. Proclaimed by the greatest prophets of all, John the Baptist, the core truth is this: “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven” (John 3:27). The framework we present should not be something we are inventing or dreaming up; nor a management theory borrowed from the world. Consider the experience of John, the Apostle, on Patmos. He heard: “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Revelation 1:11).

We are looking for a divine structure we are called to (1) receive, (2) articulate, and faithfully (3) execute. Moving further, if we frame these concepts using the Trinity model, we gain immediate clarity: God the Father gives the Vision. Jesus Christ articulates and embodies the Mission. The Holy Spirit leads us into the Strategy.

1. The Vision

“Unless you have a clearly articulated vision, you have no basis upon which to create strategies” (Barna, pp. 197-198). So, what is the vision?

The *vision* is the vivid, compelling picture of a desirable future. It defines the ideal, God-given state our organization ultimately strives to achieve. The Vision is the inspirational power, “a force in people’s hearts” (Senge, p. 192). It drives every major decision, fuels passionate service, and gives meaning to our collective effort. It is the destination that calls us forward, higher.

Bible Examples of Vision

Peter and his fellow fishermen. “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5:10-11)

Paul in Corinth. “One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you,

because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.” (Acts 18:9-11)

Moses at Sinai. “And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’” (Exodus 3:12)

Jesus Christ. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3)

Summary

- **Clarity:** “Vision is clear”, says Barna. It answers the “What?” (Or “Where?”)
- **Source:** Vision is supplied by God (through Scripture, prayer, divine interventions, spiritual discernment, spiritual leaders).
- **Focus:** It is always about the future, projecting a God-ordained reality.
- **Scope:** It is higher than any human imagination, above and beyond us.
- **Impact:** It actively challenges the status quo. It brings a desired change.

As leaders we must translate the vision ideal into a tangible, measurable picture of how our organization will look and operate. So, let’s move to mission.

2. The Mission

The *mission* is the decisive action required to realise the vision. It is not a static image or a noun, but a verb — a clear, active statement that defines the core purpose of your existence (“raison d’être”). We act because we have internalised that Vision, having that conviction that feels like a divine calling or revelation. “If people don’t have their own vision, all they can do is ‘sign up’ for someone else’s. The result is compliance, never commitment” (Senge, p. 197). When asked about our mission, the response should be a concise statement defining what you are doing right now to move toward the desired future state.

Jesus' Mission (in the four Gospels)

"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me"
(John 6:38; see also 5:36; 8:42; 9:36; 14:31).

John. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17)

Luke. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

Mark. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Matthew. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17)

Summary

- **Clarity:** Mission responds to the question "Why?" / "What for?" (Why do you exist? Why did you come? Remember: "raison d'être")
- **Source:** A mandate given by God and embodied in Jesus' ministry (The Great Commission).
- **Focus:** A vision-focused present-tense declaration (typically an enduring verb).
- **Scope:** It is universally applicable, across the board in your organisation (The "why" is the same).
- **Impact:** It is about alignment for a cause.

A Table of Contrasts

The following table is not presented as an infallible rule, but rather as a guide to help orienting in seeing key differences between Vision and Mission.

While metaphors can help us, they are also lame helpers when zooming in. Allow me to illustrate the differences by using the image of reaching a summit. The Vision is the peak, the highest peak, while the Mission is the declaration that I will get there.

Vision	Mission
A picture (e.g. freedom, settled, fulfilled). What / Where to	A movie (a verb, in action). Why are you doing what you're doing?
A destination	A journey (expedition)
Future (in space and time)	Present (in daily actions)
Higher than humans (ideal)	Embedded in human points of reference (doable)
God-given	Human and divine partnership
Acts as a magnet	Acts as a propeller
Revelation. Inspiration & aspiration.	Commandment. Alignment & followership.
Excitement and motivation	Meaning and purpose
Joyful	Painful
The vision is God-focused	The mission is vision-focused

“In pursuing the vision, prepare to be stretched and challenged beyond your comfort zone. God’s vision for your ministry, like the one He prepares for a church, will cause you to grow by demanding that you change, sharpen your skills and participate in situations in which your only hope of success is enabling His Spirit to guide you and empower you. Without the drive of the vision, chances are good that you would avoid these situations. Let the vision move you into areas of outreach that may be uncomfortable but will contribute to your personal growth. Let Him stretch you and thereby help you become a more capable minister for His kingdom.” (Barna, pp. 151-152). That drives us now to the last in the series — the Strategy.

3. The Strategy

Strategy is the disciplined methodology for fulfilling the Mission and thus realising the Vision. It is a comprehensive plan that details how we will get there, step-by-step. The process requires a rigorous evaluation of our current state, anticipation of challenges (SWOT), awareness (Jo-Hari window), and the foresight to prepare for potential detours (Cynefin) and necessary course corrections (SMART-ER goals).

Strategy translates into a series of deliberate actions and decisions (including when and where to say “No”). For immediate execution, these actions are refined into Tactics: the day-to-day, executable tasks that ensure implementation.

Bible Examples of Strategy

Let me say that the word “strategy” comes from the old Greek context of fighting on the battle grounds. So, allow me to suggest strategies from the Bible using this framework, that is, not business, but winning for God, whether in wars or mission/evangelism.

1 Samuel 17. Saul gives his armour to David, trying thus to equip him facing the mighty Goliath. The servant opted for a different approach.

Acts 17. Apostle Paul in Athens. He was preaching and teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and in the marketplace all the other days. His strategy was to find common grounds, bridges in rituals, places of worship, altars, poems. Identifying their “unknown God”.

2 Thessalonians 2. Man of lawlessness. Opposing everyone (new guy, not of the system). Exalting over everything worthy of worship (“I am the One”). Getting into God’s temple, not by force but by setting himself up. Proclaiming to be God. Using “a powerful delusion, so that thy will believe a lie” (v. 11), “the coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives” (vs. 9-10).

The Great Commission. Preach, teach, reach (Matthew 28). Heal (Mark 16). Forgiveness (Luke 24). Walk with God (John 20). For this, please see my extended analysis: The Great Commission on the Four Gospels. <https://www.adventistdiscoverycentre.org/articles/the-great-commission-in-the-four-gospels>

“When people are immersed in a vision, they often don’t know how to do it. They run an experiment. They change direction and run another experiment. Everything is an experiment, but there is no ambiguity. It’s perfectly clear why they are doing what they are doing. People aren’t saying ‘Give me a guarantee that it will work.’ Everybody knows that there is no guarantee. But the people are committed nonetheless.” (Senge, p. 195).

Summary

- **Clarity:** It answers the question “How?” (And thus a subject to change.)
- **Source:** The Holy Spirit’s leading, team discussions, reliable data, honest reflections.
- **Focus:** It is mission-focused, values-driven, and results-oriented.
- **Scope:** A step by step approach. Not myopic, but determined. It works in specialised teams.
- **Impact:** Incremental changes.

A Table of Contrasts

The following table is not presented as a contrast of “either-or,” but rather as a tool to gain a clear image of “which is which.” Effective ministry demands both mission and strategy.

Using the image of a sailing ship, the Mission sets the fixed, unmoving destination, while the Strategy provides the flexible vessel, the navigation tools, and the necessary decisions for reaching that destination.

Mission	Strategy
Fixed (in stone)	Fluid (adaptable)
Universal (in time and space)	Specific (contextual and cultural)
Enduring (rarely changes, if ever)	Expiring (must be reviewed periodically)
Driven by heart (see key words below)	Driven by head (see key words below)
Defined by the calling	Defined by the guidance
Owned by everyone (all members)	Directed by the leadership (team)
Focuses on alignment (unity)	Focuses on execution (diversity of methods)
Requires commitment and sacrifice	Requires planning and resource allocation
Qualitative (faithfulness, depth, direction)	Quantitative (growth, metrics, arrival)
The mission is vision-focused	The strategy is mission-focused

Note: Strategy has a timeline. Mission does not have it. Don’t be fooled by “in my generation”... You may have seen that our Adventist rally calls often include words such as: “radical” (prayer), “total” (member involvement), “final” (hope) and “urgent” (appeals). Beware, it’s a strategy, not a mission.

Words of clarity

Vision	Mission	Strategy
<i>What? Where to?</i>	<i>Why? What for?</i>	<i>How?</i>
Long term destination	Core mandate	Action plan
Mental image	Deep (internalised)	Implementation
Desired future	Buying in	Execution
Guiding purpose	Sacrifices for core values	Goals and results
Aspirational	Commitment	Resource allocation
Ideal	Owning & stewardship	Evaluation for optimization

4. Next step (your situation)

See. Write. Send.

Remember “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Revelation 1:11). We are looking for a divine structure we are called to (1) receive, (2) articulate, and faithfully (3) execute. Barna uses these words: “Your role is to grasp it [the vision], to articulate it and to ensure that it is acted upon” (Barna, p. 101).

From an Adventist perspective, Canale talks about retrieving, embracing, and applying. If the original vision has been lost, a fourth one (before) is “recover”: “To finish the mission of the Christian church, Adventism needs to recover, embrace, articulate, and apply—to life and mission—the vision that generated it; this must be done globally and at all institutional levels, particularly those of leadership and scholarship” (Canale, p. 10).

Spiritual leadership

Spiritual leadership, from a Biblical perspective, means to be led by the Spirit of God. In our context, using the Trinity model: get the vision from God the Father; follow Jesus’ model of articulation and embodiment of the mission; be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading. I am not saying you are to be a prophet, or in need to be exiled on an island to receive a heavenly vision. I am just saying: **Go to God! First and foremost.** Just like Hudson Taylor, who spoke about “God’s work done in God’s way”, George Barna talks about “doing His work, His way” (p. 14).

Everything comes from God. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.” (James 1:17-18)

Jesus is the ultimate model. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” (John 1:18)

About the Holy Spirit... Before His ascension, Jesus promised that His followers will not be left orphans. The Spirit of truth was to come to help and be *with* and *in* His followers (John 14:17). The Spirit’s role is crucial for the leader’s mandate to lead groups, organizations, acting as divine interpreter and guide: “He will teach you *all things* and will remind you of *everything* I have said to you” (14:26, emphasis supplied; see also 15:26), and “he will guide you into *all the truth*” (16:13, emphasis supplied).

On the contrary, and this is unequivocally established by Jesus, the world “cannot accept him” (John 14:17, see also Genesis 6:3). This fundamental distinction confirms that the source of authentic spiritual leadership is not this world. And here lies the crux of the problem: spiritual leaders orienting themselves toward the world, seeking its approval and adopting its models of influence, while the world itself remains incapable of receiving the Spirit. Aware of this reality, those called to Spirit-led leadership should not look for inspiration nor pursue validation from a realm that, by its very nature, cannot embrace the Spirit of truth. In other words, you can’t have your vision from God, your mission from God, and the strategy from the world (remember the temptations in Matthew 4 and Luke 4).

Note: Rejecting a worldly source for vision, mission, or strategy does not mean rejecting every tool developed in the world. Analytical frameworks, planning instruments, and organisational tools (SWOT, SMART-ER, Jo-Hari, Cynefin, etc.) are not inherently spiritual or unspiritual — they are instrumental and morally neutral. What makes a strategy spiritual or worldly is not the tool itself, but who sets the agenda, defines the values, and determines the direction. Tools assist discernment and execution, but they must never replace prayer, spiritual discernment, obedience to Scripture, or dependence on God. In other words, tools may serve the mission; they must never shape or govern it. Spiritual leadership is leading from your values and moral power.

“Spiritual leaders are directed by the Holy Spirit” (Blackaby, p. 33). Bell concludes it: “We go with the Holy Spirit, guided by His counsel, taught through His providential instruction, empowered by His presence and gifts, filled by His intimate indwelling presence. To lead without the presence of the Holy Spirit denies the biblical foundation of leadership” (Bell, chapter 21).

How does it work?

Blackaby. “He [God] asks leaders to walk with him so intimately that when he reveals his agenda, they immediately adjust their lives and their organizations to his will and the results bring glory to God. This is not the model many religious leaders, let alone business or government officials, follow today, but it encompasses what biblical leadership is all about.” (Blackaby, p. 47)

Adventist. “For the Christian, leadership must be viewed and understood on Jesus’s terms, not those of modern leadership texts or manuals” (Jones, chapter 15). And Patterson (chapter 20) confirms: “His words and model serve as the standard for Christian leadership and, as such, take precedence over all factors – cultural, organizational, and political – that inform the practice of leadership in the church.”

White. “In choosing men and women for His service, God does not ask whether they possess worldly wealth, learning, or eloquence. He asks, ‘Do they walk in such humility that I can teach them My way?’” (White, p. 37)

The Bible. “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” (Psalm 25:9)

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