



**Developing the Philosophy of a
Church**

Church Planting Solutions
A Ministry of Passion for Planting

The Alignment Model

The alignment model provides a simple picture of the elements of the philosophy of ministry and how the individual parts relate to one another. To effectively develop a philosophy of ministry, the Church Planter must understand the alignment model in order to understand how the key elements of the alignment model collectively relate to and define the philosophy of ministry (i.e. if you understand the alignment model, you understand the philosophy of ministry).

God builds the church according to His purposes and vision. Our role is to cooperate with what He is already up to. Cooperation involves continually seeking God's will, submitting to His leading and taking bold steps of faith. When we cooperate with God, we become positioned to experience His power and blessing as He accomplishes immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine.

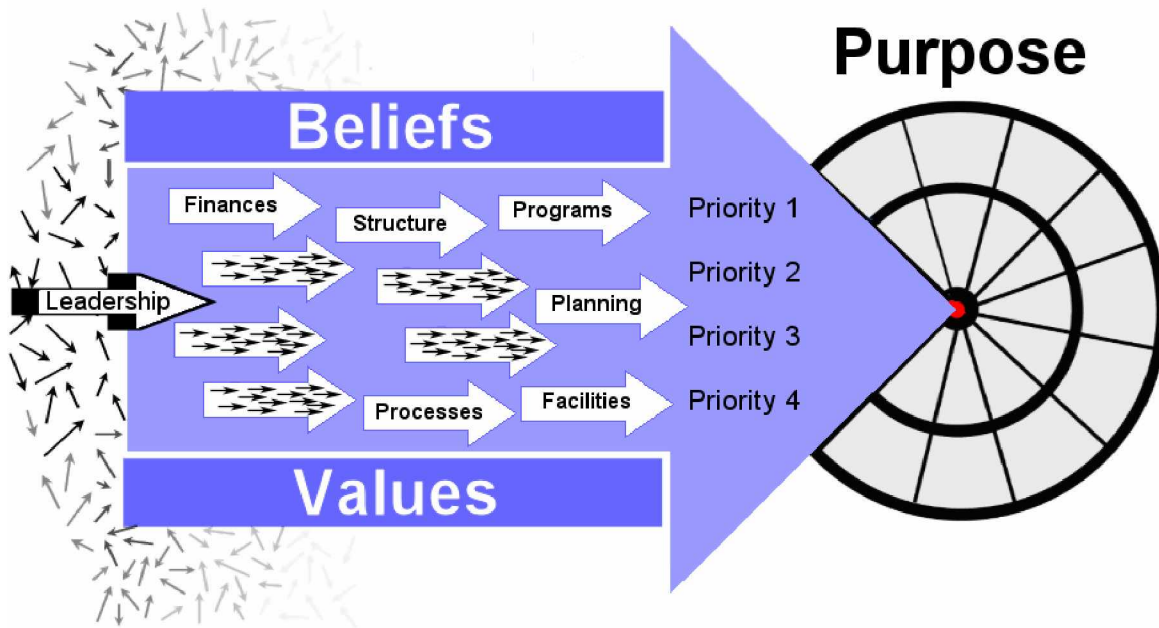
Alignment of activities, behaviors and resources within the church is a powerful tool in helping us to cooperate with God. Alignment connects people and parts of the organization together, creates an organizational culture that focuses on shared purpose and values, and helps achieve a healthy church that honors God (our ultimate purpose).

Alignment is an ongoing process that requires commitment, hard work and constant adjustment. Organizations that successfully pursue alignment build a culture of alignment that permeates the entire organization. Although you never completely arrive, the benefits of pursuing alignment (honoring God and honoring one another) make the effort well worth the journey.

Several books have been written on organizational alignment. Many of the ideas included in this paper are taken from *The Power of Alignment: How Great Companies Stay Centered and Accomplish Extraordinary Things* by George Labovitz and Victor Rosansky.

Imagine?

- Ø Imagine working in a church where every member, from the senior minister to the newly baptized convert, shares an understanding of the church, its goals and purpose.
- Ø Imagine working on a team within the church where everyone knows how he or she contributes to the church's strategy.
- Ø Imagine being on a team within the church where every member can clearly state the needs of the church's customers (God and seekers) and how the team contributes to satisfying those needs.



1. Purpose – represents the bulls-eye on the dart target. We hit the bulls-eye when we accomplish our purpose. At the heart of every evangelical church’s purpose (no matter how they express it in writing) is accomplishing the Great Commandment (Love God, Love People) and the Great Commission (Reach the Lost, Mature the Believer). This is how we define success.
2. Beliefs and Values – represent river banks that keep water flowing the same direction or the guardrails along a road to guide traffic. Our beliefs are those primary issues of theology that define what we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, the Bible, the role of the Church, and salvation. Our beliefs help answer the questions “why do we do what we do?” and “what do we do?” We will die for what we believe. Our values are usually directly linked to our beliefs (e.g. excellence may be a value that is tied to Paul’s command to “aim for perfection). Values help answer the question “How do we do what we do?” Beliefs and values do not guarantee that everyone in the church is moving the same direction, but they do help keep everyone moving the same general direction and keep us from completely going off track (like the guardrails along a road). Beliefs and values rarely, if ever, change.
3. Leadership Approach – Many books have been written on leadership. In the alignment model, the primary role of leadership is to allocate limited resources to the critical growth path. Leaders ensure that decisions are made in a manner:
 - that is consistent with purpose
 - that aligns strategy with purpose
 - that lives out the church's beliefs and values
 - that aligns resources consistent with the above
4. Strategy/Priorities – Most people are not compelled to action by a simple written purpose statement. People need to see how their actions fit in the bigger picture. For most new churches, a detailed strategy may not be prudent (or possible).

Instead, a simple list of 3-5 priorities is adequate. What are the 3-5 things that if done really well, will help accomplish purpose?

5. Resources – Resources include people, facilities, finances, programs, structures, etc. Resources are those things we have the ability to change and influence for the purpose of accomplishing our mission. Unfortunately, many churches treat these resources as fixed variables that can not change. New churches are encouraged to establish a culture where purpose, beliefs and values remain fixed and strategy/priorities/resources are changed/adjusted to more effectively accomplish the mission. The role of leadership is to oversee this process of decision and adjustment.

The Purpose of the Church:

A Church without a clear purpose will have a difficult time juggling good priorities and opportunities. Determining the purpose is the foundation of developing a philosophy of ministry.

The purpose defines the bulls-eye on our target and the filter through which most of our decisions are to be made. At the heart of most evangelical church purpose statements is the intersection of the Great Commandment (Love God, Love People) and the Great Commission. Write them out several times. Pray over them. Ask God to reveal His specific manifestation of these commands for your new church.

Caution: Your written purpose statement is one of the first things you will do that shapes and defines who you will be reaching. Adopt a purpose statement filled with “churchy” words and you can expect to reach churched people.

There are several valid approaches to developing a purpose statement. The Church Planter can use whatever approach they desire to produce a written purpose statement. Below is one approach.

1. Decide whether the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will form the basis for the purpose statement. If not, decide what Biblical commands will form the basis.
2. Look at what other churches have developed for a purpose statement. This can easily be accomplished by doing online searches via Google (or other search engines) on the key words “church purpose” or “Christian Church Purpose.”
3. Determine the types of words to use and to avoid (e.g. consider avoiding “churchy” words like sanctify and saints).
4. Ask for input from friends and peers (e.g. ask for feedback on three different purpose statements – what do people like and why?). Ideally, get input from friends and coworkers who are not Christians.
5. Finalize a written purpose statement (ideally one sentence or less)

The Beliefs of the Church:

People want to know what the church stands for. The beliefs of the church are the highest level beliefs of a church. They define the most fundamental things the church stands for.

Your Biblical beliefs will play a significant role in shaping the character of your church. Like the guardrails along a road that keep a car from completely veering off the road, beliefs help keep a church focused and on the right track. The guardrails do not guarantee that a car is always staying on the road, but they do keep it from dangerously veering off course.

You will be asked frequently (especially early in the new church) what your church believes. These questions don't come just from church people. In recent studies of unchurched visitors to church, a desire to hear Biblical teaching and learn what the Bible has to say is cited as one of the top reasons people visit.

While all Scripture is God-breathed and inspired by God, it is amazing how disagreeable we can be on what the Bible says. In matters essential to salvation, you must be firm in your approach and teaching. You need to be very clear on what you believe and what you will not compromise. You need to give thought to what you consider the essentials (those things where you will not compromise) to be. In other issues, be cautious to maintain unity and to avoid becoming distracted with issues that keep you from your primary mission (Love God, Love People, Reach the Lost, Mature the Believer). If necessary, agree to disagree and focus your efforts to primary issues of theology.

Our beliefs are those primary issues of theology that define what we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, the Bible, the role of the Church, and salvation. Our beliefs help answer the questions "why do we do what we do?" and "what do we do?" We will die for what we believe.

One approach for developing beliefs is as follows:

1. Make a list of key topics such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, the Bible, the role of the Church, and salvation.
2. Look to Scripture to speak for you on what you believe in these areas.
3. Write a brief beliefs statement about each. Attempt to tie the topics together into a common theme (e.g. God's plan for redemption of man). Craft the words in a manner that are understandable to seekers. Use wording that draws seekers in and causes them to ask more questions. Avoid wording that puts seekers on the defensive and causes barriers.
4. Look at how other churches have written their beliefs statements. Use online searches on key words such as "church beliefs" or "Christian Church beliefs."
5. Seek feedback and input from others (particularly seekers).
6. Finalize the written beliefs statements.

The Values of the Church:

People want to know what is important to the church. The values of the church are the things that define how you do things and what you honor.

Your values will play a significant role in shaping the character of your church. Like the guardrails along a road that keep a car from completely veering off the road, values help keep a church focused and on the right track. The guardrails do not guarantee that a car is always staying on the road, but they do keep it from dangerously veering off course.

Values are not something you can simply proclaim. You must live them out and demonstrate them by your actions. Values become a guide for defining normal behavior. The concepts need to become so deeply engrained in the church's culture that the actual words rarely need to be spoken. Many churches have a list of desired values, but then live out a different set of values. Your actual values are those things that newcomers who visit at least 3-5 times would use to describe your church.

Values are usually directly linked to beliefs (e.g. excellence may be a value that is tied to Paul's command to "aim for perfection). Values help answer the question "How do we do what we do?"

One aspect of values that needs to be considered is how the church (and it's members) interact with the surrounding community. Many churches become inwardly focused and out of touch with culture. It takes a deliberate and proactive commitment to ensure a church keeps its sensitivity to the unchurched. We can give our very best to God and speak the Truth boldly while also being sensitive to seekers. Studies actually show that one of the top reasons seekers are trying church is a desire to understand the Bible. How do we maximize the opportunity to teach the truth and connect with visitors when they attend? Many new churches find it useful to define these expectations during the pre-natal phase. For example, will there be an expectation that Truth is proclaimed in language understandable to seekers? Formality/dress is another expectation to address as is how aggressively you will try to obtain visitor information on their first visit. The answers to these questions may shape your values.

Examples of values include:

- Communicating the Truth in love: people hearing God's word in fresh and relevant ways
- Excellence: people honoring God and loving others with all their strength
- Fun: people enjoying God and each other
- Leadership: people leading and discipling other people
- Life change: people taking their next step toward maturity in Christ no matter where they are
- Prayer: people sharing every joy and need with God
- Relationships: people connecting relationally and caring for one another

- Seeker-sensitive culture: people building bridges to reach a lost and skeptical generation
- Service: people using their gifts to honor God and build up the church

For each value ask “why is this value important?” The answer should link directly to your beliefs or purpose in some way.

To develop values, the Church Planter should:

1. Look at what other churches have defined as values. A simple online search will help you find other church’s values.
2. Make an initial list of as many possible values that you can think of. In making the list, consider each of your beliefs statements. For each belief statement, ask “what values flow from this belief?”
3. Many of your listed values will be closely related to other values on the list. Attempt to group similar values together to reduce the list to 6 – 10 values.
4. For each potential value statement, ask yourself “how will this value cause us to act as a church?” Candidly consider the answers. Do any of the answers contradict one another?
5. Prioritize the list of values statements from highest to lowest priority.
6. Obtain feedback from others on your list. Finalize the list.

How the Church is Led

A frequent barrier to the sustained growth of an organization is the leadership approach/structure. A written leadership philosophy/approach which will prepare the church for years of healthy growth.

To a large extent, the health and growth of a new church will either be constrained or be enabled by the faithfulness of its leadership. The seeds that are planted during the pre-natal and early phases of the new church will reap a great harvest in subsequent years. Unfortunately, most church planters don't take the time or make it the priority to plant seeds of health. One of the primary seeds of health is the leadership approach/philosophy of the new church.

Leaders ensure that decisions are made in a manner:

- that is consistent with purpose
- that aligns strategy with purpose
- that lives out the church's beliefs and values
- that resources are lead/managed consistent with the above

Specific things to consider in defining a leadership approach include:

1. Written qualifications/expectations for leaders
2. Process for decision making. Who is involved? How much authority is granted to volunteer leaders? Role of staff vs role of volunteers?
3. Expectations for communicating issues and decisions. What do volunteers need to communicate to staff? What does staff need to communicate to the Senior Minister? To the Elder Board?
4. Will there be an Elder Board? When? Role of staff vs role of Elder Board in day-to-day decision making?
5. Expectations for leadership development and training

To adequately define a leadership approach, the Church Planter should:

1. Review your beliefs to see how they might impact the leadership approach.
2. Look to Scripture for what it teaches about leadership.
3. Look at what other churches have developed for their leadership approach. Contact a few large churches you feel are healthy to ask what leadership approach they use.
4. Finalize a written leadership approach

How the Church is Organized:

As with the leadership approach, the organizational structure can be a barrier to the sustained growth of an organization. A well developed organizational structure/model will prepare the church for years of healthy growth.

Organizational structure either promotes or inhibits healthy growth. As the size of the church increases, structural issues increasingly impact growth. The longer a church waits to determine a structure that promotes growth, the harder it will be to implement the new structure. For example, churches that start with a team based structure find it much easier to implement teams than do churches that try to implement them years later.

Unfortunately, most church planters do not take the time to invest in teams during the startup of the church (often due to lack of resources). If it is impractical to develop teams during the pre-natal phase (CAUTION - a healthy pre-natal phase should include laying the groundwork for healthy teams), the church planter should at least have a defined plan for implementing some form of reproducible structure during the first year of the new church. This plan should be developed early in the pre-natal phase.

A Short Story: Consider the challenge faced by a small startup business that grows quickly during its first three years. John was your average guy with a passion to start a water and fire damage restoration business. One reason John selected this franchise is that it did not require much advance training or technical expertise. John's previous jobs had all involved customer service working for someone else. Now he was anxious to use his customer service and networking abilities at his own new company. John's plan was to start small, build a solid reputation, then expand. A solid approach.

John did his homework to select an area lacking in this service. John studied the area, developed a plan, and found the money to get started. John was somewhat organized, but not a details or strategic kind of guy. He loved dealing with people (all his previous jobs involved customer service) and was eager to build his business through relationships and word of mouth advertising. After all, he had one of the best sales records at each of the previous companies he worked for. How hard could this be?

John got a quick start. He bought one used van and decided that initially the business would consist of him and his wife. His wife would run the office while he focused on production (keeping the newly purchased van on job sites – after all, money is made on the job sites). Sales and promotion would be shared by John and his wife in their spare time. Initially the business would be run out of their house (garage serving as their shop) to minimize overhead. With one van this would be no problem.

Initially this worked fine. John focused on sales to generate business, and with his wiring and background, he had no problem generating a number of new customers. John quickly found himself consumed with getting the work done. He was disappointed that he was spending less time on sales, but he was gaining all the work they could handle through marketing, promotion, and word of mouth. For the first time, John and his wife found themselves dealing with a whole host of new challenges. Keeping a van

maintained and running, scheduling jobs, generating invoices, collecting payments, ordering supplies, placing ads, and a whole host of other things.

Within about six months, they found themselves with enough work to keep one van busy full-time. John found himself dreaming about expansion. New work means a new van and hired help. And of course the need to generate new business through sales. John realized this was a new level of risk for him and his wife. They were already busy and now they would add to their responsibilities. They rationalized that eventually they would hire enough good people that they could focus exclusively on leading and managing the organization. They decided now was the time to expand. On their first anniversary, they took the plunge to add a second van.

John found a second used van for a good price and, through a friend, found his first hired employee to run the second van. As the new yellow page ad hit the streets, John found new business was coming easier than they thought. John was thrilled that they had moved forward with a second van. John spent several months training Matt (his new assistant). Matt was a relatively reliable guy, but being an hourly worker, John often found himself frustrated that Matt didn't have the same level of ownership for things as he did. Within several months, John felt comfortable letting Matt make service calls on his own. John was generally pleased with Matt, but started seeing a pattern of 3-4 sick days per month and an inflexibility in dealing with emergent after hours and weekend jobs. With scheduled service calls, emergent service calls, and no one to back Matt up, John frequently found himself doing double time. Further, there was a higher customer dissatisfaction with Matt's work than with John's work. In the short term, John found himself rechecking Matt's work (another time consumer for John), but John just figured this was part of owning a business.

John found that it was somewhat more difficult to grow the company to the point where two vans were constantly busy. With the second van and a new hourly employee, a new level of planning and administrative burden resulted. There were untimely van repairs, regular maintenance, dealing with Matt's sick days, and the general learning curve to train and get Matt up to speed. In addition, there was now a new issue of coordinating the use of the shop for furniture cleaning (for fire and water restoration, most of the furniture is brought back to John's shop for cleaning). Especially since they were still operating out of their garage and did not have permanent facilities. With one van and all jobs being done in series, coordination of the shop schedule was never a problem. But now with two vans, John had to be much more proactive in planning. John found much less time for sales since he was managing one van, covering the slack of the second, and dealing with the increased administrative burden associated with expansion.

The good news was that the overhead costs associated with a second van were actually lower. John found that if he planned properly, there would be economy of scales (particularly in ordering material). Additionally, the labor cost associated with a second van was significantly lower (John and his wife both had to be paid with the revenue generated by the first van and now, with a second van, only Matt's salary had to be covered with the additional van). At this point, John's biggest inefficiency was having

two employees to cover two vans. John concluded that with the addition of their third van, he would actually need to add two employees (one for the third van, and one backup assistant to fill in where needed). John realized hiring two additional employees was a real stretch for them, but if they were to add another van, they would have to stretch themselves. John and his wife started to realize that a pattern was forming: add work, expand, but John was still consumed with doing the work of one van and supervising the rest. For the first time they actually discussed how great it would be to actually hire an operations manager to oversee the day-to-day details so they could have more freedom. But for now, that simply was not a priority.

Although John and his wife were not thrilled with the increased administrative burden with the growing company, their profit margin was increasing and they began seriously talking about the third van. After finding a great deal, they decided to take the plunge. All this within their first two years of operation. This time John advertised in the paper for two new employees. He was happy with the addition of Frank and Steve. From his experience with Matt, John knew that training of these new guys would be vital. After three months, John was ready to turn them loose on their own. Unfortunately, Frank decided this type of work just wasn't for him and quit unexpectedly. Steve was left to man the third van. John was actually ok with this as this meant increased cash flow, and after all, Frank was to be the fill-in guy to cover the other three van leaders when they needed help. John rationalized that they had gotten by all this time without an extra guy. What's a little while longer. John committed to look for a new guy when things stabilized out with the third van workload.

John and his wife found that juggling three vans was much harder than two. In fact, it was more difficult than they ever expected. They found themselves constantly talking about hiring and training new people. They seemed to always conclude that it was more important to focus time on sales than hiring and training a new employee. They found themselves working far more hours now than when they started, but they rationalized that things could only get better.

Just as John was having a hard time keeping up with work, his wife found the increased administrative requirements nearly impossible. She concluded there was no way to add a fourth van without hiring additional office staff. Likewise, John knew there was no way to add a fourth van without adding at least two new people (one for the fourth van and one to replace Frank as the fill-in person). Matt and Steve's morale was now suffering with the lack of help and assistance they received. Both actually found themselves canceling family plans because the work simply had to get done. John knew that both would probably quit if they expanded further without adding additional help. In addition to adding two new people for the fourth van, John concluded they would have to add an operations manager / supervisor. So with the thought of adding four new people to add a fourth van, John and his wife found themselves discouraged. When John realized that adding four people to add the fourth van would also mean that he kept operating one of the vans, he was even more disappointed. On top of that, John started asking himself "where can I possibly find an operations manager who understands our work and our company?" He realized that this position was best filled from internally. Unfortunately,

he concluded that Matt and Steve simply were not cut out for the job. They were great workers, but not managers.

John and his wife found themselves torn. They wanted to expand, but the cost just seemed too high. The obstacles seemed insurmountable. They faced a defining moment. Would they settle for three vans and the relative peace and certainty associated with it (after all, they had good profit margin and could be content to ride things out to retirement), or do they take the risk to expand and grow? John found himself continually asking “why?” “Why didn’t I hire a van leader with the potential to become an operations manager?” “Why didn’t I hire some part-time help as a way of getting short-term gain and screening people for full-time employment?” “Why didn’t I plan beyond the first van before I started? It would have been so much easier and I wouldn’t be faced with this decision now!” One night, as John and his wife were wrestling with the decision, John woke up in the middle of the night in a panic. John realized that adding a fourth van would also require a permanent facility. There was no way a fourth van could be added at their house. There was no longer physically room to store supplies, park the vans, and coordinate furniture cleaning in their garage.

Faced with so many obstacles, John and his wife resigned themselves to slowing down and working on healthy infrastructure. Their goal became to work themselves out of a job. Admittedly, it was more about slowing down as they marched toward retirement than it was building the health of the company. A funny thing happened, however. After several painful years of focusing on infrastructure, John and his wife actually found themselves in a position to expand again. Ten years after startup, they found themselves ready to add the fourth van!

What do we learn from this simple story of a new and expanding work?

- In the early days of the company, John had to be involved in the details and do whatever it took to keep things moving. He was the momentum. With just him and his wife, there was not much choice.
- John and his wife would have added the fourth van (and subsequent vans) far quicker if their initial startup plan had looked beyond the first van. They should have asked “What will this company look like with one van? Two vans? Three? Five? Ten?” The answers are predictable far in advance and can be dealt with proactively.
- The health of an organization and its ability to overcome organizational barriers are best dealt with before you are faced with the barrier.
- Administrative burdens increase at a greater pace than the “productive work” as the organization grows. Overhead requirements tend to increase (facilities, equipment management, supply support, phones, etc.)
- John needed to work himself out of the position that other paid staff could easily do far earlier than he did. By replacing himself in the detailed work, John would have been freed to proactively spend time planning for the future and developing people.

- Structural issues are important. Structures need to adapt to the life stage of the organization.

Many church planters fall in to the same traps as John. The best approach is to give thought to what the church will look like at launch. At one year. Two years. Five years. Consider the following questions in setting defining your organizational approach:

- Role and organization of small groups. What does the structure look like from staff down to small group leader? Will small groups be the basic unit of organization within the major ministry areas of the church?
- Role and organization of ministry teams. Will ministry service be done through teams? What does the structure look like from staff down to team leaders? Will staff initially lead teams? If so, what is the transition plan to volunteer leadership? What does that commitment require and look like?
- Role and organization of coaching. Will a coaching system be implemented? How will leaders be cared for?
- Basic organization of ministries. What will the basic organizational structure look like at launch?

One process for developing a leadership structure is:

1. Review your beliefs to see how they might impact your organizational structure.
2. Look to Scripture on what it teaches about the use of teams.
3. Look at what other churches have developed for their organizational approach. Contact a few large churches you feel are healthy to ask what organizational structure use.
4. Finalize a written organizational structure.

The Process Approach

Every activity of an organization is part of some process (most churches have over 100 different processes functioning all at once). Initially, churches can survive without formal processes. Eventually, a lack of healthy processes will inhibit growth. It is easier to establish healthy processes during the startup of a new church than to try and change established things later.

Processes define how we do what we do. Whether they are written down or not, every organization consists of a system of interrelated processes (e.g. tracking visitors, setup/teardown on Sunday morning, planning Sunday services, children's security, hiring staff, recruiting volunteers, etc.). Every activity of an organization is part of some process (most churches have over 100 processes functioning all at once--- a full children's ministry has at least 13 different distinct processes). Initially, a church can survive without formally defined processes. Eventually, lack of healthy processes will inhibit growth. It's just a matter of time. The best time to establish a commitment to a process approach and to begin defining a limited number of processes is during the prenatal phase.

In his best selling book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" Stephen Covey highlights the difference between production activities and production capacity activities. Production activities are the specific work tasks things we do. Production capacity activities are those things we do to improve our capacity to get work done. Covey uses the Fable of the Goose with the Golden Egg to illustrate the point. A goose produces golden eggs every day. The farmer wants more and kills the goose to get the rest of the eggs inside the goose. Production is making eggs. Production capacity is the care and feeding of the goose so that it will be healthy and continue producing eggs in the future.

Unfortunately, many of us become so focused on production, that we starve production capacity. Eventually we wonder why we can't get more done or why things are not going well. Production capacity is an investment today in future health.

Production capacity is about process (how we produce results). Production is about the products coming out of a process. If you want to improve the product, focus on the process. Unfortunately most church planters don't take the time to begin the work of defining processes. They feel so overwhelmed with production that they don't take the time to invest in the process.

Defined processes are important for:

- setting expectations for volunteers and providing a clear picture of what a volunteer is being recruited to do. Most people have an easier time volunteering when expectations are made clear.
- producing more consistent results.
- providing a basis for training volunteers.

- producing higher quality and a more disciplined approach to continuous improvement.
- providing a basis for measuring performance.
- providing a more quantitative basis for resource needs (people, money, facilities and equipment).
- proactively shaping how things are done rather than leaving it up to volunteers to figure it out.

Key things to consider:

- Every process needs an owner
- Teams are best suited to own processes. Each team should own at least one process (in most cases, they own several processes).
- Processes start with expectations. It is best to empower a team (or individual) with the responsibility of designing a process. In delegating this responsibility, it is essential to provide the team basic expectations or parameters that the process must live within. The expectations define the box that the team must work within. The team has flexibility to do whatever they want inside the box. Ask these questions in setting basic expectations/parameters:
 1. What do we want to accomplish? (e.g. high quality monthly newsletter).
 2. What are the non-negotiable factors affecting a process? (e.g. must be printed in color, need an article by the Senior Minister in every edition, grammatically error free, produced and mailed for less than \$200 per edition, etc.)
- Processes should initially be defined in writing. Writing things down forces those who own the process to understand it.
- Volunteers should be trained on the process.
- Volunteers who use the process provide the best insight into how the process should be changed for improvement.

Products of this action include:

- Written statement of commitment to a process approach
- Written description of the how a process approach will be implemented
- Identification of the highest priority processes to start with

The Priorities and Strategy of the Church

Not all churches can be all things to all people. Given the purpose, beliefs and values of the church, along with the average target family, the Church Planter must determine which priorities will be the focus of the church resources.

Keep it simple. Narrow the focus. So easily said, so hard to do. Torn by the desire to do everything possible to reach lost people, many church planters overextend themselves and the new church. By focusing on trying to do too many things, we don't do anything really well. By selecting 3-5 key priorities, the church planter has a filter through which decisions can be made. All the activities and decisions during the pre-natal phase (from staffing to facilities to equipment selection) should be filtered through how the decision supports the 3-5 priorities.

Most people are not compelled to action by a simple written purpose statement. People need to see how their actions fit in the bigger picture. For most new churches, a detailed strategy may not be prudent (or possible). Instead, a simply list of 3-5 priorities is adequate.

This action prepares the church planter for thinking through the initial priorities of the new church. The most basic question is "What are the 3-5 things we are going to do really well when the new church opens?"

Factors to consider in answering these questions and identifying the initial priorities for the new church include:

- Gifting and talents of the Lead Pastor. For example, if the Lead Pastor is a great communicator, teaching may be an initial priority.
- Passion and calling of the Lead Pastor. In deciding to plant a church, God placed a specific vision and calling on your heart. Follow that calling.
- The church values. If you value community, perhaps small groups/home groups would be a high priority.
- Felt and real needs of the target demographic in the area. For example, if your target is young families with children, a safe, high-quality children's program is very important.
- Understanding of the strengths of other churches in the area. How will you be distinguished from other local churches.
- Reputation you seek to establish. What do you want to become know for in the community?

What are the 3-5 things that if done really well, will help accomplish purpose? One new church defined small groups, children's ministry and an excellent worship service as their three top priorities. The church church planter (and his team) aligned their actions and efforts around these priorities. In this way, anyone on the launch team could see in practical ways how their actions fit with the church's purpose and priorities. These

priorities are not rigid and inflexible. As a church matures and grows, the list of priorities may be changed or transitioned into a more defined strategy.

To develop church priorities, the Church Planter should:

1. Consider your talents and calling for what God may place on your heart as priorities.
2. Review your beliefs to see how they might impact the your priorities.
3. Review your average target family to look for key priorities which may best reach them.
4. Finalize a written priorities

The priorities should be clearly stated with no ambiguity. Additionally, some church planters find it helpful to identify specific measurable goals for each priority..

Member Expectations:

Numerous studies have shown that the higher our expectations for people, the higher the commitment people have to the cause. Clear expectations help everyone better meet a common goal/purpose. Without specifically telling church members what is expected of them, they are left to try to figure it out on their own and will likely all come up with different answers.

The importance of clearly defined and clearly communicated expectations can not be overstated. Most people generally have good intentions, want to do well, and do not want to let other people down. Vague expectations consistently lead to trouble. Clear expectations form the foundation for selecting volunteers, training volunteers, defining processes, and helping disciple people in their next step with God. Clearly defined and clearly communicated expectations help keep us from being a barrier between people and Christ and their next step toward Him.

Many churches turn to the first century church as the model for clear expectations. How did a follower of Jesus act in the first century church? Consider the following characteristics of a follower of Christ in the first century. How do these characteristics translate into expectations for members today?

- Accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior, confessing their sins, repenting, and being Baptized
- Meeting together regularly for fellowship
- Meeting regularly to worship God
- Sharing financially with one another to meet needs
- Serving one another
- Praying for one another and the church

Some churches also choose to identify basic expectations for how we will treat one another and how we will communicate with one another.

When developing membership expectations, the Church Planter should:

1. Take into consideration your beliefs, values and strategy, develop a list of possible member expectations.
2. Review the member expectations from several other churches you admire.
3. Decide which expectations to adopt.

The Discipleship Process:

Every person in the church from the new attendee to the senior minister has a next step to take in order to draw closer to God. A primary role of the church is to facilitate moving people from being unconnected to being active participants in the church. This process is usually called discipleship.

Defining a discipleship / Next Step Process is one of the first practical examples of defining expectations and defining a process (see previous actions) that the church planter will accomplish.

Most planters start by categorizing people into groups. These groups could include:

- The unchurched with little or no interest in church
- The unchurched considering or discussing church or spiritual things
- First-time visitors
- Newcomers who have come at least 3 times but have not committed to stay
- Infrequent attendees (consider your church their church but do not attend regularly)
- Committed to regular worship, but not connected in the church
- Connected, but not practicing spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible Study, serving, giving financially, etc.) – Spiritually stuck people
- Fully committed leaders

Next planters consider the best environment for each of these groups to experience growth and to take next steps. After identifying the environments, the planter considers specific activities within those environments for helping to draw people into that environment and then to move them onto the next environment. Finally, the planter looks for a simple and focused way to connect the environments together into a simple to understand and easy to follow process.

[North Point Community Church](#) outside Atlanta, GA has done a masterful job of this. Their book titled “[7 Practices of Effective Ministry](#)” is a must read book on this subject. The North Point approach uses the image of a house and the experience that happens in each room to describe the movement of people into more intimate settings and relationships. The basic assumption is that life change happens best in the context of safe relationships where people can ask questions. North Point creates environments where those relationships can be formed and life change happens. Each environment has an increasing level of intimacy as a person enters the home through the front door/foyer and ends up in the kitchen. Click [here](#) to read more about North Point's environments.

The Church Planter must determine what the process will be to lead people through a process of growth recognizing this is a never ending process. To do so:

1. Seek input from other churches you respect about their discipleship process.

2. Develop your strategy for moving people toward your purpose.
3. If desired, develop a picture or simple analogy to describe your process.

In addition to a written description, many planters choose to put the process into a simple picture for easier communication of expectations to people.