

Turning Vision Into Reality

Several years ago, Bill Hybels did a session at The Leadership Summit called "Turning Vision into Reality". In it he talked about the time in his ministry when he realized that vision casting was not enough to take Willow Creek to the next level. He had to figure out as a leader how to move off of just casting a compelling vision to actually getting it done. In this issue of Defining Moments, this classic message is presented to help stretch your thinking about vision casting and the vital importance of follow-through and implementation.

Outline

- I. The importance of achieving a vision
 - a. A vision is only wonderful if it is achievable
 - b. Followers need to know that progress is being made and there is a path to success
 - c. Every leader needs to move past the vision-casting phase of leadership to the "getting it done" phase
 - d. Many leaders don't want to move to the second phase
 - e. They think that if they just keep casting vision, the dream will be realized
 - f. This just isn't true
 - g. There is a big difference between visionary leadership and "getting it done" leadership
- II. Sailing example
 - a. Bill had the opportunity to race in a prestigious regatta with world-class sailors
 - b. The team had trouble with some maneuvers during practice
 - c. Bill had a choice – he could give another vision talk, or he could move to the next phase
 - d. He had everyone sit down and talk through the maneuvers until everyone understood what they had to do
 - e. They were able to execute the maneuvers well in the race
- III. Willow's experience with moving into the second phase of leadership
 - a. When the 20th anniversary of Willow arrived, Bill felt it was time to step up his leadership
 - b. The staff and volunteers needed new and clearer marching orders
 - c. Willow's leadership went into a strategic planning process
 - d. Bill had never had any experience with it before
 - e. The leadership decided to add three areas of focus for the next 5 years underneath the broad vision of turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ
 - i. Reach a higher percentage of people in Chicago land area with the Gospel
 - ii. Mature the congregation with the regard to the value of community, spiritual maturity and full participation in the life of the church
 - iii. Invest more knowledge and resources outside the walls of Willow through Extension Ministries and through the Willow Creek Association
 - f. Willow's leadership felt good about the refinement of their vision, but the job was not finished yet
- IV. The need for goals
 - a. In the first 20 years of Willow, there weren't any clearly marked goals in place
 - b. As they continued the strategic planning process, they felt that establishing goals would help them live out the vision in the five-year-plan
 - c. The key was figuring out what the balance of resources would be between the three areas of focus
 - d. Through prayer and discussion they eventually came up with six goals that corresponded to the three strategic focus areas
 - i. 20,000 people attending weekend services at the end of five years

- ii. 20,000 people involved in small groups at the end of five years
- iii. 8,000 mid-week service attendees at the end of five years
- iv. 8,000 fully participating members at the end of five years
- v. 4,000 people working annually with the poor at the end of five years
- vi. 6,000 member churches in the Willow Creek Association at the end of five years
- e. They also decided to appoint a “goal champion” to each goal, whose responsibility it would be to provide leadership and implementation to the goal over the next five years
- f. The strategic plan was launched in January of 1996 and Bill laid it out to the congregation
- V. How the strategic plan rolled out
 - a. At first, there was high excitement and buy-in from staff and congregation
 - b. The five-year goals were broken down into 12 month goals, and about a year in they could see they were on track for some and behind for others
 - c. Leadership would engage with the issue of being behind instead of thinking it was “good enough” the way it was
 - d. The management team kicked into another level of leadership and there was high motivation and energy
 - e. Bill thought that this was what level of leadership needed to be provided, but he was wrong
- VI. The shift
 - a. About 16 months into the five year plan, Bill began feeling uneasy about what was happening but couldn't articulate why
 - b. He felt everything wasn't running to its fullest potential
 - c. There was a missing piece, but he couldn't figure out what it was
 - d. Then he had a conversation with a college student who had been involved in Student Impact, Willow's high school ministry, who said she felt she had never been a part of the larger Willow church
 - e. He saw the issue was that the sub-ministries of Willow were so focused on their own work that they didn't connect to the larger Willow Creek church
 - f. Willow had become a decentralized, loosely-led federation of sub-ministries
 - g. Bill and the team realized they needed to realign the staff and departments to get them to buy-in to the strategic plan
 - h. It was not as easy as Bill had hoped it would be – it took a long time and some staff didn't want to change the status quo
 - i. Bill had to get tough at one point and give an ultimatum to staff who were not on board with the new plan
 - j. Ultimatums are very dangerous, and normally shouldn't be used, but sometimes a line has to be drawn in the sand
 - k. Eventually the leadership team was able to realign the entire staff and organizational structure to fit with the strategic plan of the church
 - l. It finally feels like the church is almost firing on all eight cylinders
 - m. Everyone feels like they are a stakeholder in the future of the church
- VII. How it is playing out
 - a. Increases in weekend attendance, mid-week attendance, small group participation, membership and service to the poor
 - b. This isn't about numbers
 - c. There is still alignment to be done on the administrative side so it works with the new paradigm
 - d. Willow isn't competing with anybody, and no church should be competing with another church
- VIII. Leadership challenge
 - a. Leaders need to lead with all diligence
 - b. Every leader needs to commit to pursuing the full leadership potential
 - c. Do whatever needs to be done, even if it's uncomfortable, to stretch and develop your leadership skills

3. Bill talked about how Willow wasn't running on all eight cylinders until the church leadership moved to get all sub-ministries aligned to the same vision and strategy. How is your church functioning? Are its ministries and staff aligned behind a common vision, strategy and goals? If so, what is one thing you need to do to keep that alignment intact? If not, what one or two next steps do you need to take to begin to move it in that direction? Write your thoughts below.

My next steps:

4. As Bill mentioned, leading with ultimatums is a dangerous proposition. However, he also maintained that there is an appropriate time to draw a line in the sand when the stakes are high. When in your leadership have you had to draw a line in the sand? Think about what the circumstances were, what you did well, and what you could have done better. If you have never had to draw a line in the sand, either think about a situation you are presently in that may call for it, or recall a time that you saw another leader do it. Write your thoughts below.

5. Bill challenged every person who has been given the gift of leadership to intentionally develop their leadership skills. Below, make an inventory of the things you are *intentionally* doing to sharpen your skills.

How I am developing my leadership skills:

Now, write down one or two new things you can do – specifically or generally – to continue to develop your skills.

What else I can do: