

Brian C. Stiller

**7 Ancient Principles  
for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders**

## World of Theology Series

### Published by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance

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- Vol 28 Brian C. Stiller: 7 Ancient Principles for 21st Century Leaders

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# Contents

- Prologue .....7**
  
- Principle 1: Listen for Opportunities .....11**
  - Link listening to your ability ..... 11
  - Learning the art of listening ..... 12
  - Understanding gifting..... 14
  - Identifying God’s calling..... 17
  - Training oneself to hear..... 17
  - Finding your call ..... 17
  
- Principle 2: Recognize Opportunity in Chaos .....21**
  - What is vision? ..... 22
  - What does vision do?..... 24
  - What does it take to fulfill a vision? ..... 27
  - What is the value of vision?..... 30
  
- Principle 3: Exercise Your Faith .....31**
  - Meaning of faith ..... 31
  - Importance of faith..... 34
  - How faith works ..... 37
  - Exercising faith ..... 38
  - Discerning faith..... 39
  
- Principle 4: Discover the Value Proposition .....41**
  - Locate the essence ..... 41
  - Trust the Spirit..... 42
  - Dig beneath the clutter of short term goals..... 42
  - Be on the lookout for resistance..... 43
  - Install the right kind of leadership ..... 44
  - Build on the essence ..... 45
  
- Principle 5: Link Your Passion with Planning .....47**
  - Importance of strategic planning ..... 47
  - What is strategic planning?..... 48
    - What is the value of a strategic plan? ..... 49
    - What does it take to complete a strategic plan? ..... 50

Where does one begin? .....	50
Tyndale's strategic plan.....	51
What does strategic planning require? .....	52
<b>Principle 6: Resource Development: A Litmus Test of Leadership.....</b>	<b>55</b>
The importance of giving .....	55
Common objections from leaders .....	59
Reasons why raising resources is a litmus test.....	60
Benefits of the leader being involved in fundraising .....	60
What is resource development? .....	62
A word to pastors.....	64
A last word.....	64
<b>Principle 7: Yes, it is Political .....</b>	<b>65</b>
What is politics? .....	65
Politics everywhere .....	66
Leading in a political environment .....	67
Strategic moves for political leadership.....	67
Dealing with the dynamics of the body politic.....	70
Conditions for effective leadership .....	73
Your leadership team: Key to political management .....	74
<b>Reflections on a calling .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Measuring success .....	77
Have I done what I set out to do? .....	79
Is it stronger now than when I began? .....	79
Have I used my allotted time well? .....	80
Final thoughts .....	81

## PROLOGUE

Nehemiah wrapped his robes around himself for some warmth in the cool early morning as he stepped onto the patio of his lavish apartment in Susa, capital of the Persian Empire. Last night he had been told of the impending arrival of Hanani, his brother, from Jerusalem. Bureaucratic insider gossip told him the news was troubling. But only his brother's version would he trust.

When Hanani arrived, they greeted as brothers. Their life history, friendship, and life in exile had maintained their bonds in spite of long separation. They understood each other's words, spoken and unspoken. Little chat was needed to get to the core of an issue. They also knew their roles.

While Hanani was a family man, Nehemiah had ended up in the king's court with the trusted role of senior minister to the king. The decision was not without cost: now a eunuch, Nehemiah could have neither marriage nor family. Without the prospect of descendants, his life was on a different track—his king was his life. Loyalty would not be complicated by wife or children. Sexual opportunity had no attraction. Little distracted his interest or attention—that is, until today.

Brothers embraced. As they sat on the eastern edge of the courtyard, servants brought early morning drinks and fruit. The sun pushing its way up over the horizon promised another hot day. Yet in the cool air, Nehemiah sensed another heat. There was something troubling today about his brother. Hanani's eyes hinted at a story that would soon affect Nehemiah's life.

Politics. It wasn't everything, but in Nehemiah's world everything was political. Nothing touched his world without some overplay of political intrigue.

As senior minister, he knew the goings to and forth in the court. Stories of insider manipulations came to his desk. He had eyes and ears to know what was going on, any time, any place. He was expected to know. Only Nehemiah did the king ultimately trust. He was even the last to inspect the king's food to guard against a favorite enemy ploy of poisoning.

In 586 BC, almost a century and a half before Nehemiah's time, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had overrun the Jewish community nestled on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, destroyed the Temple and took captive craftsmen, artisans, and skilled leaders: fifty thousand to eighty thousand Jews were exiled to Babylon.

The raid occurred on a chessboard of shifting powers. Babylon (now Iraq), north and east of Israel, was in ongoing battle with Egypt to the south

and west. Israel, stuck in between, was bounced back and forth, century after century, ruled by one power after another.

Cyrus, king of Persia (now Iran), took over Babylon in 539 BC without much resistance. Benevolent and tolerant, he allowed Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. Many Jews, led by Zerubbabel, returned and rebuilt the Temple. Other Jews, prosperous and successful where they were, saw little value in returning to their homeland.

In 529 BC Cyrus was killed and internal fighting broke out over who would be king. Eventually (519 BC) Darius took over the vast Persian Empire, which stretched from India across into North Africa. A brilliant governor, Darius organized the empire with regional leaders and by taxation built up central wealth and power.

When he died, his son Xerxes took over but lacked his father's skills in organization and leadership, and soon the empire began its long slide. The only bright spot in Xerxes' career was when he gave in to the pleas of Queen Esther to save the Jewish exiles.

In 465 BC Artaxerxes came to the throne, desperate to keep the kingdom intact. With Egypt on the cusp of rebellion, the king had to play his cards right to keep the outer edges of his kingdom—in this case Judah—from slipping into the hands of the Egyptians. Artaxerxes sent Ezra to Jerusalem to modernize the language and document the events of the city.

Then to add to Artaxerxes' woes, the Athenians in 460 BC cast their lot with the Egyptians. Not only was the Persian king faced with Athens and Egypt ganging up on him, one of his generals, Megabyzus, turned on him (449 BC). The king was fighting battles without and within.

Jerusalem was strategic. Through it ran a primary trade route from the Tigris and Euphrates valley to Egypt. Whoever controlled Jerusalem had economic dominance.

Now Nehemiah heard devastating news from his brother: the walls of his beloved city were lying in disrepair.

Hanani's face, creased with years in the desert sun, was shadowed by sorrow. Waiting until the servants slipped away, Hanani slowly began, choosing his words carefully. Hanani, close in age to his older brother and possessing the same faith in the God of their patriarchs, knew Nehemiah had issues and concerns far beyond his own. He had no wish to encumber Nehemiah with an increased burden. But to whom could he turn? Wrestling with whether to tell him, Hanani concluded his brother would not forgive him if he was kept out of the most critical issue their people had faced in their years of exile in the Persian world.

"Brother, the news I have to tell you from our beloved city is not good. We live in ridicule and abuse. Jews who escaped when we were taken cap-



tive have finally come out of hiding. They live as scroungers and beggars. They scratch away at the soil, and are run off by our enemies, who try to keep our people from Shabbat worship.

“Then—and this will be hard to believe—while a few of our countrymen were quietly singing King David’s songs, those half-breed Samaritans heckled them, attacking them with insults and clubs.

“I was humiliated. Not only did the Persians rob us blind and kill and carry off many of our best families, now the locals are making us look as if we are religious nothings. They’ve tried to take our faith; now they are showing signs of taking our city.

“Nehemiah, when we rebuilt the Temple, we could at least sacrifice and worship. Here is the critical issue and the one we must address: the walls of Jerusalem are in rubble. Even the doors have been burned to ashes. The stones that gave the city such protection are tumbled around. It’s a disgrace. But more. It shows the Samaritans, our enemies, that we don’t care. It’s one thing for people to attack us, but if we do nothing, what message does that send?”

Nehemiah’s heart seemed to stop. Nothing held his affection as did the Temple. “It began the night our ancestors left Egypt,” he thought. He recalled the story.

The final warning Moses gave to Pharaoh was this: “In any house that is not sprinkled with lamb’s blood tonight, the death angel will kill the oldest son of the household.”

From that moment—the night Moses began leading the Israelites from Egypt—the Temple began. A slain lamb became the cornerstone of their religious ritual. In the wilderness they built the Tabernacle, and finally under King David’s son Solomon the great Temple was built. It housed God. No mobile wilderness tent, Solomon’s Temple was not only an architectural wonder, it was the holy place where confessed sins were forgiven and where voices co-mingled in praise and homage to the God of life.

Nehemiah’s rise to influence in the Persian world had been remarkable. An immigrant’s son becoming a senior official in government, living in luxury in the most powerful of nations, was a rare achievement. No longer a despised Jew, Nehemiah had class, status, and influence.

Now his world was about to change, his comfortable life upended by the news of catastrophe in Jerusalem. The city was not simply his ancestral home; it was the seat of his spiritual life, religious memory, and identity. While much had been done to reconstruct the city and Temple, what use was that when everything that had been built up was exposed to danger because the city’s walls were in disrepair? Weeping was not foreign to his world, and Nehemiah let his feelings show.

In the following days, he found comfort in seclusion, fasting and praying. Time alone gave him focus and opportunity to craft a plan. As a Jew, and senior government official, Nehemiah made it his business to discern the intricate web of political entanglements. Time in prayer was not simply asking God for a way out; he was giving his mind to seeing what kind of plan would work. In his early years as king, Artaxerxes had been hard on the Jews in Jerusalem, ordering that all building be stopped. Nehemiah wondered whether he could persuade the king to reverse that order. He knew the news from Jerusalem might upset the Jewish exiles in Persia, and he was confident the king would do his best to keep the Jews from unrest. It was the opportunity Nehemiah needed. He watched for the right moment to lay out his proposal.

It had been four months since Nehemiah heard news of his homeland. With the king's court now back in session, it was time for Nehemiah to swing into action; mourning over his stricken city would be left for another day. Visiting satraps sat with their entourages as the king opened the session. Times were tough. Rebellion was in the air. Taxation was a festering issue in many regions. The effect of conquered regions being forced to raise enough taxes for their own needs and also deliver the levies Artaxerxes expected was crippling. Nehemiah understood. Now Egypt was prowling, sending noises of its readiness to battle Persia. Sitting in between was Judah.

This was the best card Nehemiah had to play. It wasn't a story he had made up. His loyalty to the king was too deep for that. But it was a factor, and there was no need to spell out the consequences.

The king called for Nehemiah. Nehemiah answered, following protocol and meeting the dignity of the occasion. The king noticed something was amiss. When time allowed, he took his trusted bureaucrat aside.

"Nehemiah," he asked quietly, "what's wrong? My goodness, you look like you've haven't slept for days."

"With permission, Your Majesty, at the end of today's session, might I have a word with you?"

It was agreed.

And so began the remarkable journey of Nehemiah as he requested of the Persian king permission to leave his high position in Persia and return to Jerusalem to make his home city safe from those who sought its demise. This was no small request, for by such authority he affected the political dynamics of the ever-explosive Middle East. For the next twelve years, he led a ragtag group that was underfunded, under armed, and under attack, nationalists who had a will to recreate in the city of David what any Jews worth their salt would give their eyeteeth for: protection of the very building in which Yahweh lived, the Temple.

# PRINCIPLE I

## Listen for Opportunities

People often lead because no one else is available or interested. You may not have visualized yourself as a leader, but then you saw a need, observed an opportunity, or felt a pent-up urge to do something, so you acted, which in turn drew people to the idea. With people following your lead, you became a leader.

Most of us end up doing something we never had in mind in the first place. When I graduated from the University of Toronto in 1966, I had laid out my goals and strategy. I missed on both counts. Almost thirty years later, in 1995, when I responded with a throwaway line to a board member of a Canadian college and seminary (later renamed Tyndale University), I had no idea where it would lead. As I stood with Billy Graham and the leadership team before his five-day event in Toronto, a friend said, “Brian, we are having trouble at the college and seminary.” I responded, “Let me know if I can help.” Little did I know this would result in my life being taken over by a bankrupt college and seminary and immersed in the bone-crunching task of creating a Christian university.

Who can predict the end? Life isn’t a straight line from A to Z; it is a zigzag. Decisions made for less than stellar reasons can lead into a calling of significance.

From watching others and testing ideas, I discerned critical principles in leadership. This analysis comes from overlaying the story of Nehemiah on what I’ve experienced in leadership in local and national youth ministry to a national Evangelical Alliance and then to a university.

Where does one begin?

Begin with hearing: it may be soft or boisterous, understated or self-directed. Listen for tones of survival, for noises from places and people wanting to tell those who listen that survival matters.

### Link listening to your ability

A corollary to listening: when your imagination is caught by the importance and dimension of a need or an idea, in my experience, it is a signal that you have the capacity to do something about it.

In working with people in an assortment of ministries I've noticed that what you hear is in line with what you can do. I use "hear" in this sense: I pick up messages that connect with my desire, passion and skill. We hear certain things because we have capacity and skills to respond with solutions. Implicit in this kind of hearing is a native or learned understanding of the nature of the need, rising out of a corresponding capacity to do something about it.

In 1995, I was asked to meet with the committee overseeing the survival of an undergraduate and graduate school in Toronto which was on the edge of bankruptcy. Although I hadn't led an educational enterprise, I had a sense of what was needed to right the ship, raise the sails, steady the rudder, and move it into quiet water. I had experience in starting from the ground up. I knew it would be tough, but the elements and strategy in reconstruction were evident. Here is my point: there is a link between what we hear and what we are able to do.

Let me put it another way. My dreams—of what I would like to be and do—rise out of my ability. We are wired in such a way that our hopes and dreams connect to our gifts.

I'm not speaking of romantic or wishful dreams. As a boy I wanted to be a hockey star. After all, I learned to play street hockey in an alleyway between our church and the house of the parents of Detroit Red Wings' star Gordie Howe. Playing in the National Hockey League was a romantic dream. It came and went. Though I wasn't a slouch on the rink, I wasn't pro material.

Let me note the distinction between *visions* and *dreams*. A dream catches my interest; it is fantasy fabricated of self-interests but not that which drives my life. A vision is compelling, that which absorbs my thinking and is linked to capacity.

A fawning fan of the pianist Paderewski gushed after a concert, "Sir, I'd give my life to play like that." To which Paderewski replied, "I did." It was more than a dream. It was a compelling vision grounded in his musical capacity and perfected by years of practice.

## **Learning the art of listening**

Endemic among leaders is the tendency to not listen to what another has to say. Filled with our own interests and the importance of our task, we understandably are anxious that the world know. Such intemperance, however, engenders two subtle and self-destructing flaws.

It shuts off our listening: an active mouth distracts a listening ear. You may notice it's hard to do both well. And in not listening we fail to hear

those noises of life waiting to be born. Do you know how many people have no one to hear their story? And how few have someone they respect who will take time to listen with interest and feeling?

So, in not listening, we lose. The story, the idea, the opportunity is screened out by our compulsion to be heard. What may be next for us, what may very well be a voice of God's creation in need of an audience, is muted. A treasure designed to be given so we might take of its wealth and invest in a greater good is missed. We lose what our heart has yearned for, what in our most quiet moments we have longed for. There it was—if I had only listened.

Equally tragic are people who need to be heard. Their sense of being is diminished when dismissed or ignored. As you listen, listen with your heart. Take note of what stirs you. Take heed when it recurs, coming back to you day after day. It may be of little interest at first. Indeed, your decision to engage may precede an inner love or passion.

\*\*\*

*After sixteen years in Youth for Christ, I resigned and within a week was invited to consider pastoring a church on Canada's west coast. We met and I asked for some days to consider. For a couple of days, with a Bible and note pad, and fueled by a simple prayer, "Lord, guide my thoughts," I read slowly a verse or chapter, all the while making notes. I came to Nehemiah and read the entire book. As I finished, I looked at what I had written:*

"Find a broken wall.  
Find a broken wall most ignore.  
Find a broken wall others ridicule.  
But whatever you do, find a broken wall."

*Within an hour, a long-time friend called. "Brian, I understand you are considering a church on the west coast so I'm calling to tell you how wrong that would be for you." He continued. "Harry Faught [a mentor and founder of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada], and I believe that it is time for you to take up the leadership of the EFC."*

*"EFC?" I queried. "There is no organization, no funding. It has little recognition in our community and in the wider church, and for sure none among civic leaders." Yet The more I spoke, the more I heard myself describing a "broken wall".*

\*\*\*

Listen to stories of broken dreams; walk through rubble of failed plans; hear hurting hearts speak of missed opportunities; step over the pieces of

fallen monuments. Instead of searching for the good places, rewarding salaries and benefits, popular communities and nice people, look for run-down, bankrupt communities in need of someone to lift and lead.

Hearing is more than listening, more than having gifts that connect to hearing. It requires honing.

The Jews asked about Jesus, “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” (John 7:15) His response was unexpected: If you do what you already know is the will of the Father, then you will come to know. Hearing is a learned discipline. The more one works at hearing, the more likely one will hear. Like any other ability, we use it or lose it.

While we suffer from media overload—as streams of passionate, need-laden stories wash over our hyper-stimulated feelings—nurturing a hearing heart helps us hear what’s important.

## Understanding gifting

Nehemiah, hearing of his beloved city, listened, which led to doing. He was grieved to learn of Jerusalem’s vulnerability. He was angered by the humiliation of his people, ridiculed, and offended by their enemies. He was so moved by this frightful situation that he spoke to the king. But without inherent skills in moving from idea to reality, he would have been passionate but not much more.

Passion is an indicator that gifts are commensurate with the need. Hearing is connected to skills. I may think it’s a good idea to design a sculpture to honor a person or event, but it will go nowhere, for I am not a sculptor. As much as I believe in the value of education, and while I’ve given part of my life to provide for a center of Christian higher education, I don’t have passion to construct an educational curriculum. That’s a clue that I’m not best suited to the task of teaching.

My generation was not familiar with theories on personal gifts. Learning about personal gifts was revolutionary. Pressured by colleagues to be like them, I was liberated when I clued into an understanding that skills and gifts are commensurate with passion or calling: the ability to envision what needs doing is rooted in a capacity to do it. Driving ambitions move within circuits of abilities. What I’m not gifted to do I don’t have passion for.

Desires to do are linked with gifts that enable the doing. When someone asks, “What should I do in vocation?” I ask, “What do you like to do? What do your friends and family say you do best?” Once we establish that groundwork, I suggest that it makes sense to see God’s call within the person’s gifts.

The logic goes thus:

- What I like to do is an indicator of what I do best.
- God has gifted me.
- Education, training, and experience serve to strengthen those innate gifts.
- It would not be out of character for God to want me to use gifts he has given.

So, identify your gifts.

Note Paul's outline of personal gifts.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12: 6–8)

This list of seven gifts, though not exhaustive, outlines seven primary motivations: what you or I find to be renewing and rewarding. A gift is like a pair of well-fitting shoes: we can walk for extended periods without fatigue. When we try to serve with the wrong gift, soreness sets in and we don't get far.

The gift	The related natural ability
Speaking	Able to speak in public or write, often in a position requiring public speaking with the goal of persuasion
Serving/helping	Inclined to help and serve, often in fields of health care or hospitality
Teaching	Interested in relating knowledge so others will understand, often as a schoolteacher, professor, instructor
Encouraging/ motivating	Loving to support and motivate others—a gift required in positions in which encouraging others is key: management and HR
Giving	Able to give, often as entrepreneur or businessperson who can generate funds out of wise investing and management

Leading	Able to gather, inspire, and organize people toward a goal
Showing mercy	Having an instinct for people's needs, suited for work that requires empathy and wisdom in finding solutions

Figuring out your ministry includes finding what best matches your natural gifts. I played fullback in high school football. Short and stocky, I wasn't suited for the long throws or end runs as much as I was for running up and over the defense. My football nickname, appropriately, was "the bull."

In time I learned that, as much as I loved public speaking, my primary strength was not in preaching but in leading. I finally admitted it and was set free from expectations of others and especially myself.

Analyze Paul's outline and you will see the pattern of key motivational strengths.

Let's work with some models.

- A pastor with a combination of the teaching and mercy gifts will tend to find teaching and counseling as the base of ministry.
- If you are strong in leading and giving, it may suggest you have the capacity to lead a parachurch ministry or manage a multi-ministry church.
- A visionary with high ideals and grandiose plans but little interest or skills in sitting quietly and listening to needs may be just the person to take a moribund church, agency, or business and push it into a new plan and strategy.

Each of us, from time to time, is called on to operate in each gift. Even though my prime gift is not "showing mercy," there are situations in which I'm called on to counsel, to help a person through a stressful situation. Also, though my prime gift is not giving, I am called on to give and to do so with joy.

The point is not to be trapped into allowing a personality test or gifting chart to be the final guide. It is to serve as conversation and in a growing understanding of oneself.

To help us to see where we fit into life ministry, I've organized roles of ministry into five basic categories: pastor/minister, evangelist/apologist, educator, advocate, and leader. These are not mutually exclusive. A pastor may have leadership gifts. A person with a heart for social justice may also



be a pastor, evangelist, leader, or teacher. This list asks you to identify which area most naturally suits you.

## **Identifying God's calling**

Linked into gifts is calling. The Spirit is ever moving and shifting us about to meet his agenda. Respecting our gifts, he moves before us and in times of opportunity helps us hear what is best, best for Kingdom purposes. In the end, what we do becomes his call.

Critical to hearing is a conviction of God's providential leading; he combines what we do best with what needs doing here and now.

In listening, Nehemiah knew it was now or never. The message delivered by his trustworthy brother allowed no mistaking of need. He also had capacity.

## **Training oneself to hear**

How then can we hear the deeper and less pervasive sounds of the universe? When I am brought face to face with reminders of an exploding catastrophe in sub-Saharan Africa or the devastating impact of an earthquake or tsunami, am I in danger of becoming heart-dead over these unimaginable disasters and the encroaching needs? I think yes.

Along the rough roads of leadership, God is in the moment. Our predicament may be of our doing. But failure in moral judgment or lack of insight to solve an issue is not the end of life.

Leaders, take a cue from your dreams—that which fills your mind with creative excitement. Reflect on your hopes and wishes. God is in that. It is more than psychological hype. He works out of our motivation, a clue to his gifting. It is an essential ingredient of a healthy self, the basis on which we dream our dreams. Kingdom leadership partners with God in transforming life, engaging a hurting and dysfunctional world in the power of his Spirit. We aren't selling another product or service. We are leading ministry whose mission is introducing people to eternal well-being. That takes a dream proportional to the task. Don't despise dreams. That's the stuff of God.

## **Finding your call**

How does one make choices? I have no formula: many factors influence our decisions. Identify the essential elements that weave an emotional and

spiritual infrastructure that gives strength so you can lead with emotion, joy, and clarity. Here are a few from my repertoire.

**That I have a passion for it.** Passion is a barometer, indicating that I'm gifted to do what needs doing and seems right to do. Without passion I'm useless. If our lives are listless, feet shuffling with boredom of doing a task day after day, weeks dragging by in wait of the weekend or a holiday, we become a weight on the organization. While feelings run through cycles, and there are times when we struggle, if the actual vocation or location is not fueled by an inner drive to accomplish and get something done, then consider getting out, and getting out fast.

**A moment when I knew God was calling me to this.** Ask people how they came to their place, and you discover there is often a moment or word that gave confirmation of a call. It is not surprising if you have a story backed up by a belief that the Spirit guided and directed.

We come to decisions in various ways. The more cerebral may see logical conclusions, while others, more mystical in personality and theology, may see more direct points of God's intervention. However, if you don't have an internal conviction that where you are matters, the tough times will be more difficult. Biblical stories have been critical in my decision making. I am grateful that while riding some rough patches during the Tyndale presidency I could recall a drive with Lily on Alligator Alley in south Florida when she recounted my vocational history. I heard—in my mind—the Spirit saying, “Brian, you've built the EFC as much as you need to. Now I have something else for you to rebuild.” That was important, for there were times I wanted to resign, that earlier “call” reminded me where he wanted me.

**Opportunities, refined by careful discussion.** Appointments don't come out of thin air. Implicit in serving is that we are not alone, we don't serve ourselves, and we don't end up in successful service without having our calling reviewed by those we trust.

After eleven years with the EFC, I was asked if I would consider serving as president of the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States. It excited me. I was somewhat bored by the Canadian scene, so taking on the U.S. was a challenge. But Lily and I could not discern whether that was for us so I arranged for seven friends to meet us. Some were aghast that I would consider leaving Canada for the U.S. Others thought it was a great opportunity. However, there was no confirmation of what to do. And without that we decided to stay put. Seven months later Tyndale

slipped into receivership, an opportunity we would have missed. Conflicting opinions were used by the Spirit to hold us.

**Does the calling fit with my primary gifts?** From time-to-time friends in struggling marriages ask if I will help. And I will, but only for a time. Most need someone gifted and trained in that area. I'm simply not able to help beyond some encouraging words. So it is with your prime calling. There are times you may be called on to fix something because it needs doing and you're closest. The trick is to locate your main vocational responsibility within your gifts. Try running a marathon in athletic shoes that are too small or too large. Blistered feet and aching joints result. To use your gifts is to walk in a calling that fits you.

**Is there a reasonable possibility the goals can be realized?** At least you see it that way. Some may reason that the prize is beyond reasonable expectation. The point is that whatever is the goal, it has sufficient short-term objectives that allow you to build momentum: that what you are doing can and will be accomplished.

**Are there resources which can be accessed to reach the goals?** What one calls impossible another sees as a challenge. Get a fix on where resources are accessible. Launching a vision without having in mind where the essential resources can be sourced is a sure plan for failure.

**Is there a group, or a few who will make it their priority?** Often, we begin alone with an idea. The idea needs friends. Before a launch, recruit those who will make accomplishing the goal a top priority. As we built towards the purchase of a new Tyndale campus we needed a few to put this project at the top of their priorities. Two said they would give five million dollars; a few more invested three million; and others came in at two million and one million. By so doing, they signaled to others that this was a serious priority, an encouragement for others to do the same.

Learn to appreciate the connection between what catches your attention and what you are gifted to do. For it is out of our hearing that we can discern the calling.



## PRINCIPLE 2

### Recognize Opportunity in Chaos

Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.

—Jonathan Swift

Hearing listens. Seeing takes in the possible. Hearing identifies ability. Seeing sees the here, the now, and beyond into the “what ifs.” Vision breaks us out from seeing what is expected, moving us from *what is* to *what may be*.

In *Visioneering: God’s Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Personal Vision*, Andy Stanley quoted Benjamin Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. It struck a chord with me:

Goals can be engaging—when you win. But a vision is more powerful than a goal. A vision is enlivening, it’s spirit-giving. It’s the guiding force behind all great human endeavors. Vision is about shared energy, a sense of awe, a sense of possibility.

In Principle #1 I briefly discussed the difference between *vision* and *dreams*. Let me explore that a little further.

A dream is often fantasy, a fabrication of self-interest and wishes, driven by mixed motivations—altruistic, romantic, materialistic. A dream is like a cut flower—it blooms for a moment, then wilts and dies.

Vision captures and drives life; it is rooted in the soil of ongoing life. It may include fantasy. It may lead one to dabble in unrealistic plans. But it takes hold of lives, ambitions, resources, and energies. A vision is like a garden bulb—with careful planting, and given time, it grows and blooms.

Visions make a difference. What would the world be like if British parliamentarian William Wilberforce had not devoted his life to bringing down the slave trade? For years his motions were repeatedly defeated by the British Parliament. Finally, just days before he died, the bill passed, and slavery was declared illegal.

Would the worldwide growth of Christian evangelism in the last half of the twentieth century have been as strong without the vision of a Toronto pastor? In 1948, Oswald J. Smith, from The Peoples Church, spoke to young leaders at a conference in Beatenberg, Switzerland. World War II was over; Europe was devastated, both economically and spiritually; and tens of

thousands of young men and women were returning home, hardened by horrors and the stress of war. Would the gospel have anything to say to them in rebuilding the world?

These young visionaries included Billy Graham, evangelist; Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision; Bob Evans, founder of Greater Europe Mission; Dawson Trottman, founder of the Navigators; Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU); Harold Ockenga, founder of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

In meeting after meeting, Smith asked this troubling question: “Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once?” This simple, overarching call, a heartfelt vision birthed in the life of a missionary pastor, became the rallying cry of a new generation.

As Nehemiah listened to his brother unravel the tragic story of his homeland, he discerned what disaster faced his ancestral city and jewel of the region, Jerusalem. Why did that concern him? His obligations, surely, were to his present home. Sometimes there is no logical reason why a vision captures a person at a particular moment. We are driven by complex factors: family and genes, peers and society. But we are also inhabited by the Spirit. When a moment of surprise comes and your heart is “strangely moved,” take note.

Nehemiah did. And returned to Jerusalem.

## What is vision?

Vision stirs your passion, creating interest and concern, generating feelings or thoughts that emerge in your consciousness at unlikely moments.

**Vision is a natural gift.** The human personality remarkably links passion to natural abilities. Vision flows from our natural gifts: we envision what we can do.

That was true of Nehemiah. Being a cupbearer to the king was not like being a waiter. Kings under threat had to be careful, as servants or cooks were often bribed to poison them. The cupbearer guarded against this, even tasting the king’s wine and food. Only the most trustworthy was chosen as cupbearer, often becoming a king’s confidante. Nehemiah’s status and influence rose with his ability and skill, giving him opportunity and influence to ask for the king’s help.

Though vision is a gift, it is also cultivated. Envisioning is an attitude that inclines one to defer to vision in shaping conversations and plans. It is a way of life. Visionaries don’t suddenly have a vision. It is an art, a craft, needing to be nurtured.

**Vision is service.** Vision catches our attention, calling us to give our lives in service. Protecting the Jews' center of worship was a big enough challenge to draw Nehemiah away from comfort and prestige.

In Westminster Abbey you'll see on William Wilberforce's tomb this epitaph:

In an age and country fertile in great and good men,  
He was among the foremost of  
those who fixed the character of  
their times; because to high and  
various talents, to warm  
benevolence and to universal  
candour, he added the abiding  
eloquence of a Christian life.

On July 26, 1833, shortly before Wilberforce died, the British House of Commons passed the bill abolishing slavery, the bill he had given his life to.

Why was it that he "fixed" the character of his times by vision? His eloquence enabled him to humor, cajole, and pressure fellow MPs to consider the issue. Without vision, his eloquence might have been used for other good and honorable causes, but none likely as world changing as abolishing slavery.

**Vision rises from within.** Leaders are not so much zapped by vision from outside as they receive it from within—through ideas, feelings, observations, and instinct. I become aware of vision in a particular way: feeling excitement. I want to start planning, asking people to test the validity of an idea and inspiring others to help construct a plan and implement the process.

In my early days with the EFC, I wrestled with the nature of Christian faith and its place within government and public life. Little material was available, so I wrote my own, designed to help explain what it means to be an evangelical and what the Scriptures call us to as public witnesses. Out of that emerging vision, came a seminar, given in some 200 Canadian communities, which in time became the basis for developing a national membership and eventually a funding foundation for the mission.

**Vision is developed.** Vision may come as an epiphany or word spoken as God breaks through the clutter of your search, providing insight or a compelling idea. It may take months or years of incubation. The first generation will go through many modifications over days, months, or years, influenced by conversations, articles, and books as it matures.

An idea is a thesis, a proposal, a concept that has shape, design, meaning, subject and predicate. Its substance allows one to think about it, argue, debate, pulling it that way and this.

As an idea matures, as the environment changes, so do we. Earlier motivations, which may have had more to do with a desire to strike it successful somewhere, are squeezed into a heart that is now more driven by the needs of those our vision will serve.

**Vision is born of pain.** Vision can also rise from heartache and sorrow, the ashes of humiliation of personal failure, or the heartlessness of others. It may come from natural disaster or human-manufactured war. It may be born out of organizational debacle, personal insecurity, the fire of oppression and persecution, or long and lonely nights of personal travail. It comes from as many places as we live, and from as many places as our hearts find a resting spot.

**Vision is at times, created in chaos.** Visions are often born out of crisis. The news of Jerusalem's vulnerability was sufficiently sad that Nehemiah listened. Often, we simply miss the story because life is going fine. But catastrophe presses us to listen.

If Tyndale had not been in meltdown, would it have attracted my attention? When asked to help, I asked historian Dr. George Rawlyk of Queen's University what the loss of Tyndale would mean to the evangelical community in Canada. He said there was nothing else in Canadian church history that could match such potential loss. That got my attention.

Vision stirs us to do something. It connects to our natural gifts, taking hold of our attention with a heart to serve others. Though outside influences affect the way we see life, vision bubbles from within, triggered by a word, experience, newscast, personal tragedy, humility or sorrow, a picture, or for me, stories from the Bible.

As hard as it may be to pinpoint how vision surfaces in life, we can see what vision will do—for ourselves as individuals, for those we work with, and for the project or mission at hand.

## **What does vision do?**

**Vision lifts hearts.** In the darkest moments, vision calls us to think grander and more important thoughts. Hope creates the environment in which we think and act. When people and organizations are broken and dysfunctional, they languish. Self-doubt and other-inflicted wounds, if allowed to fester, will undermine and diminish any positive notion.



I had stepped from the national stage of debating issues, of meeting with political, social, and religious leaders, to running a nine-acre property. I had moved from engaging on the major matters of the day to managing schools. My world had shrunk. My sense of meaning to the national church diminished. Yet I never doubted I was where I had been called to serve.

For vision to rule, personal subordination is required. What do you do when what you are called to do, cuts across your life's agenda? You work at consciously setting aside what matters to you personally. It is good to live to a higher purpose than your own. Soldiers do it. We can too.

**Vision motivates others.** Vision does what nothing else can do: lift people into a zone of enthusiasm and personal commitment. As Nehemiah's vision became their vision, those who followed Nehemiah were empowered. In a complex world, where we get lost in the dreariness of daily living, purpose—which vision can bring—fills a person with meaning. And from that inner motivation people more enthusiastically select what is important in the use of their resources and time. Vision brings together resources, making the many together much more powerful than the many apart.

Vision can be understood by story. Frame your vision by describing what was, what is, and what will be. A story helps people remember the idea and gives a framework in which to tell of vision.

**Vision establishes priorities.** Mike Shanahan, former coach of the Denver Broncos football team, once said, "If you don't have the Vince Lombardi trophy, everything else is a paperweight."

As much as many professional football players may be hugely compensated by money and status, winning the Super Bowl sets priorities. Such a compelling vision sees players through the rough and hard moments of a bruising career.

Assembling your daily schedule around what matters will make an enormous difference. Review your schedule for the past month. How much time was given to what you really want to accomplish? Put your vision in front of you. Make it what you first see at the beginning of the day. Diversionary claptrap—as vital as it appears to be—can push vision from first place in your schedule, and "stuff" will become your trophy, with vision demoted to being the paperweight.

We endanger our people and organizations if we don't regularly remind each other of vision.

**Vision amalgamates resources.** As demoralized as were the ragtag Jews in Jerusalem, as soon as Nehemiah told them of his vision, they said, "Let us

start rebuilding.” The many tributaries of abilities and interests flowed into a single river, pulsating with drive, care, and ability. Vision has a way of doing that.

Try asking staff independently, “What is our vision?” Can each describe it with reasonable accuracy? Also, attitudes, work habits, customer relations, and profitability will let you know if a common vision is gripping the organization. Before you hire consultants to sniff around the organization, look at vision.

**Vision matures the leader.** Vision matures us, pushing us to consider new ideas. Over time we figure out the difference between hype and substance. I’ve hurt myself and others by getting excited about an idea and moving too quickly, without proper evaluation and a careful work plan. But this too is how we learn. Success never comes without failure. My youthful vision of launching a national preaching mission failed, but in making the attempt I learned better to screen ideas and find what is primary.

**Vision creates focus.** In *The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham*, Harold Myra quotes Fred Smith speaking of Graham’s critics: “Sometimes if a racehorse pays too much attention to a horsefly, it makes the fly too important. Some people’s only taste of success is the bite they take out of someone whom they perceive is doing more than they are.”

Nehemiah faced a barrage of critics. Those in opposition had a lot to lose. They were fighting for their economic existence.

The sting of fair criticism smarts. Vision doesn’t eliminate the hurt of criticism, but it helps us focus. There are times when we wrestle through sleepless nights, replaying tapes of our defense, edited and refined through multiple times of replaying.

But when criticism is unfair, undeserved, or inaccurate, what then? Smith warns us not to give it more credence than it deserves. His picture is compelling: a horse coming down the last quarter mile, fussing about a fly!

**Vision lines us up with what else is going on.** Vision does focus attention, but in so doing, it can blind us to a better way. The apostle Paul and his associates set out to visit churches in Asia Minor (Turkey). But everywhere they went, “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:7). Paul didn’t realize his plans weren’t lining up with the Spirit’s agenda, which was—as we now see it—to make the geo/political leap from Asia into Europe. Paul was stuck in Asia Minor, not seeing the enormous harvest field of Europe.

In a night vision Paul heard a voice from Macedonia in Europe, calling him to come and help. This brought him in line with what else was going on. Unwittingly, Paul was being influenced to bring his vision in line with a grander plan. This wasn't a modest reorganization of their plans. It was a massive leap; and from that the gospel spread through the West and the world.

## What does it take to fulfill a vision?

**Let's define it:** Fulfilling a vision takes more than a fuzzy dream. Nehemiah rode through the ruins of Jerusalem, calculating what the vision required. He needed firsthand knowledge of the situation. As deeply moved as he had been when his brother first told him of the dismal state of his beloved city, and as passionate as he had been in describing the predicament to his king, it was now time to define the problem and outline a solution.

**Test it.** Give an idea time to mature; test its workability. Nehemiah didn't pray that someone else would do it; he evaluated the problem, reviewed what was needed, and tested it with those he trusted.

Eric Hoffer, a longshoreman on the California docks with next to no formal education, spoke sanity into my generation of the '60s and '70s. He saw past the arrogance of many leaders of his day and wrote in *The True Believer*, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." The "learned"—Hoffer speaks with tongue in cheek—merely think they are.

He knew that learners learn with an attitude of humility: there is so much more for me to know.

There are two kinds of "learned" leaders, those who are insecure but want their team to believe that they know it all, and those who don't know that they don't know. The latter assume that their ideas are right, best, and doable. A powerful vision can be dangerous. If we understand that what we lead people into doing has impact for either good or bad, we will be aware of the responsibility and risks that go with it. A secure leader is willing to test an idea against a critique to examine value, timing, and resources.

**Confirm it.** "Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be," comments Andy Stanley.

Seeking confirmation isn't about camouflaging insecurity. It is finding someone you trust who, with wisdom and prudence, offers support. Now

and then we need someone to sit in the applause section, especially in the tough times when we wonder if the idea was crazy at best.

We live in the tension of *what is* and *what could be*. Leaders push out from the shore, refusing to sail in shallow waters. And there is the risk. We need confidants—those who will look into our eyes and, with love and care, speak words of support.

Mel and Marion Sylvester were those for me. As we rebuilt the EFC, we had no money and no plan. Yet as chair of the EFC and as friends, they openly affirmed what we were doing. Their love was evident, made sure by their confidence. In the first few years of start-up, I knew they believed, and for me that was enough.

**It takes hard work.** Recall the minister who stopped by a parishioner's farm. Looking over the meticulously cared for field, he commented, "Isn't God's creation beautiful?"

"Yeah, I suppose," the farmer grunted, "but you should have seen it when he had it all to himself."

The gifting of God is not automatic. We've all seen tragic failures of people who were gifted yet by poor choices, crippling life experiences, or laziness frittered away their lives, leaving their skills tossed aside, lost in their struggles.

Vision is not a half-baked idea that you ask God to bless; it's what has been defined, something worthy of sacrifice. If it is half-baked, then wait. Let it first emerge as workable and saleable. Launching too soon can ruin what might otherwise be a treasure.

**It calls for moral conviction.** Christians called to lead, whether in making widgets or doing Bible translation, discover convictions in biblical values. Believing they have been called to serve, they want to be accountable for what they do and how they do it.

**Vision takes us beyond ourselves.** As I viewed a Hubble image of a far-off constellation, it reminded me that too often I live within narrow plans, oblivious to God's wider world. Susceptible to forgetting that our life is part of a greater world, we are in danger of speaking appropriate platitudes, operating organizational machinery, and doing our best to predict need and resources without being aware of the Spirit, his interests, connections, agenda, and timing.

**Nothing happens without passion.** It's not that there is only one thing in which we invest passion. Passion is both a signal as to one's gifts and a ba-

rometer of how much the vision matters. If there is little passion, or if it has diminished, be warned.

This affects everyone in the organization. If people lack passion, it is likely their work will be done poorly, it may take too long to get done, suffering from a lack of pride, and be marginal in quality. Passion is a make-or-break factor. Raise that to leadership level and its impact is multiplied.

Skills, abilities, and energy all matter to what I do. Over some four decades of leading, I've grown in knowledge and know-how, but the hardest lesson has been that when passion is missing, 95 percent of who I am isn't there. It's as clear a test on one's calling as I can find.

**Humility is foundational.** Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu at age 18 knew her life would be different. At 38, she founded the Missionaries of Charity. For another 20 years she worked in obscurity. We know her as Mother Teresa. She died the same day Princess Diana died. A columnist noted, "Princess Di touched the poor, Mother Teresa took them home."

No one in our generation defined Christian love as she did. Mention her name, and images of care and compassion surface. What we forget is that she spent years in drudgery and obscurity before her name and work blazed across the world. The service that had its impact later was refined in years of obscurity. (That is not a promise that what we do in obscurity will inevitably find its way to a Nobel prize.)

The validation of our calling and value of our work may never surface. William Carey's forty years of missionary labor with one convert was not the measurement of his calling or effectiveness.

**Sacrifice wraps up these eight ingredients needed to fulfill a vision.** During the rise of Hitler and the increased oppression of the church in Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor and theologian, traveled to America to study. But he soon decided it was wrong. Eberhard Bethge, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Eine Biographie*, quotes from a letter that Bonhoeffer wrote to his mentor and professor Reinhold Niebuhr:

I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security.

He returned to Germany and in 1945 was killed. His letters and papers written while in prison continue to speak to generations long after his death.

## **What is the value of vision?**

Vision is a priceless treasure; care for it. Of the billions of ideas dreamed, yours or mine is but one. Does it matter? Will it make a difference? We don't know at first. In a sense it is like with children. In our hopes for our children, we can't predict what they may become. But we won't take a chance. Even though they are among billions of other humans, that they are ours means we have responsibility. We will do everything to ensure they have the best opportunities. Each one is priceless.

Vision is a great gift, not to be squandered. The managing of vision depends on many factors, one of which is how we steward the vision. Do we give it sufficient time? Do we provide adequate investment of resources? Second-generation wealth too often finds itself in the hands of children who squander it. It has come too easy. They may have grown up with a sense of entitlement. Likewise, if you have been blessed with a rich experience of family and faith, don't assume that will naturally lead you into successful ministry or leadership. Entitlement is not part of the biblical vocabulary. Nurture your vision. Build it carefully, knowing that what you invest in it will, in part, predict the result.

When is vision substantive and when is it transitory or diversionary? Here are questions to ask as you evaluate your growing vision.

1. Is it consistent with what I've been learning?
2. Is it consistent with who I am?
3. Does it seem right?
4. Does it seem impossible or just difficult, and do I know the difference?
5. Have I given it time?
6. What do my closest advisors/friends say?
7. Is it an excuse to get out of where I currently am?
8. Is it something for which I have passion?
9. Can we do a trial run to test it?

Vision gives life and energy. Seeing beyond what is, to what may be, fuels passion. Like a specimen in a petri dish, ideas, when nurtured, may lead to extraordinary possibilities and discoveries.

## PRINCIPLE 3

### Exercise Your Faith

You must at some point take a “leap of faith” toward the emerging model of what it means to truly lead and away from the need to be successful, famous, rich, in control, or powerful. The kind of leadership I am advocating is out of the understanding of pain, the loss of innocence, the love of others, the larger purpose, the pursuit of wisdom, the honor of life. Ask yourself if you are willing to take the risk.

—J. Hagberg

*Real Power: Stages of Personal Power in Organizations*

Let’s review our first two principles: Hearing, connects your gift of leadership to opportunity. You hear what others miss because your gifting is tuned in to hear that which is linked to an opportunity because it lines up with your innate and honed skills.

Envisioning defines opportunity, to you and others. This follows from being able to hear that which is consistent with and flows from your gifting. Which in turn prompts us to see that which flows from our gifting.

**The third principle:** Faith actualizes opportunities, moving from hearing and seeing to reality.

### Meaning of faith

We tend to use *faith* loosely. Someone asks, “What is your faith?” meaning, “What is your religion?” Or one may say, “I have faith that the Dow Jones stock index will hit ....”

In its various uses, *faith* is often used interchangeably with *hope* and *belief*. Here, I speak about faith as something quite different, all the while closely linked to hope and belief. Here, in speaking of “faith” I take the Hebrews’ passage, reinforced by biblical stories, recognizing the word can be used in other more general ways. For us, in this conversation, I’d like to see faith as an expression of the will, that which we do in our trusting relationship with Christ.

Here I want to make a distinction: hope is of the heart, an emotional construct of life and the world, the wide canvas on which we sketch our landscape. It is our paradigm or emotional context of daily life. When a

friend dies, hope provides framing death for where it is in the overall scheme of life, for our hope in Christ tells of the great story of the past, present, and future. In sorrow, I hope. The heart-breaking moment of saying “goodbye” is softened by the deep assurance fueled by hope of a coming “hello”. Life is seen through the time frame of hope, with a built-in capacity to look beyond the immediate and the now into a universe defined more broadly than our planet, and a mode of living more diverse than our molecular definitions.

Whether hope is wise or foolish is determined by the object of one’s hope. Hope in and of itself is not necessarily good. Wrongly placed, it can be destructive. It depends on what one places one’s hope in. Those who followed Jim Jones to Georgetown, Guyana, had hope, but a hope badly misplaced.

Belief is not hope. Belief is of the mind: what I deem to be true. It is cognitive. It may begin with or be shaped by hope, but belief is what we describe. Though believing is personal and emotional, belief can be defined. In a sense, it is objective; it can be written, debated, and edited.

Faith is not hope (of the heart) or belief (of the mind) but action (of the will). Faith is what we do. “I have faith in God” may mean many things. The person may be saying,

- I believe God exists.
- I will go to heaven because of God.
- I’m not an agnostic or atheist.

However, faith is something substantially different.

As we explore faith and its central value in leading, let me tell you how this understanding of faith became critical in the rescue of Tyndale. When I agreed to give leadership to rebuild its broken walls, a powerful Old Testament story was pivotal, and over time became a source of comfort and encouragement.

*As I was considering taking on the Tyndale challenge, Lynn Smith, dean of students said, “Brian, this morning Roger and I, in our devotions, read Joshua 3.”*

*It tells the story of the new young leader, Joshua. Moses had died, and after forty years of wandering in the Sinai Peninsula, the Israelites wanted to possess the land. They pushed Joshua, who in turn asked of the Lord. The instructions were that as the priests walked into the Jordan River, the Lord would stop the water and the people could walk across on dry ground.*

*Lynn concluded with this question: “Brian, would you be our priest and walk into the water?” (Now how could a Pentecostal minister’s son turn down such a request?)*



This story became the operating picture time after time during the coming years. My decision to accept the challenge was not based on knowing how we would get “there;” it was Lynn’s spiritual overture that triggered in me the gift of faith.

I discovered I did not need a detailed job description and the promise of remuneration and sabbaticals. I soon learned that such opportunities don’t always begin with a clear roadmap. Most likely the terrain hasn’t even been scouted and for sure, roads haven’t been mapped. What may be needed is a compass.

My learning about leadership matured as I understood that faith is central to leading. I had been raised in a church world where faith in God’s interaction in life was a frequent topic on preachers’ calendars. Added to that, inclined in risk taking, I assumed that leadership and faith were in cahoots, naturally linked. Even so I missed faith’s operational essence.

The writer of Hebrews nuances its meaning in chapter 11. The King James Version gives it color: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Faith requires that what I ask for be considered substantive even though it is not yet: it is what I see as the coming reality. It isn’t pretense, neither is it a foolish stunt to bolster belief.

Faith is also evidentiary, to use courtroom language. Faith reverses the usual pattern in which evidence proves what happened. Jurisprudence is based on evidence of what took place. Instead, here, the writer uses it to point to what is on the way. Faith comes at it from the other side. It looks forward and offers evidence now of something coming to pass later.

Hold that thought. Now let’s see how the New Testament text unfolds faith by way of a list of historical examples in Hebrews 11. As the writer develops examples of faith, he drops in an extraordinary bit of advice: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Are you sure? Can’t I please God by being good? By being holy and circumspect? Or by giving my life in service to others? The writer is telling us that there is something about faith that pleases God. What might that be? *Faith is risking, knowing that without the help of the Lord I’ll fail.*

Faith is action, counting on the Lord to be there. In this text, those who are pointed out are chosen because of their *acts of faith*. Faith is an act of the will. It is what we choose to do. And in choosing we trust in the enablement of God.

This risk-taking choice is not foolhardiness but based on understanding the task, the importance of the enterprise, and the need to move forward.

Faith is founded on what one believes while hope provides the wider narrative in which all three are identified and described. We have the biblical text, with its varieties and combinations, which weaves that story in many ways and with many examples.

Abraham had a construct of belief in place. When the call came, he already believed in God. His choice to move out from home—where to, he had no idea—was an act of faith based on belief.

Nehemiah knew where Jerusalem was located. He needed no road map. However, he had no assurance that, even if he got favor from the king and resources for the rebuilding, success would result. He risked, making of the king a request that set-in motion a series of events ending in protecting Jerusalem.

Anne Lamott writes, “The opposite of faith is not doubt but certainty.”

How counterintuitive! To have faith, shouldn't I be certain? Shouldn't people of faith be sure of what they do, where they lead, where or what they plant? And isn't fear the opposite? And by extension, isn't to be fearful to be faithless?

The Scriptures shape the meaning of *faith*: to have faith in God is to trust in him without assuming we have options. Christians put their lives, their totality, into trusting that what he promises and who he claims to be is true. What if it isn't? What if he isn't? Then we've got nowhere to turn. If God doesn't show up, we're sunk. If I'm certain, I don't need to exercise faith. Frankly, much of what we do could be done by someone who doesn't believe in God.

The term *faith*, worn thin by careless usage and trite claims, loses its wonder and power. Look again at Joshua. When he bumped up against the Jordan, pushed by tired Israelites who wanted access to the Promised Land, he asked of the Lord, “What am I to do?” “When the feet of the priests touch the water, I'll stop it,” was the reply. Joshua might have said, “Interesting. But I have another idea. You stop the water and then we'll walk across.”

Faith is what we do. It's being vulnerable enough to trust. It means we proceed without a plan B. Too often we assume we're living by faith, but just in case, we'll build a bridge or two. Certainty is good. Faith is different. It's the opposite: to have faith is to operate in a zone that casts us beyond what we are sure of. Faith is the exercise of the will to do that which requires God's help to succeed.

## Importance of faith

To you, as leader, faith matters. It is a powerful force in leading. It is an indispensable tool that brings plans, organization, resources, and commu-

nity to life. It is true partnership, and when those you lead see you humbly trusting the provision of the Lord, it heightens their awareness that they too need to walk by faith. Here is what faith does.

**Faith characterizes leadership.** In my experience people gifted to lead usually exercise faith. This is not to say that good leaders must by nature be risk takers. But the exercise of faith does help identify people who, by their gifts, are willing to move beyond the status quo and explore new and difficult fields. In recruiting personnel for positions in which leadership, as distinguished from management, is needed, I look for candidates who have the emotional capacity to move outside of the habitual and explore new avenues.

Faith brings God into play. Risk-taking is not only for people of Christian faith. However, it is important to note that for a Christian the role of belief—in that I trust in the provision and presence of God—is critical. Faith is taking action on that belief, and that brings God into play. Would the water have parted if the priests had not entered the Jordan? As much as they believed God would or could have stopped the river flow, without their action of faith it is safe to assume the water would not have parted.

I return to my earlier question: why is it that *without faith it is impossible to please God*?

Leading is more than a nod of the head to what we believe but lives with an interfacing with him in all we do. And not surprising, as God's children, we please him by living with an underlying assumption that we need him in all we do. In that sense, we please God as our faith brings us together in ways beyond simply an assent to a belief. It is one thing to say, "Yes, I believe you will help me"; it is something else to say, "I won't make it without your help."

There is a thrill in going beyond what most see as doable, energized by the uncertainty of the initiative, calling for determined and creative efforts. Taking risks and experiencing faith are naturally linked. But there is a downside.

My weakness was to construct plan B, so if God didn't show up, I'd still succeed. I conditioned my activity to make sure that the goal was reached. That is not faith. Faith is risking but with an understanding that partnership with God is essential. I don't go it alone. Faith isn't what I feel or believe. It is what I will to do trusting in his help and provision.

**Faith transforms us.** We look to leaders to inspire us with their great ideas. We may grumble about aspects of their personality, but we need their vi-

sion and energy to help us see the bigger picture and to remind us of where we are going and what really matters.

What about the leaders? Where do they get inspiration to create the grander design, and where do they derive energy to fuel those they lead?

Faith is not a single act. It is the Spirit's work in personal transformation. Though an essential "muscle," faith isn't given to us to make us better leaders. It is a door through which we enter to live in a closer and more participatory relationship with the Trinity.

**Faith transforms others.** The exercise of faith extends into transforming others. It isn't a solo performance. It is not for myself, nor is it for a limited benefit. As much as Abraham and Sarah may have wanted a child to fulfill their own desires, the birth of Isaac set in place the beginning of a race in which would be birthed the light of the world. Faith sees beyond self. It sees our partnership with God as a means of spreading life to those we lead.

**It models vision casting.** Knowing that our lives operate within the space of God's care gives permission for leadership to press the boundaries, even of credulity. In short, because our visions are not just our own ideas limited by our capacity, they embody greater possibilities.

**It moves us from security into new territory.** Inertia keeps us from exploring beyond where we are and is a kind of "unfaith," a predisposition to remain in our securities.

Abraham left the leading-edge culture of his day. Leaving his home was more than saying goodbye to family; it was putting behind him a world of scientific advances, including the invention of cuneiform, a means of keeping records permanent, an enormous cultural shift and a major force in the transformation of civilization.

When I picked up the few files of the EFC and started on a journey that eventually led to publishing a magazine, launching a national voice on vital issues, hosting a weekly national television program, and opening a national office in Ottawa, I began with a simple decision to invest my future and the security of our family in an idea outside of my life experience. I had learned how to create and manage youth ministry, but this was different. So, I started a national magazine. I had just published my first book, which was a kind of journalism 101 course. I had to learn. Again, you are amazed what other doors open when you take a risk. It isn't that there are too few worlds to conquer; it's that too many people stay locked into their current world, unwilling to open that first door.

**Faith prepares leaders for the next stage.** Doing is essential to learning. We learn by frequently flexing our faith. As we do, moving forward becomes less frightening. Martin Luther King gave his great Washington speech after years of testing his faith in marches, prisons, and in the face of those determined to destroy his vision. Abraham accepted the unbelievable call to sacrifice his son after decades of walking with this God he had come to trust. One stage leads to the next, but without risk-taking today you won't be ready for the next.

**It facilitates our interaction with God.** Earlier, I noted that faith, as an activity, brings God into play in one's life. Here let's take it a step further. Faith not only is interaction, but it also perpetuates interaction: the exercise of faith stimulates the desire to continue in faith. Leading without faith becomes drab, boring, and lifeless. Leaders can easily drift, losing the interface with God who we can't see. It isn't long, then, before we are off doing our own thing, in our way, in our strength, in our time. Faith draws us back. Putting ourselves into places where faith is the only means of moving forward, we are renewed.

**Faith creates new realities.** Faith makes something out of what wasn't there. It creates. Bringing together people, resources, and ideas, faith synergistically combines ingredients to bring about something new or renewed. God's creation isn't a world ruled by a zero-sum equation. There is no limit on ideas. Resources given to one doesn't mean there are fewer resources for another.

## How faith works

Getting to know what faith means helps one to see faith as a critical aspect of the journey. To help further identify the nature and importance of faith in leading, let's view the actions of Nehemiah.

**Faith is an action.** It is what we do. Nehemiah learned about the state of his homeland, the frightful vulnerability of the Temple, and the embarrassment this was to his people. His story pivots around his request to the king for time and assistance in the rebuilding. It was a major risk-taking moment. The king might have suspected treachery. Nehemiah, as cupbearer, was counted on as the final person the king trusted. Crafty and always observant, the king lived by his ability to observe and discern. So, when he saw something bothering this trusted servant, it would not have been far down his list to ask himself if Nehemiah was up to no good. In that moment

Nehemiah acted in faith. He risked everything by trusting that the God he had spent time with was with him as he acted.

**It works on our inner convictions.** The very activity of faith usually includes our emotions. Nehemiah had passion about the well-being of his home and people, and their strategic importance within the economy of God so that when notified of their struggles, he knew what to do. Faith is a natural extension of that inner life.

**Faith rests on a history of learning to trust in God.** Faith doesn't come out of nowhere. It is built on a history of trusting God. Nehemiah wasn't a novice when he made the daring move before the king. His life had been tutored in a theology and experience with people that gave him a repository of understanding.

**We learn about faith from others.** Nehemiah had a long list of patriarchs from whom he drew stories of faith. From stories often retold by his people, he recited their acts of faith. He saw the effects on the Jewish tribes, both when leaders failed and when they were heroic. He had patterns that stood him in good stead in the moment when it was his turn to exercise faith.

**It is rooted in biblical knowledge.** Faith rises out of a heart sufficiently rooted in the biblical text. Faith as a constituent in the wide range of human activities is not limited to people of biblical faith. It is an activity that moves people into risk-taking that is exercised by people of all faiths and of no faith. A skydiver has faith in the ability of the parachute to land him safely. The skydiver's faith in God has nothing to do with that faith (apart from faith in the laws of physics). Likewise, a businessperson investing in an enterprise takes a risk, exercising faith in the product or the people producing it.

There is a different dimension to faith rooted in belief in a God who is both creator and sustainer. This elevates activity to a different level. While one may rightly trust in a product, a system, or another person, the act of putting one's faith in God for interactivity is unique.

## Exercising faith

Where does one begin to exercise faith?

**Begin small.** As with any exercise, start carefully, and over time you will grow in endurance and strength. Our first ministry assignment landed me in financial duress, which forced me to think about faith as an element of

leadership. The learning was huge. But it taught me how to exercise faith within a plan and strategy.

**Align yourself with the Spirit.** If you are serious about moving out of the boundaries of your current world, pray what Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision, prayed: Lord, break my heart with the things that break your heart.

Such a prayer will make you vulnerable to God's concerns, putting yourself in line with the Spirit's agenda. Beware, such a prayer may lead you to places of risk and challenge.

**Exercise.** I'm not trivializing faith as if it were *only* a muscle of the will. Faith, in its origin and object, is found in God. We don't will ourselves. It is an activity of the Spirit through which we effect his enablement. Recall the progression of faith-building moments during the life of Moses. His first recorded act, killing an Egyptian, sent him scurrying into the hills. It was only after forty years of walking in a different world that he was trusted to approach Pharaoh. Despite his fear of personal incompetence, step by step he developed an understanding and accompanying ability to exercise faith on behalf of his people.

**Do your planning.** Faith is not isolated. It is a part of an overall plan. Developing a business plan is integral to exercising faith. Planning ensures that the exercise of faith fits within a wider vision and allows the accomplishments of faith to be supported and in turn contribute to an ongoing viable and worthwhile activity.

**Practice humility.** The inherent danger of God meeting us at the river of faith is that when it becomes public, that the exercise of faith produced a visible result, egos can become inflated. Praise is heaped on the person exercising faith rather than on the source and object of faith.

So, what does one do? Practice being humble. The biblical call is "Humble yourself" (James 4:10). Whether you feel humble is not the point. Our emotions ebb and flow, and often we have no understanding why. Humility, like faith, is what we exercise by the will. Is Billy Graham humble? I can't say whether he felt humble, but I do know that he acted with humility. And what we do filters back into what we are.

## Discerning faith

How do I discern whether the faith I am exercising is authentic or merely personal wishes? There are a few rules to use in discernment.

**Faith becomes a way of life.** First, exercising faith is not a single, once-in-a-lifetime event. It is a way of life. The incremental activity of faith makes it part of one's normal walk. It doesn't become an all-or-nothing moment. There may be times when the exercise of faith is larger than usual, but faith is a gift we get used to exercising.

**Faith aligns with Scripture.** Test the purpose of your act of faith with Scripture. See if it lines up with the Bible's ethical and moral criteria. If you are exercising faith for building a larger church to show others the rightness of your theology, that will make your "faith" suspect. If you are exercising faith so your company will grow larger so that you will need less to trust the Lord, I'd say that too is suspect.

**Faith bears scrutiny.** Test the situation of your faith with others. You may be reluctant to tell others about it, fearful they may poke holes in it. Faith with God's imprimatur deserves the light of day. If the plan is plausible as an exercise of faith, it can stand scrutiny. By so subjecting it to examination, you will build a stronger rationale.

**Faith fits into the wider view of life.** Though logic and human rationality can impede a faith-driven life they are indispensable gifts of creation. So, identify where the faith-driven portion fits within the wider scene. Make sure it won't simply become an appendage to the plan. Early in our rebuilding of the university, when Lily pointed out an adjoining 56 acres and said, "Brian, someday the Lord will give this to you," at the time it would have been ludicrous to have told anyone. It took time, first to get the college out of debt and then get university accreditation before we openly exercised faith to expand into a larger educational strategy for the training of those to serve the world for Christ.

**Faith sees the result.** Answer this question: What do I expect will be the outcomes and value of this exercise of faith? Project out to the end and visualize what it might accomplish and its value. For Nehemiah, the expected outcome was clear: finish the wall to protect the Temple. However, within the struggle of opposition, grumpy workers, and the heat and dust of the day, he would have to remind himself and others that what they were doing was a good thing. It would have value in the end.

Defining the end value before you begin helps to verify and validate the exercise. Getting there requires learning the nature of faith, an important part of the leadership process. Nehemiah understood that without God's interaction the idea had no chance of success.



## PRINCIPLE 4

### Discover the Value Proposition

You may be rebuilding a broken-down wall or constructing a new wall. In either case defining your value proposition—the core around which your enterprise operates—is vital in design and construction.

Nehemiah’s value proposition was, its critical we preserve the witness of God’s people. While the immediate need was to solve Jerusalem’s security problem by rebuilding the walls, the core value was their life of faith. Walls were needed to protect the value proposition.

*In 1983 I was invited to lead the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, a national Christian association of Protestant churches, denominations, and mission agencies. Formed in the mid 1960s, it had yet to develop into a viable organization. As I began, I was asked: “In fifteen words or less, describe your mission?”*

*I stumbled and fumbled. I didn’t know. There were many things I thought this national association could do. But I hadn’t landed on its value proposition. What was our reason for being? This is critical for any organization, but more so in this case because the popular perception of evangelicals in Canada was formed by images and caricatures beamed to us from south of the border.*

*Canadians are both blessed and plagued by many U.S. voices. Many a home is permanently tuned to U.S. news broadcasts.*

*So, I surveyed Canadian evangelicals on what they saw we needed in Canada. Overwhelmingly, responses identified the need for a Canadian voice. This led to us asking, how can we help Canadian evangelicals see that God’s agenda embraces our total country, including public life?*

*In time we identified this as our value proposition: **to be a voice for evangelicals**. That became our mantra, which included a calling to be articulate, to be thoughtful, to be Christlike, to be adequately educated, to be responsible and to mobilize our community by faith.*

*From then on, everything we did was measured against this value proposition.*

How do you go about learning your value proposition?

### Locate the essence

Try these steps:

Brainstorm with three groups, insiders—senior members of the organization, including regular donors; peripherals—those with a more casual acquaintance, including occasional donors; outsiders—those who may know about you but have no organizational or financial involvement.

In separate meetings, ask,

- What is the essence of our history?
- What do we do best?
- What do we not do well?
- What should we do that we aren't now doing?
- Who else is doing what we are doing?
- Are they doing it better, and if so, why?

Then allow for time to reflect on the responses, cataloging them for reference. The exact wording is important. Take time to get it right, doing edit after edit until it fits with mission and rings with clarity.

## **Trust the Spirit**

Management can too easily be carried out without regard to the life of the Spirit, for there is more going on than what we know, estimate, or expect.

As God guides us in moments of darkness and times of the unknown, the Spirit undertakes to support and fulfill the agenda we have agreed on in faith. He knows your vision and passion and where it will lead.

## **Dig beneath the clutter of short term goals**

In rebuilding and locating value, mission, and calling, I've seen how organizations get locked into short-term goals. As problems come their way, survival—defined by immediate goals—becomes the reoccurring theme. To keep from being stuck in a survival mode, begin with the question "How did we begin?"

Crosswinds are inevitable, even in the best of ministries. Leadership can't anticipate all disruptions but by regular times of reflection and examination, it will help you build you capacity in anticipating and recognizing approaching trouble, all the while keeping an eye on what you really want to accomplish.

## Be on the lookout for resistance

Nehemiah faced resistance from deniers, malcontents, fierce opponents, and gainsayers.

As you poke about, resistance you encounter may provide clues as to the importance of what you are doing. For Nehemiah, the outside resistance made it clear that protecting the Temple and the City of David posed a threat to the surrounding peoples, which made it clear why it needed protection. Opposition pointed the way.

See these three kinds of resistance.\*

**Psychodynamic resistance.** Life experiences inflict emotional hangovers and debilitating memories that may lead a person in the organization to oppose a given action or proposal. Childhood and young-adult experiences can generate conflict.

A number of us involved in Christian ministry (men only on this occasion) met for a three-day prayer summit, spending our time in reflective prayer, Bible reading, hymn singing, and interactive prayer.

Occasionally we placed a chair in the center and invited anyone to occupy it, confess a need, request a prayer, or be silent. One senior leader took the chair and told of a heartbreaking and dysfunctional relationship with his father. We listened, then gathered around in prayer. Soon another took the chair and told a similar story. Then another, who had never heard his father say how proud he was of his son. This went on all afternoon, with most of the thirty-five men openly describing lingering sorrow in life because of poor relationships with fathers.

Throughout life we accumulate experiences that shape us. Leaders aren't called on to be in-house therapists, but as we meet unfair and irresponsible resistance, we need to remember that there may be reasons for people's behavior that have little to do with the immediate situation.

**Systemic resistance.** Systems get stuck. People do too, believing their actions are best. People who are inwardly focused may be unaware that others also have valued opinions.

An organization can get into trouble when it is unduly constrained by groups who measure life by political correctness or the status quo, willing to pull most any lever to stop new thinking from having a say.

In rebuilding a widely respected nineteenth-century Bible college we first need to do a reassessment of its value proposition. The Bible college move-

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\* See Peter Koestenbaum's helpful book, *Overcoming Resistance*.

ment that began in the 1890s had served churches, missions, and service agencies well. But now seminaries were the prime place for training leaders for church and mission ministry. Many who attended Bible colleges did so for personal spiritual enrichment. But that changed as they wanted degrees which would transfer into university-based programs as their Bible college degrees had little currency outside of church related vocations. Building Christian universities helped solved those problems, providing spiritual nurturing along with degrees that allowed graduates to move into non-religious vocations. But there was pushback. People feared a liberalization of content and purpose.

Anticipating questions on why we would change, we drew lessons from other schools that had migrated to a Christian university focus, and we decided that the best way to resolve those concerns was to get out in front of the question and answer it with our value proposition. We told our community what we were doing, why it was important, and where it would lead. We did this at every opportunity—events, donor letters, banquets, graduation, church services, and pastoral and parent meetings.

**Existential resistance.** Some people who are resistant to a different worldview fear that another idea may be of more value than theirs. Anxiety sets in. Fueled by insecurity, their feelings can pressure an organization to become protective and isolationistic, out of touch and unaware.

Tinkering with an organization's purpose and structure may not be sufficient. Bringing in a new idea may not, of itself, bring a turnaround. At the heart is the need to change. The biblical term is *metanoia*, literally meaning new birth, or birth from above.

## Install the right kind of leadership

Even when you figure out your value proposition, without the right kind of leadership you won't get far. A crisis doesn't call for an "on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other-hand" kind of leader. It needs one who takes hold and moves with energy and determination.

In the crisis at Tyndale, we had sixty days before fall semester was to begin. Faculty and staff wondered whether they should look elsewhere for employment, and students were checking out what schools would accept transfer credits. I couldn't say, "Give me a few days and I'll get back to you." It was now or not at all.

Leaders make decisions. Theories of applied leadership, creative and helpful as they are, give way to determined and often intuitive initiatives in crunch times. In reading books on leadership, I invariably check the flyleaf to see if the author has ever led.

## Build on the essence

Finding the essence—the value proposition—of the organization is the beginning. Now begins leading the organization into what it might be.

**Nurture spiritual life.** As leader, you are the one to articulate spiritual understanding and expectations. If your skills are not in speaking, you may be inclined to delegate that to someone else. But don't delegate the responsibility of keeping spiritual matters in view. Leadership necessitates that you oversee the reading of the spiritual temperature of your people and keep the flame lit.

Humanitarian organizations face the danger of accommodating religious and political pressures while downplaying their spiritual roots. David Toycen, president of World Vision Canada, told me, "The leader is responsible to ensure the expression of Christian faith and to nurture staff." Part of his plan was chapel and a regular senior staff meetings for prayer. It gave senior staff the opportunity to help each other on their spiritual journeys. In addition, they set a full day apart for prayer, once a year.

The second level is the day-to-day routine. A Christian agency that doesn't have space in its schedule for devotional time will soon lose its spiritual base. As much as documents may proclaim an organization's spiritual heritage, without actual prayer, Bible reading, and devotionals, its spirituality will be on paper only.

How does a leader protect against spiritual drift? There are factors a leader can take into consideration in shoring up the spiritual life of the community.

**Make the right hires.** The proper screening of those we bring into leadership is the most important means of being foundational in faith.

When hiring, have applicants write out their understanding of the mission statement. Make it fundamental to the process of recruitment. Not only will this imprint on their minds its importance, but it will also bring those who are recruiting and evaluating face to face with what the organization claims to be—and who they are in relation to it.

**Renew your mission commitment.** Don't assume everyone catches or retains the central, driving mission. It needs yearly reinforcing, specific efforts to remind personnel what you are about. Make the mission statement part of the annual staff review. Ask for a one-page reflection on how a person's work during the past year assisted in meeting the organization's mission. In a staff retreat, break up into smaller groups and ask each group to

first identify ways the group is fulfilling the mission and then offer suggestions on how implementing it might be improved.

**Renew your spiritual core.** Resisting spiritual drift requires strategic activity. Regular activity is critical. Returning to the World Vision experience, this agency wrestles with issues of pluralism, human rights, and finding able staff from various religious communities. Even so, it continues to hold chapel, unapologetic in its Christian heart, theology, and passion.

Don't assume that because you are known as a Christian organization or church and operate with a Christian mission, the heart of Christ will continue to reside habitually in the operation. It takes careful nurturing and oversight.

**Continue to cultivate the vision.** What happens when you've lost the vision, when leading is drudgery, when the days begin with a gnawing fear that either you've been trapped into something that won't work or you've been asked to do what you aren't geared to do: in effect, you know the value proposition, but it no longer fuels you?

I have no reliable formula for how leaders might deal with boredom, fatigue, or burnout. But I have learned that the following may help.

- Find one or a small group of highly trusted friends.
- Find one part of your gifting that renews and refreshes you, and make sure that is a part of your schedule.
- Work your schedule. Don't fall into it. Think about what is needed, when and how often. If possible, have someone manage it for you, making appointments and inevitable changes. Keep your distance from the process. Decide who you need to see, when, and for what reason, and let someone else set it up.
- If your tendency is managerial, put into your schedule something creative that forces you to meet new demands, stretching you beyond the usual.
- There are, however, situations when leaving the ministry is best for all. And leaving earlier rather than later is generally better.

Lock into what is core to your vision before you take off in planning. In the next chapter I look at how your passion and vision needs planning. That, of course, presupposes that you have settled on the essence (value proposition) of your vision, and you have taken time to clearly identify that in as few words as possible.

## PRINCIPLE 5

### Link Your Passion with Planning

A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time.

—Annie Dillard

To a visionary, fueled by the possibility of faith in action, planning sounds almost like “unfaith,” as if thinking about the steps in achieving making the vision somewhat calculated.

#### Importance of strategic planning

Being able to see from 10,000 meters has its advantages. From there I’m able to describe the vision; what I see it being in five years. The story of what has been, what is, and what will be plays like a well-rehearsed concerto. Where I struggle is to move on to the next critical step of breaking that vision into plans and steps, showing how we get from here to there.

Leading ministries requires more than passion. Coordinating volunteers, protecting them from enemies, encouraging them to keep going in the face of danger requires passion. Hearts filled with a desire to see the project finished are essential to the strategy. But it takes more than that.

Important ideas will become reality when your plan is designed with steps to carry it out. The building of a major work takes years in the planning, as we learned from the Japanese: “It takes the Japanese ten years to plan and one year to implement; North Americans take one year to plan and ten years to implement.”

As passionate as you are, your vision and need for activity must not keep you from putting in place a strategic plan—or at least appointing someone (from within or from the outside) to help you.

A romantic read of Nehemiah overlooks the impact of his planning and forethought. Overcome by the force of his vision, we might ignore the deliberate and progressive ingredients of his planning and execution. Nehemiah had to convince the most powerful leader on earth to

buy into his idea. Such persuasion required him to have a plan. Notice what he identified and the steps he took:

1. He convinced the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem. His presentation would have been filled with passion and color. Vision played into the story he told. Even so, it was a careful step, located in a plan. This first step was necessary, for only then could he proceed to the next.
2. He worked out sufficient detail to persuade the king to provide financial support. Such a king wouldn't risk international conflict simply on a well-told story. The king needed to see that the project was doable, and that Nehemiah had sufficient understanding of what it took to get it done.
3. Nehemiah had the foresight to get letters of introduction for both safe passage and acquisition of building materials. Paperwork! The bane of visionaries. Great ideas described with great passion and conviction fall to the floor over a failure to do the groundwork. I know, for there have been too many such ideas in my life for me to ignore.
4. Then he made a deal with Asaph for lumber. It was possible because he had requested an introduction. Bluster wouldn't work. As powerful as Nehemiah was within his own regime, he understood politics. He knew the critical nature of having the king open the door. That took planning.
5. If Nehemiah had arrived in Jerusalem without the necessary resources, all the great speeches in the world would not have overcome the need for lumber. An estimate of what was needed allowed him to gather supplies so that when it was time to go to work, they had what was needed.
6. He needed authority, so he asked to be called "governor of Judah". This critical position gave him leverage to deal with a debilitating problem of the poor being charged high interest. His forethought kept him from being hemmed in by the social and political dynamics of the complex world of Jerusalem.
7. It took more than enthusiasm to get the Jerusalem Jews into action. They needed to be organized. Collecting people with passion for the project required plans.

## **What is strategic planning?**

Strategic planning is more than writing out a strategy and listing the ingredients required. It is first about thinking—thinking what is, what needs



to be, what can be done, and ways it can be accomplished. It starts with thinking about the bigger picture.

### **What is the value of a strategic plan?**

*It brings vision from 10,000 meters to ground level.*

Visionaries by nature visualize the project completed but might find it difficult to describe its elements. Calling on the visionary to be more specific presses him or her to unwrap the ideas with more specificity. It forces vision to be broken up into bite-sized chunks.

*It helps demonstrate the vision's workability and possibility.*

How many ideas find their way into reality? Inventors try and try and, after scores of attempts, see only a low percentage of ideas actually take off. Ministries that deal in the less-than-quantifiable world of spiritual well-being have greater difficulty in achieving concrete results than a business. That makes it even more important to work at identifying the plan.

*It shows where your weaknesses are and helps you see what is needed.*

Fearful of opposition, a visionary may believe there are no weaknesses or that identifying them will unravel the vision. The better an idea is refined, the greater the possibility of success.

*It engages others in thinking about what you envision and how to accomplish it.*

Visionaries tend to be proprietary with their ideas, protecting them within boundaries of their own interest. Planning presses them out of such limiting emotions and, by drawing in the community, improves and expands the idea.

*It identifies the important ingredients needed for fulfilling the project.*

Before Nehemiah set out for Jerusalem, his planning forced him to identify what was needed. That brought him face to face with the political dynamics of the region and prepared him for their inevitable impact on the project.

*It brings major parties into play, calling on their visions, gifts, and adaptability.*

In recruiting, help people visualize where they fit. A plan identifies the places that need to be filled. Most people know instinctively what they do best, but self-selection works only if the plan has sufficient details. Some stakeholders contribute financially, but for most people, time is the larger contribution. In a busy world of demands, participants will need to see

where their gifts and schedules fit into the vision. With a plan, the vision will more likely attract the needed skills.

*It lays out a schedule that motivates and disciplines those involved.*

In molding a team, a plan helps each one know what is expected.

*It monitors accountability.*

In working with volunteers, accountability becomes a serious part of compensation. It works this way: if the leader takes time to review the work of the volunteer, it is a clear message to the volunteer that his or her contribution is worth the leader's time. This heightens their sense of worth.

### **What does it take to complete a strategic plan?**

**Someone to take charge.** A strategic plan helps to ensure the success of an organization. When people see the value of the plan, they will instinctively promote its importance, subject themselves to its discipline, and serve the person who oversees it.

There is great value in assigning someone to oversee the development and implementation of a strategic plan. Recruit someone you trust to do what you can't do.

**Being adaptable.** Developing a strategic plan does not imply that the course ahead is fixed. Who can predict the next twelve months, let alone three or five years?

Assumptions of adaptability—willingness and ability to quickly shift gears and rework the plan—are innate to strategic planning. Adaptability calls for an examination of what is being done during the process, not just what has been done on completion. By avoiding the temptation to let the end justify the means, the means is given due consideration as critical in testing the value of the end.

### **Where does one begin?**

**Take time.** Allow for research, assessment, and planning before beginning. Make an environmental assessment of your organization and your world.

Bring together internal and external parties and brainstorm each category. Write lists on large sheets of paper and post them around the room. Then go back over the process to see what you've missed and what should be eliminated. This will give you a view of the environment and point out

aspects you possibly had not thought of. Allow this to gestate. A few weeks later, revisit the process to refine the lists and your understanding of the environment and project.

Above all, make everyone a part of the process. Give team members a sense of ownership as they better understand that their ideas matter.

Link into outside contributors. Get outside people to not only help you “think outside the box” but “live outside the box.”

As you begin, consider this framework for planning:

1. Research, reflect, and review the context of planning. Give yourself time to think about the world in which you live and serve. It is in constant change, requiring reflection on the nature, cause, and speed of change.
2. Review and reflect on your ethos, disposition, or characteristic spirit. We grow from our roots, a history that contributes to who we now are. Ask what your group assumes is true, good, and worthwhile out of that history.
3. Research for the process that best suits your needs. Formulas aren't sacred. Some people will have their pet schematics. Don't be trapped. Have a specialist help you look at your group and advise you.
4. Keep yourself, as leader, free to intellectually roam the ideas without having to own what is percolating or having to supervise the meetings. Find someone else to chair. Bring in an outsider who is professional enough to handle any discordant views that may surface.

Note that Nehemiah's goal was not to rebuild the walls but to renew the people of God. Rebuilding was a strategy.

Nehemiah's challenge was to help the Jewish people regain their place as God's light to the world. Rebuilding—as a strategy—served the goal, the bigger reality. We are tempted to make strategy a goal. If Nehemiah had seen rebuilding the wall as the goal, he would have lost sight of the other factors that flowed from the real goal: to renew the people of God in service and devotion.

### **Tyndale's strategic plan**

At Tyndale we had three objectives. First to survive—if the school had shut down that first summer, the likelihood of restarting was nil. We had sixty days to get it up and running for the fall semester. The second was to rec-

reate—this over-a-century-old college needed an overhaul. The third was to build sustainability.

Though the troubles of Tyndale were financial shortages, the underlying issue was how to manage what finances we had.

As a new team took hold, costs had to be curtailed and revenue increased. Through the first couple of years, we did mainly operational corrections just to get functioning. The redevelopment of the board was careful in establishing corporate authority and governance.

Even so, strategic issues were at the heart of our considerations. While we kept to the operational matters and let our community know what we were doing to fix the immediate issues, long were our conversations with the board, senior staff, faculty, and key donors on strategic matters.

## **What does strategic planning require?**

Strategic planning requires thinking. Think about what it is you are thinking about.

It is one thing to think about what needs to be done but another to think about what you are thinking of doing. You may imagine planting a new church or taking on a broken-down organization or starting a business. That is what you are thinking about. Now lift that to another level and ask, What am I thinking about as I go about doing?

Here are ten critical points to consider as you take time to think about what you are doing.\*

1. Leadership is about achieving results. Those in a church-related world are prone to couch “results” within spiritual metaphors that may end up in obscuring the leader’s role. Acting Christianly with a servant attitude is important, but don’t let it obscure your role in reaching objectives.
2. Leading is about influencing how people think. Linking activity with good habits and practice ingrains into people that which will serve them in difficult times.
3. Be willing to change. Allow the moment to infuse you with new ideas and press you to consider new models. Admit that some things are being done wrong or are no longer needed. Push past the status quo, past the human inclination to stay where you are, refusing the slippery slope of trying harder to do the same things you’ve done in the past.

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\* A helpful list by Peter Koestenbaum. See his book, *Leadership, New and Revised*.

4. Strengthen your understanding by teaching it to others. As you hear yourself teach it to others, it acts as a check and reinforcement. When we reflect on the “what” and “how” of our work, we become more conscious of what we do either reflectively or intuitively.
5. Learn by doing. “What they didn’t teach me at Harvard” wasn’t a putdown of their education or that of any other school. It simply was a reminder that our primary way of learning is by doing. Courses and books on leadership will help in framing the questions and advising what one might expect, but the place we do our best learning is in the laboratory of leading. Mistakes, fair game for us all, are essential in the learning process. This is not an excuse but an understanding that the critical lessons of life are discovered in the doing.
6. Learn to live with ambiguity. Much of life is lived in the gray zones. Though people need direction from their leader, within the group there will be varying points of view. People see things differently. Differing views may be valid and may be held by wise and trustworthy people. Hold them together like an orchestra, bringing various tones and parts into harmony.
7. Be faithful in nurturing the important areas of life: employment, family, self-development, spirituality, economic well-being. For example, be careful that in your focus on ministry and enterprise, your sense of self-giving doesn’t cloud family needs.
8. In the daily life of your ministry, build in teachable elements of what serving looks like. By so doing you add value to your staff and community.
9. Learn from other models and people. Trees grow naturally, but in our yard, they grow according to what my pruning allows. I determine how they will be shaped. They do the growing; I do the shaping. And I do so from what I see arborists do.
10. Expect that what you do will enhance those in the organization and community. Have it in your mind to say when you leave, “It is in better shape than when I came.” There will be days when a misadventure, a wrong word, or something over which you had no control will create a reversal, and you will despair of moving forward. Keep at it. Stay with the essentials.

Planning is to vision what wheels are to a motor. Gusto, power, and potential are essential to moving forward, but without wheels all you get is a roar.

The discipline of planning is a vital bridging of the opposites of vision and implementation. Your determination to do good strategic planning will not only enhance the vision but move it into reality. Think of it as your most important initiative as leader.

## PRINCIPLE 6

### Resource Development: A Litmus Test of Leadership

Let me make this point up front. I've found this to be a litmus test for leadership. Leaders instinctively learn how to recruit resources in accomplishing their mission. Those who don't, are reluctant to, or can't are outside of what I see as leading.

While that may sound tough, if you haven't figured out that building resources is central to your calling as leader, you may want to look at what's essential to leading. And if you are responsible for recruiting a leader and make an allowance for a candidate who has no inclination or willingness to care for resource development by rationalizing: "Well, I'm sure we'll get the needed financial support some other way," in my experience that is courting disaster.

For Nehemiah, resource development began in his first conversation with the king. No sooner had the king agreed, than Nehemiah asked,

"If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Tran-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" (Nehemiah 2:7, 8)

Don't separate vision from sustainability. If an undertaking is worth the start, it is worth the finish.

Money, a gift of God's creation, is integral to all of life. If leaders exclude resources in their equation, it is a sure sign something is wrong. Even so, organizations leave it on the bottom rung of requirements, rather than making it essential in the leader's skill set and within their priorities.

Let's learn from Nehemiah.

### The importance of giving

**Treasure follows the heart.** Money is a critical means by which humans interact, a fundamental ingredient without which societies would grind to a halt. Jesus spoke often about money, factoring it into the heart of his

calling. I saw this issue differently when I discovered that I had misunderstood a biblical insight.

Jesus:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21)

There it is. That last line: “For where your *treasure* is, there your *heart* will be also.” I assumed it meant, “For where your *heart* is, there your *treasure* will be also.”

I had inverted “heart” and “treasure” for good reason: my heart attracts my giving. When I’m emotionally moved, I give. Many organizations working with the poor, broken, and underprivileged play that heartstring well in fund-raising.

But that’s not what Jesus said. Though he didn’t say emotions are not a trigger point in giving, in this text, he spoke about ownership and investment. So, what was he saying? Giving, is the link to a person’s interest. Investment transforms the heart.

In devotions, I instinctively recall those we financially support. Giving to people, organizations, and missions compels our interest. For good reason: our investment locates our interest in wanting to know their needs, interests, and work. The gift secures our interest.

When you have given to a ministry, you are much more attentive to what they are doing than you are to others. In giving to the cancer society, you develop a better understanding of the disease, are more attentive to new discoveries, and are more inclined to sign up as a volunteer. Why? Your treasure secured your heart.

Regardless of the ministry or business one leads, your task includes engaging people with that enterprise. That means you as leader, having an integral part in the stewardship program, as giving pulls the donor’s interest into your mission and strategy.

Pastor, who are your most faithful members? Not surprising, those who give regularly. An important lesson to teach your people is the benefit of faithful giving. Wonder why congregants wander around from church to church? Music perhaps. Better youth resources as well. However, the hearts of those who give will be anchored, and the comings and goings of styles and worship music will be less likely to draw them away. Cynical and undisciplined people are less likely to be consistent in giving. Money links



our hearts to the cause, be it Jesus or cancer research. It is a life principle that crosses all boundaries.

**Gifts become levers of encouragement and acceleration.** Small and large gifts influence the well-being of the ministry. During the first summer of trying to right the Tyndale schools and get them opened for the fall, we came to the deadline of our donation drive to meet our immediate needs. We were short \$40,000. A lady walked in and, in halting English, asked to see someone about making a gift. She had received an inheritance from a relative in Hong Kong and chose to make a gift to Tyndale. On that last day of the campaign, a person led by the Spirit gave a gift of the exact amount needed. Imagine the ripple effect that had. If we ever believed the schools could be rescued, it was that day.

**Giving accomplishes what donors can't do on their own.** One day I received a letter from a donor who had a half million dollars to give. Some weeks later, I spent an afternoon with her and her husband, getting to know them, hearing their combined story of faith. Over the years, she had carefully saved from the couple's modest income.

I asked why she wanted to give her savings to Tyndale. "Because you will know what to do with it," she said resolutely. On the way out I said, "You look so happy now." "Yes," she replied, "the money is now in your hands." I understood. She had a heart for training young people, but it was something she could not do on her own. In trusting us with her funds, she extended her life so that with us, she could do what she wanted to accomplish.

Not surprisingly, we speak of *trust* in handling money. People trust leaders, and when they give to organizations, they believe that the funds will be used to fulfill their own passion and accomplish what we promised. We in fact, become a means by which their resources extend their lives out into ministry. We are given the task for fulfilling their financial legacies from their years of working and saving. As leaders, we are privileged to enter their lives as a conduit of service in ways that are consistent with their giving, praying, and serving. To say it another way, people need us to help them carry on their testimony.

**Raising support is essential to leadership.** Let's connect the dots: leaders bring people together around a mission. Giving is a means of connecting with those who join. As we link in with a supporter's giving, we capture their hearts.

Before we go further, understand what I mean by leadership. We loosely use the word to describe image makers, idea formulators, spokes-

people, promoters, philosophers, pundits, and advocates who influence people, ideas, and products. In a general sense such people lead in that they influence by their ideas or personality. That's not what I mean by leading.

I have in mind those who actually head up movements, organizations, business, missions, and congregations, in short, those who, in exercising authority, guide others in doing good. In that position, leaders are responsible to see that resources are recruited to fulfill the mission. If you don't, are unwilling to, or deem yourself unable to see that resources are recruited, then by definition you aren't leading.

Raising funds is not only a high priority for a leader, but also a wonderful calling. I find that it connects me in a more personal way to people as I spend time with them and learn of their families, aspirations, needs, and opportunities. Then I find ways to serve by sending books, attending weddings and funerals, grieving in times of sorrow, and praying in moments of decision-making.

**Raising support is about heart transformation.** Leaders seek human transformation. It doesn't happen immediately. It takes time. It requires nurturing and building relationships.

Don't assume that making people feel good will result in support. It's important to create good will. Good feelings always make the process easier. However, getting people to feel good about your ministry or project doesn't automatically translate into giving. Giving is a transaction in which the case for support is made and the request to participate is clearly presented, then followed up. That is the beginning of what might very well be a long relationship that will hopefully transform a potential donor into a supporter with a heart for your mission.

When I left a ministry, I was pleased to hear investors say, "We began giving when you challenged us, and we want you to know now that even though you are leaving, we will continue our support." Their hearts were fused into the mission and vision by their investments.

Leaders by nature attract people to their mission. How do you know if you are leading? By witness of those who join in your vision. And you will know if people are linked to your vision when they show their commitment by regular support.

What principle is at work here? Jesus invites us to view treasure differently: when you invest, your heart will be linked to its cause and calling. Building support is about heart transformation. Convince someone of a good place to invest, and the person's heart will be changed.

## Common objections from leaders

I know some will react negatively to including recruiting resources as an essential role of leadership. I hear various excuses for not engaging in fund-raising.

**I don't have what it takes to be a fund-raiser.** It maybe you are reacting to a caricature, someone who has been offensive, insensitive, or smooth. Don't allow stereotypes to hold you back. My hope for you as leader is that you have a life-altering perspective that will set your leadership free in new, creative, and powerful ways.

**I don't like it.** So? I don't like to do detailed reports. Many things we don't enjoy, but they need doing.

**I'll get others to do it.** Of course, you will. Depending on the size of the organization, others will help. But prime benefactors will want to hear from you, to hear *you* describe the vision and to sense your passion.

**I've more important things to do.** Not really. In a start-up, you will juggle many tasks, one being to speak of your mission and vision. When payday comes and there's a lack of money, it is the leader that people look to for a solution. Better to have thought of that long before that day. A mission worth doing needs to be sustained. Regardless of the vision's importance or necessity, it will end as mere words if building a support base hasn't been essential to your life and schedule.

**People don't like me speaking of money.** I've found that isn't true. We assembled 2,500 donor names from four mission organizations and hired a research company to ask a series of questions focused on attitudes of money. People who gave to these agencies said their number one request of their pastor was to help them manage money. An understanding of giving is as natural to the managing of money as seeding is to the process of farming.

**Some fund-raisers make me bristle.** Join the line. Organizations make a mistake by turning the raising of funds over to those who are able to pitch the request but lack credibility, or who sound like an infomercial selling salad-cutters or rotisseries. However, because others have done it poorly is no reason not to do it at all.

**Some people are turned off when I ask them to help.** As I recall, I've been turned down sharply by no more than ten people in almost five decades of

making thousands of requests for funds. If the case statement is clear and compelling, if the setting in which the request is being made is appropriate, and if a simple invitation is made, people are willing, and indeed honored, to be invited. They may decline, but not turned away.

**People aren't interested.** How do you know? Has it been tested? If so, by whom? By an independent researcher who knows how to ask good questions that lead to honest and helpful answers? If you are interested, you can interest others.

**There are not enough resources out there.** Resources are not zero-sum. In many parts of the world, resources are available for a compelling cause. Just because someone gives to one cause doesn't mean she or he won't have resources for another.

### **Reasons why raising resources is a litmus test**

Why is raising resources a litmus test for leadership? Let me offer some reasons.

**A leader articulates the mission.** Volunteers, donors, associates, and the public need to hear *you* outline the vision and sense your passion. Moses protested, pleading lack of skill, and his brother, Aaron, stood in. But when they got going, Moses was the leader the people heard. You may need to work on your presentation skills, but don't allow anxiety to keep you from outlining where you are going and what it will take to get there.

**A leader draws hearts to the mission.** I said it earlier: resources define those who are committed to the mission. As the leader wins hearts, resources given become part of the exchange.

### **Benefits of the leader being involved in fundraising**

I've explained that, strategically, it matters that resource generation be among your highest priorities. There are other, more personal reasons why it is critical for you to be party to donor development.

1. **It is personally renewing.** Donor development is similar to other kinds of visits. You come face to face with another person's needs, issues, and concerns. It gives you opportunity to speak hope and love into that life and leave knowing you've been a contributor.

2. **What happens when it's a friend?** You may already be building relationships with people who can help you in your mission. Is it manipulation to ask a friend for support?

How you handle it is the point. Recruiting resources is not manipulating friendship to get your way. First it might be helpful—if you are dealing with a close friend or relative—to remind them that this is part of calling. I find it helpful to ask, “Could I take a few minutes to tell you what is going on in our mission, and would it be okay for me to identify possible needs and opportunities?” Asking permission helps lay out where the conversation might go, and allows them to say yes or no.

3. **You are personally invested. It really matters that** you are making personal giving to support the cause. Be careful of the trap of saying to yourself of others that your time or modest salary is your contribution. When both your heart and finances are invested, you have moral grounds on which to stand.
4. **It keeps you in touch with a broader reality.** For years my scheduling rule has been to have three donor appointments a week. This discipline moves me to engage with others. As much as vision is exciting and renewing, it must be actualized in the schedule. Look at your calendar. Does it show appointments with donors or potential donors for next week? If meeting with donors haven't been arranged, it won't happen. My weakness was to allow administrative detail to block out meeting donors, a default that calls for deliberate resistance.
5. **You will be stretched.** Many donors will be professional people or entrepreneurs who know the importance of risk and inventiveness and the dangers of the status quo. Meeting such people can be a risk. They may press with questions that cause discomfort. An enormous benefit of meeting with donors is that it encourages you to live beyond the fences of former years. In conversing with donors, you will realize that the “same old” will not capture or sustain interest.
6. **It inspires your staff.** As leader, you demonstrate to staff the importance of the mission as they see your passion and commitment in meeting donors and building resources. It also spreads the story. Take a member of the staff or the board with you on donor visits so they will better understand the importance of donor development.
7. **Investors want to hear from the leader.** Presidents of public companies, relying on investment, regularly meet major investors, who

insist they hear from the senior manager. Although donors don't want information overload, they really want to speak with the leader.

8. **You learn through the process.** Leaders can be storytellers. In telling the story, you shape and refine your message: you get better at it. Every time you meet a person and give your story, you learn what is missing, not in the story but in the plans on which the story is based.
9. **It develops networks.** Developing networks provides a leader with connections that help in many ways. Contacts will build relationships, some of which will last for life. Don't assume the role of a spiritual counselor but be responsive when people turn to you for confidential counsel. I benefit from friends who speak wisdom, faith, and encouragement into my life. I gain much more from these relationships than I give.
10. **It develops other kinds of support.** Though these notes speak primarily of money given by donors, recruiting people as volunteers and asking for prayer support happens in the same way as donor development. When leaders are rooted in and open about expressing faith, meeting with donors will cultivate prayerful partners and not surprising, where people put their treasure, that's where their hearts will be.

## What is resource development?

**Articulating your mission.** You may know what you want to accomplish, but until you define it in brief, compelling terms it will be wind and fury. An idea may lift your spirits and drive your energy, but until tested and retested, it may be nothing more than a bundle of nerves wrapped up in conversation. A simple test is the *elevator speech*. Can you describe the mission within a ten-floor elevator ride? If not, the statement may be too abstract.

**Living the life.** Giving isn't a result of a smooth presentation; it comes from people attracted to a cause. The talk and walk of your organization must match. By investing in your enterprise, a donor takes a risk. Ponzi schemes are reminders that we all live on the raw edge of trust. What evidence do you give to donors that you are reliable? Ask those who support your mission: What first attracted you to invest? What sustains your giving? What more would you need to be assured that their trust is well placed?

**Lifting people's eyes to the larger issue.** Leaders invite people to the walk of faith. Sometimes the response is “go away money”—that is, a very modest amount just to get rid of you.

Human impulse is to give when it is convenient and what is comfortable. To discomfort people in their giving is not to exert pressure; rather it is to enlarge their understanding of what together you can be done.

**Living the part as a shepherd and servant.** Leaders fulfill two important roles: shepherd and servant.

A shepherd, even though regarded as shady and untrustworthy in Jesus' time, still symbolized care for the flock: the flock supplied the shepherd with income and in turn was cared for.

A servant (in a time when there was no middle class) was less like a waiter and more like an indentured slave. To be called to be a servant was not a pleasant reference for those who listened to Jesus. His point was that leaders were not to be like the imposed outsiders from Rome or the politically appointed high priests or the few who had (often misappropriated) wealth and amassed property. They were to be those who did menial work.

These two powerful metaphors help us consider who we are to be.

**Telling the story.** Raising funds is a by-product of storytelling. People give to what makes a difference. My generation had loyalty to institutions. The following generation moved from institutional giving to cause giving, looking for ways in which an investment would have impact.

As chief storyteller, tell

**Of the past:** people like to know the essence of an organization's journey—the people and critical movements which make up who it is.

**Of the present:** you'll be amazed at how people are interested in knowing what is going on now; notice how people cluster around a camera to see a picture taken fifteen seconds earlier.

**Of the future:** describe what the organization or project will look like in five or ten years.

After the story is adequately told, make “the ask,” keeping this simple rule in mind: once the request has been made, be quiet. Resist the impulse to fill the silence. Allow the donor to comment first. You have done your best to put forward the case. Now sit back and let the donor decide what to do or say. Pressure is unacceptable. Your work, for the time, is done. If the

response is uncertain, there may be opportunity for more information or time for further consideration.

Remember, these are the donor's resources. We have no right to them. The gift that will or not will be made is for them to decide. In your enthusiasm and eagerness, don't ruin future opportunities or friendship by trying to push for a decision.

### **A word to pastors**

Don't avoid the subject of giving. Your church tradition may have developed its own pattern of talking about money. Note how often Jesus discussed money. This is not a rationale to pressure your people into giving to your annual fund or a campaign. As pastors, you enrich your members by providing biblical counsel on finances. Tell me a person's giving patterns and I can tell you something about the person's spiritual life. While some people may give as a way of exerting influence but don't let that keep you from teaching on money as critical to your instruction on Christian discipleship.

Also, the biblical phrase "storehouse of the Lord" is not synonymous with the local congregation. As much as church attendees should give generously to the work of their own congregation, giving isn't about that alone. As you raise the matter of giving beyond your local activities, and lift it into the wider world and people may be less defensive, knowing your teaching on giving is not for your enterprise but given so that they will be enriched to live a healthy Christian life.

### **A last word**

Resources become available when recruited. It doesn't fall from the sky. This biblical text makes that clear: *we lack because we don't ask*. So, balance trust in God with actual fund-raising. I've already made my case on trusting God and such trust is essential to leadership. I'm cautious of some who say they need not work at fund-raising as they "trust" for the resources. That attitude, however, is like the farmer who simply declares "trust" in God for the harvest, which means there is no need to work the land, plant the seed, control the weeds, or ensure adequate moisture. As I began this chapter, let me end with, leaders instinctively learn how to recruit resources in accomplishing their mission.



## PRINCIPLE 7

### Yes, it is Political

In leading not-for-profit organizations, while politics isn't everything, everything is political.

Nehemiah lived in a world of political intrigue, so when the darts and arrows of political opposition came his way, he wasn't surprised. Sanballat, head of Samaria, along with co-conspirator Tobiah ridiculed the Jews for talk of rebuilding the city walls. Ridicule Nehemiah could take. However, when the opposition became hostile, he divided the workers, half building the wall and the other half standing watch.

It was internal politics that was a major strain for Nehemiah: Jews exploiting each other with unfair usury, forcing families to sell children for food or mortgage their fields, vineyards, and homes just to survive the famine. Rebuilding the wall meant that Jewish communities, often estranged in the past, now had to work and live together. That led to disagreement. Politics, he understood, was not something to avoid but embrace.

### What is politics?

Politics is the interface of people as they live together. Sometimes it's harmonious, other times difficult and even nasty. While ideas are magnets around which people can coalesce as a community or a team, people make the ideas work, and it is here that the internal dynamics of political interface come into play.

Language about politics was crafted by the Greeks. Aristotle used the word *politika*, later Romanized into the Latin *politicus*, from which we get the idea of citizens (*polites*) living within a city (*polis*) or a governed community.

To set it in perspective and understand politics as an essential ingredient of community life, let's understand it to mean *the human dynamics at play as people work together in pursuit of common objectives*.

Politics is at work when leaders do their job of setting goals, establishing boundaries, negotiating terms and agreements, harmonizing activities, ensuring order, protecting the community, establishing discipline, creating means of celebration and rewards, to name a few of the leadership tasks.

Politics as a discipline and exercise is how the body politic or group, lives and finds ways to do what is needed to accomplish agreed-on goals.

It is not finding the lowest common denominator, although that may be needed as a start in order to bring people together. It is about people getting along, finding appropriate ways of working together.

## **Politics everywhere**

By the very nature of living in family and society (local, national, and international) ours is a political world. When people enter a group, they bring their experiences, biases, hopes, and means of acting.

I was asked to chair a parents' meeting held by a church board that had announced in December that the school, which was part of the church organization, would no longer be able to hold classes in the church building the following September. There was enormous upset, so the board agreed to hold an information meeting. About 800 people, mostly parents, showed up. For five hours they asked questions and expressed their concerns.

There were enormous misunderstandings at all levels. Parents were upset, many acting in anger, assuming the administration's actions were malicious. Rumors abounded. Accusations were slung. Motives were questioned. Feelings ran high. Was it a good meeting? It will depend on whom you ask. But it was politics at work. The community had an issue that needed public airing.

Community is about living and working together, and the interaction of people requires rules, conversation, accountability, and honest exchange of ideas. In most groups there will be a variety of views on most issues, and these will range along the whole spectrum. Theologically conservative communities are often conservative in political, economic, and social views as well. The parallel is true for those of a more liberal theology. Yet it's a mistake to assume that one label fits all. Leaders allow people their variegated views without assuming or insisting they correspond with the leaders' own views.

Leaders make sense of problems, organize personnel, oversee the project, and manage its collateral aspects. Know as well that eventually you might become a target. Though I had not been around when Tyndale collapsed and had had no part in creating its governance difficulties, I was the one people had to turn to. Rumor mills ground on. Backroom conversations crafted scenarios and possibilities that I had to decipher, respond to, or ignore. Politics was very much at work. It wasn't because it was the worst of times, for even in the best of times, political dynamics is a factor of human community. Accept it. Define it. Encourage it. Guide it. And learn to enjoy the interplay as you lead.

## Leading in a political environment

People need structure, authority, defined assignment, accountability, and empowerment. In a wide range of organizational types, from Machiavelli's absolute power to flat-line egalitarianism. We each choose our model depending on various factors: history, ethnicity, religious experiences, location of operation, required guidelines of operation, and sophistication of our society, among others. Regardless of the model, political reality runs through it and, if used wisely, will provide leverage for effective leadership. Your success in part will depend on developing a structure that includes and sufficiently amplifies authority, defined assignment, accountability, and empowerment.

So how do you go about leading, knowing that all things are political?

Begin with a point of reference to which the whole life and activity of the enterprise refer. Don't assume that what you had thirty-six months ago is in play today. Organizations are not static. The strategy needs reviewing each year and the mission statement at least every five years.

## Strategic moves for political leadership

Leaders, particularly those who are rebuilding, inevitably run into resistance: people tired, upset, and discouraged dig in their heels, acting in negative and unappreciative ways.

Strategic moves that help to turn political factors to an advantage.\*

**Know that for some, new ideas will be unnerving.** People in the throes of failure, anxious about their immediate finances and long-term security, may be frightened of your new and bold ideas. Teach them about risk, what it means to live by faith. In so doing you will teach them how to live in the present calamity and for life.

**Work to overcome the status quo.** After the fall of the Berlin Wall and demise of the Soviet empire, many eastern Europeans said they preferred order to freedom, old ways to disorder, and certainty of what they had to uncertainty of the new. The present, with its knowns and predictability, is the chosen default for some. Their resistance to moving out of today's world into a time and place they can't see necessitates handholding. As leader, show them the advantages of rebuilding and how you will get there.

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\* See Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, in *Leadership on the Line*. I've incorporated some of their insights with my own.

**Help people articulate their views and needs.** When dealing with a discouraged ministry or organization, be aware of how much its members, staff, and volunteers need your empathy. Assure them that you are wanting to understand their personal issues.

Create a safe place where people can offer opinions without fear of jeopardizing their positions. Construct the work environment so everyone knows how it works, providing freedom for expression so people will be heard, all the while reminding them they are responsible for what they say.

Meet with the community at agreed-on times. Create an expectation that at certain times of the year there will be town hall meetings. Keep that time sacred for you and your people and agree on the rules of engagement so there are no surprises.

**Control the temperature.** High temperature is not always bad. However, if a heated environment becomes the norm, it may skew the conversation and disrupt your ability to guide the process.

How can you control the temperature? As you plan a meeting, whether with a department, with heads of departments, or a town hall meeting, agree at the start on what is allowed, defining rules that will frame the conversation.

**Pace the work.** In times of stress, people may react in ways not in tune with their life patterns and say what they would never say in less-pressured times. Each of us has personal tolerance levels in accepting change and the speed of change.

Trying too hard to reach your goal in the allotted time frame may be counterproductive, and timelines may need to be revised. Slow down if the pace is creating too much unsettledness. Gauge the drive to move forward by the political ease or tension it creates.

**Anticipate fallout.** Organizational or business stress can often result in the loss of good people, sometimes your best. As much as you will try to find a suitable role for everyone, some won't be able to ride the tough journey you may be in, into the future. If they can't dislodge the negative baggage of the past, it is probably best that they leave. Give them your blessing and get on with finding those you need.

**Identify the disparate groups within the organization.** If you have come up through the organization, you've experienced the group dynamics peculiar to the organization and you recognize where polarizations are likely to occur when interests are at variance.

To better understand the various groups, list who they are within the organization. Some will be obvious, defined by a department or affinity. Others will be hidden in the organizational woodwork as smaller entities, unnoticed within the larger groupings.

Once you've discerned who the groups are, do some testing. Ask what they would plan if they were in charge.

Note how groups operate. The business office will have a different *modus operandi* from sales or marketing. Their responsibilities will give rise to strategies different from other departments. They will recruit different personalities. Take time to learn what makes a good member of a financial team in contrast to one from marketing, for example. Then watch how they interact with each other.

**Develop an agreement with the governing board, defining its role in governance and yours in management.** There are various theories on the relationship of governance to management, some egalitarian, others more hierarchical. In addition, each leader operates with a personality that calls for tailoring the agreement on lines of authority and expectations of the board. You might be inclined to suppose that your previous experience will work in your new situation, that the people you're working with now will be like those you worked with in the past and that they understand what you want or expect. Don't assume. Clarify regularly and test out the workings of the agreement. Without that, the relationship can develop into the worst of political nightmares.

**Identify spiritual opposition.** Don't dismiss evil as being nothing but a metaphor. Sophisticated societies framed by a material world assume the non-material world is spooky, unknowable, a figment of overactive minds. For 2,000 years the Christian community has developed a body of knowledge and disciplines of practice in identifying how to be protected and empowered by the Spirit.

**Learn from jazz.** Leadership is both science and art, but mostly art. The science of leading involves learning which levers help you exercise authority, power, and influence. Leaders operating on intuition driven by enthusiasm can inadvertently be blind to learning the discipline of leadership. If you are egregiously self-confident, assuming that learning this science is unnecessary, you may lose a valuable ingredient in the mix of your leadership.

Leadership like jazz is improvisational. Jazz is extraordinary. To some it sounds complex, without melody or harmony. Actually, it is an outflow

of classical music, especially the contrapuntal form which takes a theme, or melody line, and works it through the composition. Listen to a Bach fugue or invention and you will hear the melody line moving back and forth. It then takes on added musical features, but all the while the melody remains.

Jazz adds improvisation. The melody moves its way through interpretations of the trio or quartet. One begins with the melody line, and then it moves on to others in the combo, one by one. They layer the tune with additional material, with improvisation.

It isn't a novice who can improvise. An experienced jazz musician can because they knew the science as well as the art and their discipline, experience, and creative talent allow them to improvise.

So, it is with leadership. We improvise. Effective leaders understand that it isn't about them. It's about an internal interplay of ideas, personalities, needs, and possibilities. We listen, watch, and then, when appropriate, move ideas around, start or stop conversation, turn to someone who is listening without adding much and ask for input. Know when to push and when to pull. Feel when it is time to be tough and disciplined or when to relax and party. Trust your instincts. Be flexible on time and performance. You have the right and responsibility to improvise. It will enhance your ability to move politically among ideas, personalities, and issues outside your control.

## **Dealing with the dynamics of the body politic**

How does leadership handle political dynamics?

**Seek out those with whom you can dependably collaborate.** At Tyndale I found those who not only had a deep love for the schools but a grasp of the issues (many of them political) needing my attention. I asked for a list of issues needed addressing and for months I carried that list with me, periodically going over it, measuring our progress.

**Ask for ideas on a plan to move forward.** Drill down into the experience, passion, and talent of people on staff, both paid and volunteer.

**Keep close to those you know are resisting.** Don't assume they are the troublemakers, in fact, they may have important solutions. If you regard them as enemies, the broken relationships may fester and lead to more disruption. Give the "opponents" a chance. Ask them what they would do in your position.

**Stay in communication, reminding people of the past, present, and future stories.** Telling stories helps people know where they stand within the body politic. Frame for people who you all are, where you are going, and where they fit into the scheme. History matters. If you are working in an organization with some history, learn the past, what made it good and effective. Draw on that memory. Then describe where you are. Be kind but blunt. Don't gloss over the facts, but don't leave them there. Etch out an outline of what the future may very well be. As disgruntled as some may be, you can rightfully assume that people want to be part of a winning and successful enterprise. Speak hope. Take your people to a level where they can see the landscape and its possibilities.

**Anticipate that personalities will clash.** "Dirty" politics usually happen as people come to dislike each other. Work into your schedule times for open conversation and for partying. Allow people to air their concerns in a way that is not threatening to them and their future, yet responsible enough that it doesn't become a grouching session. Then find excuses to celebrate.

**Allow conflict to work its way through to resolution.** Human dynamics are complex, interlocked with all kinds of emotions, memories, competitive personalities, and egos. If your reaction is to fix them today, rein that in. Some things take care of themselves.

Sometimes take the way of least resistance. I learned its counterintuitive value. There are times it is best to do nothing and allow the workings of human interrelationships to operate. But know when it is time to step in. Choose when to resist. Wait for a time when it is worth spending political capital.

**Take your stakeholders up to a higher point of view.** Most of us live so close to the ground we lose sight of the wider landscape; this is especially true for managers. Lift them above circumstances, problems, and conflicts and again, by story, help them see what life looks like from there. Politics can be influenced by feeding into conversations, information on what the point of contention looks like to others and how it can be interpreted from a broader point of view.

**Don't take things personally.** If you are "thin-skinned," prone to letting people's comments rule your spirit, ask someone to help make sense of what you are hearing and how you are reacting. If negative comments become habitual chattering voices, and if you give them space in your hearing, the voice of your calling may be drowned by their noise.

**Refuse to allow special deals in your attempt to keep someone onsite.** Negotiation helps the body politic function. Even so, I once got into danger by crafting a deal that helped to assuage one person but resulted in misunderstanding within the group. I have no guidelines on this: I simply advise caution and discernment.

**Respect and affirm the board and its role.** Leaders can get unduly focused on their own responsibilities and forget that ultimate authority is vested in the board of governors, trustees, or elders.

Don't allow situations to create a rift between you and the governance body. In times when there is misunderstanding or conflict between leader and board, the leader may be tempted to represent the board to staff in such a way as to get the staff on his or her "side," and in so doing create friction that can lead to irresolvable difficulty. Disagreements with the board are to be worked out behind closed doors. Always affirm the board's authority.

You will want political stability within the authority framework. Your relationship with the governance group is as important as any and working with them is as strategic as anything you do. To ensure that the proper governance/administration structure is in place, allow time and thought for your working relationship with the board; work to strengthen its membership and increase their knowledge of the enterprise, thus cementing an effective partnership.

Politics are particularly in play in the dynamics linking you to governance. As leader (or CEO) you are the primary link between administration and the governing body. Authority and responsibility flow both ways. From the governors (board) you receive authority and responsibility to oversee the operation. It works the other way as well. The operation (staff) gives you authority and responsibility (power) by their willingness to serve under your leadership. If they reject your leadership, you lose your authority to lead. You need their cooperation and support. As the board sees your leadership affirmed, they have more reason to trust you. Staff empower you. It is a relationship in which politics is vital.

**Keep the board from interfering with management.** There is a fine line that separates governance and management. Don't assume that either side knows where that line is. Raise it regularly with your chair and board, discussing respective roles of board and management, how each side is reading the other, and the comfort level with how the two sides interface.

**Admit your mistakes.** Others see our errors, misjudgments, lack of insight, and occasional misspoken ideas, so we might as well admit them. Don't



wallow in errors, but be up front with your senior staff and, when appropriate, let your board know. Invite them to identify areas of vulnerability; then agree on a regular time in which you answer their concerns. Strike a balance. A little self-deprecating humor can go a long way.

**Identify your assumptions.** Political leadership (and remember, all leadership is political) works best when your team agrees on your working assumptions: vision, values, mission, and goals. If I were to walk into your enterprise and ask for a statement of your vision and mission, could you produce a written copy? And more, if I asked a staff member what they are, would he or she know they exist, be able to identify one or two, or know where to find a copy?

## Conditions for effective leadership

Who is in charge? Leaders lead, at least this is what we expect. However, when the elements required to lead effectively are not defined or understood, political instability results.

Ask your group if there is clarity on authority, defined assignment, accountability, and empowerment. These four pillars of an enterprise provide you as leader with a base on which political interaction will benefit your leadership and work.

**Authority** is the right granted to a person to do what is asked. It comes from others either in a formal sense—a job description and a board or congregation—or informally when people assess your ability to lead and agree to fall in line with where you are going.

Established authority helps to clear the air when people question who is ultimately in charge. Political instability occurs when the leader has written authority but not informal authority.

**Defined assignment** is management making it clear for staff what is expected, ensuring that employees understand assignments. While this seems self-evident, people and organizations fall into abusive and discordant relationships when people don't know what is expected. Defining an assignment is more than a written job description. It requires revisiting the commitment regularly so that leader and staff both know what is expected. Nasty political testiness can be averted when people know what they and others are doing.

**Accountability** is both attitude and process: attitude in that people expect and accept that they and others will be held accountable, and process in carrying

out preset reviews. It has been found, both in for profit and non-profit organizations, that salary and benefits are not the determining factor in staff retention. Critical to retention is people being held accountable. It is like compensation, in effect saying, “You matter enough for me to make the effort to evaluate how and what you are doing.” Employees learn they are valued.

**Empowerment** links assignment with adequate social, technical, and emotional tools. If you ask someone to dig a trench but don’t supply a shovel, at the end of the day you both will be frustrated and disappointed. Empowering staff sets them free to meet goals.

## **Your leadership team: Key to political management**

In the mid 1980s, Leighton Ford, chair of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, asked me to organize a world event to find and encourage 350 younger and emerging leaders in the Christian community, called Singapore’87. I assembled a worldwide 18-member planning team and at one of our meetings, in Stuttgart, Germany, after two days of conflict and disagreement, I said, “I’m going to have to tell Leighton that this won’t work; it seems this will never get off the ground.”

Conversation ground to a halt. The fiery words and self-possessed speeches ended. Elie Lau from Hong Kong spoke up. In a few minutes of impassioned pleading, she implored each member to lay down personal agendas and, as members of a single team, make it work. I never did speak with Leighton about what seemed sure disaster. The team decided that what we were about was too important to allow the stress and strain of international differences torpedo the project.

Positive political dynamics within a team rest on a number of measures.

- Build a sense of community, of belonging. A tribal instinct allows people to retain identity and a sense of being while operating together in a team-like way.
- Allow team members to feel their freedom to operate without a sense of being dominated and overtaken by the leader. This will ease the inclination for political infighting.
- Avoid sabotaging ideas and initiatives. The team is not there to serve your self-interests or massage your ego. Inevitably there will be competition for your approval and support. Alienating team members by dismissing ideas only fractures relationships.

- If something goes wrong, don't hide behind the team's decisions. The team will see you as politically weak, unable to stand up to your failures or indecisions.
- Listen, then contribute, recognizing there is a balance between hearing the views of others and spouting your own. Consciously listen and let the team know you are listening. A response like "Let me repeat what you said to make sure I understood it clearly" is a helpful way to send a message that indeed you are listening. The political value is that it breeds inclusion of ideas and ownership.
- Make the team essential to your plan. The team you create reflects you. Identification with the team is not to be done after success is assured; it happens in process.
- Understand systemic rules that govern group behavior. The dynamics of a group are different from those when individuals operate on their own. In addition, groups vary from one to another.

Recognize that guiding a team is something different from running an organization. While the team is part of the organization, it is family, working with lines of authority and responsibility that run alongside each other.

- As much as you may want to be one of them, and in a sense, you are, in another sense you aren't "one of the girls—or boys." You are a senior among equals.
- Know that, for most, being part of a team is one of the most deeply satisfying parts of an assignment.
- Help team members know that because they are part of a team, they aren't on their own. Accomplishments are shared.
- Be aware that teams will struggle in making it work. Building a team is not for perfection. It is to accomplish a task.
- As you build and manage the team, provide times for built-up steam to be let off.
- Have the team evaluate its own work and progress.
- Work at making meetings something to look forward to, interspersed with ideas, prayer, readings, food, and celebration where participants feel privileged to be members.

While politics isn't everything, everything is political.



## REFLECTIONS ON A CALLING

Nehemiah's life is a template of ideas, motivations, and principles that provide opportunity for reflection.

In taking an ancient story and creating a paradigm of action, one must be wary of reading into the story, fabricating an outline that goes beyond what the writer wanted to say. Whether I have crossed that borderline, I leave for others to decide.

In my summation, as I link Nehemiah of ancient Persia with decades of leading, I end with what I consider to be valuable in leadership.

### Measuring success

For those embarking on leadership, for those currently leading, and for those closer to the end, I offer these final reflections.

Thomas Harris's book *I'm OK, You're OK* soared on a 1970s societal craze for feeling good. Self-fulfillment became a litmus test for success. Christians shaped by this *zeitgeist* interpret God's call based on self-fulfillment. Nothing so belies the biblical call and turns spiritual well-being inside out as assuming that if we feel fulfilled, we must be within God's will. Or conversely, if we don't, we've missed it by a mile.

Friends wanting to know the state of my being would ask, "Are you enjoying your work?" At times I responded with, "Please ask, 'Are you doing what you should be doing?'"

There are periods in which we feel rewarded, experience the blush of success, sense that our work is in concert with God's grand scheme. But that's not our best gauge. Such times come momentarily and are gone. Some experiences produce self-doubt. Many decisions come by agonizing reflection. There are decisions that committees, let alone manuals, don't solve. Leaders are called on—often alone—to deal with those.

Self-fulfillment may be a by-product of leading. But if you make it the test of being in God's will, you will be tempted to "hear" God's call to "sunnier" climates, to places far from troubled front lines to people whom you like and those who make life convenient and satisfying.

I can't read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and then live with a sense of entitlement that self-fulfillment is my right as God's servant. "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised."

**Have I contributed to the wellbeing of others?** Over the past years, “servant leadership” has become a popular term, an assumed Christian maxim to describe leadership. Jesus makes clear that Christians are to serve others. Leaders do best when they lead with a heart to serve. It is good ethics and good business.

However, be wary of maxims. They carry with them an essential truth but collect fuzzy and romantic ideas that may create wrong and unhealthy expectations. Serving others too often assumes that I serve the interests that others define.

In seeking to learn how to contribute to others’ well-being, I look for outcomes that lift others in their circumstances, occupations, families, and spirit. Seeking to enhance the well-being of another assumes I understand what that well-being is and I look for those ingredients that enable.

These involve these four components.

1. Discover the gifts of your people. This will be critical to harmonious relations and success. Finding the right people, or as Jim Collins phrased it in *Good to Great*, getting “the right people on the bus,” is a working metaphor identifying the value and importance of bringing together a team with potential.
2. Make assignments clear and doable. I know that some on my teams have failed because I didn’t provide sufficient lucidity in their assignments. Some might not have succeeded even with clarity, but in other cases, both I and they were less than clear. An assignment with precise goals and agreed-on expectations gives you the framework in which evaluation can more effectively occur.
3. Give space. How much space? Figuring this out is more on the “felt” than “telt” side of management. What I do know is that it is somewhere between being a micromanager and an absentee landlord. Figure it out with the team. Work from the seat of your own style and need. If you tend to lead from 10,000 meters, put in markers and dates that ensure you observe, encourage, question, and are present. If you like to get your hands into the details, work out with your team what space they need so they don’t feel they are being stalked. This isn’t easy to balance. In a review by my leadership team, one said I was dictatorial and another evaluated me as being too pastoral. Sometimes you can’t win.
4. Provide evaluations. Put in place the times and means by which each person will be evaluated. Create a form of evaluation that has a high level of objectivity and is written with clear objectives of the assignment.

## **Have I done what I set out to do?**

This question one asks about any period of life. Goals change, but we carry our core objectives, desires, and personality into all we do. Even so, the question is important in that it calls me to consider, What am I trying to do?

Nehemiah had a clear goal, and in the end, he could make his assessment. The biblical story suggests he allowed nothing outside of his objective to interrupt.

Life is relative to what each of us understands and sees. What we believe depends on what we experience, not unlike the metaphorical three blind men who were asked to touch a part of an elephant and then describe—without knowing it was an elephant—what it was they touched. One stroked a leg and proclaimed it was a tree. Another felt its trunk and said it was a hose. Another touched the tail and said he was sure it was a rope.

The usual interpretation of this story is that nothing is true. Because it makes it appear that truth depends on each person's perception, the conclusion is that all truth is relative.

How wrong is this interpretation. While each blind man believed an elephant was one thing or another, depending on what *he experienced*, there was one standing alongside who saw what the others didn't, who saw what was there in its entirety. It may have appeared as various things to those who felt with their hands, but that was perception, not reality. It was, after all, an elephant.

Leaders don't always see the whole elephant. In developing the EFC as a national association for evangelicals in Canada, only years later did we realize the importance of establishing a national presence in our nation's capital, Ottawa. We learned its importance as we went along. Unexpected realities show up, forcing a change in plans.

## **Is it stronger now than when I began?**

Leading is about taking an idea or organization and moving it along the avenue of effectiveness. To do that, identify the core elements, have a clearly defined mission, perpetually work on building the strength and competence of staff (and volunteers), ensure you have able governance, build fiscal stability, build a good reputation, have your strategic plan, and constantly redevelop the means of mission.

## **Have I used my allotted time well?**

In the 1970s, time-management courses became the rage. I shunned them, concluding that learning about micromanaging was of little value. I suspect I was the loser for not attending such workshops.

Time is a gift of creation, external yet part of who we are. We make the mistake of thinking of time as linear, a series of unending seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years stretching out to death.

Five years ago today, what were you doing? What mattered then? Unless it is memory marked (something very important happened), you probably can't recall. That day, like today, is squashed into other days. Anxieties, drivenness, unanswerable questions pushing you that day are now forgotten. The passing of time has a way of getting lost in the accumulation of days.

Time is not a bureaucratic nicety of noting when we begin and end an activity. It is a gift, as essential to our being as breath, a resource enabling the building of ideas, relationships, and enterprises. Time is not something we need to manage so much as understand and live in as part of the creative process. Modern organization demands we match jobs to the amount of time required. Salaries, even if not hourly based, are compensation for our time as well as our skills. Time becomes a tool for management. Leaders effectively use it as a device to organize. And it is a good tool.

But for leaders, time is an accommodating and nurturing environment, an essential ingredient of human makeup. It is not a taskmaster. It is not something of which we have too little. It is a friend and in sufficient supply. We don't exist for it. There is nothing intrinsically important about one moment over another. Like the physical creation, it provides an essential element in which those in God's image live out their calling. Time is part of who I am.

Time is on our side. It is within that framework we lead. Although labor laws and employment contracts specify hours to be worked, those who excel will not limit the time in which they think, pray, and work out ideas.

When we speak of managing our time, we speak of the now and the future: how we use time allocated for today and how we will organize what is coming. The past, our history, we remember and reflect on to gain perspective to guide us in decisions and to identify who we are and what our organization is today and might be tomorrow.

Time also is transcendent, becoming one with the eternal. Our lives merge into the eternal, reminding us that what we do in time has consequences out into eternity. How we and our people use time is to be seen within that larger reality and not as a measurement to fill out boxes on time sheets.



Yet the careful use of time matters. Nehemiah knew that the protection of the Temple and city was urgent. Enemies were plotting. Time mattered. When I arrived to a closed-down Tyndale on June 28, 1995, we had 60 days to get it up and running for opening day. If we hadn't met critical deadlines all could have been lost.

## Final thoughts

Lessons come by way of failure and success. Nehemiah provides us with a universal example of what is needed to move from idea to reality, from brokenness to wholeness, from scattered people to coordinated community, from living under siege to celebrating success. In this story there are rich resources as you think and plan.

**Be hopeful.** When rebuilding, adrenalin provides raw energy and feelings of possibility. But that won't last forever. In time, the glow of rescuing recedes into dull amber. What then is the lasting factor that lifts our spirit and energizes a community?

It is hope, an eternal optimism staring down imposing issues. Hope refuses to blink. Hope breeds hope. There is a disingenuous line: *Fake it until you make it.* I'd rather say, *Fan hope until it takes hold.* In moments of tension, fear, and conflict, speak hope, and as you do, hope will rise, pushing back the storms of doubt.

**Remind yourself of the grander vision.** Work among the details; don't sleep among them. Keep your dreams for the grander vision. You won't want to leave details alone, for they are the linking fibers of the leader's agenda. Rather, from time to time, deliberately push them aside and dream the "what ifs." Do it alone. Do it with your team.

Cultivate creativity. Bureaucracy dulls the edge, rubbing the sharpness off curiosity and new ideas. Creativity needs affirmation, investment, and applause.

**Expect stress.** Stress can be an elixir. A stimulant. It keeps you on your toes. It also can kill. Look it in the face. Refuse to bow to its burden. Make it your friend, not your foe.

**Test faith.** Push your organization to the edge, where walking in faith becomes the way forward. Christian faith is based on a life-and-death proposition: life is to be lived with a loving and interfacing God. Force your group to look over the edge, knowing God is walking alongside.

**Refresh belief.** Religious organizations have a tendency to focus on their dutiful exercise of religious form. This can be good, yet dangerous. Dangerous when it becomes a rote mantra devoid of life. Good when it refreshes and reminds us of the life and calling of a God of love, mercy, and grace.

**Allow for transformation.** In Plato's allegory of a cave, prisoners are chained so that all they see is what is in front of them. One escapes and discovers that what he and his prisoner colleagues had believed to be true was wrong. He desperately tries to convince them but is unable.

Leaders sometimes deal with people who are so convinced of one reality that they are unable to shift their perspective. Some prefer the known, even when it is debilitating or unproductive.

Among the many opportunities a leader has, few are greater than to bring personal transformation to those with potential for good if they could but see that their current situation is a delusion. As someone who has seen a world outside of the "cave," help others see a different reality.

**Tell the story of your becoming.** While the wider story of the ministry may be firmly in your mind, don't assume others are up to speed. Be a storyteller. The leader is charged with telling the story again and again: where we have been, where we are going, and what drives us to get there.

People love stories. At Tyndale, staff and board wanted to hear of their part. We had come through a disaster. Though few of the former board and staff remained, our constituency and remaining faculty remembered it well. As we were freed from debt, and with a new campus coming into play, the story gained momentum. Members were enthused about this new history being written, believing this was the right course. The new story overtook the old one.

When queried about the bold new move, I would ask, "If we miss this opportunity, how will the next generation view us?" We need to see today through the eyes of the next generation.

Once we decided that the purchase of the new campus was critical to our longer-term plans, the purchase price—even though considerably below market price—was an enormous challenge. We pondered the amount. Would we inflict damage on the organization if we went forward and then couldn't meet it? Then we asked, If we back off because of the amount, what will our grandchildren think as they drive by this spectacular site and remember their grandparents backed off because they weren't sure it could be done?

That galvanized our resolve. Looking today through the eyes of the next generation helps us see what needs doing today, pulling people out of their current sphere of vision to see their world in a new way. Such teaching moments can be transformative.

Nehemiah got the wall built, secured the community, constructed an ethical framework, and renewed the spiritual vision and well-being of a people, setting loose a new generation of faith and hope. It can be done. Unbuilt or broken-down walls present opportunities for you to build new and vigorous communities of faith and life. Look for them. Let your vision for their renewed life coalesce others, so in the doing of good together, lives are transformed, made alive by the same Spirit that calls you into action.