

Prolegomena¹: A Mandate, A Model, and a Method

As we begin VVS ('values, vision, & strategy'), I set out three parameters, so that we are all on the same page: (1) a mandate; (2) a model; and (3) a method.

1. A mandate: an *ad hoc* advisory group

We are *ad hoc*, assembled for a particular purpose, and for so long as it takes us to accomplish that purpose, which I estimate to be about six months, taking us to the end of August 2009.

We are an advisory group. We are not taking over the leadership of English ministry. We will analyze, strategize, and suggest innovations. But no one has to do what we propose. We will be content if we succeed in clearly conceptualizing and articulating appropriate forward movement, and EML gives serious consideration to any proposals that we may make.

2. A model for 'vision building': What do we care about? What will we do about it?

To help us all be on the same page, we will use a particular management model for vision setting, from the article "Building Your Company's Vision," by James Collins and Jerry Porras <http://www.idbisc.com/building%20vision.pdf>. Below I summarize the model. But first, I offer two caveats.

For one, no model – and no vision – provides the key to success or to change, whether in ministry or in any other venue. Results are the outworking of many factors, perhaps the most crucial being the personalities and actions of key (whether formal or *de facto*) leaders. Academics come along later and propose an explanation for why a particular initiative succeeded or failed, because, well, that is how academics make a living. Protocol requires that an academic explanation be analytical, logical, and neat. Protocol does not require that it actually work. Conversely, sometimes what works is not neat. So we employ a method simply as a mechanism to facilitate conversation, not because even the best methodology ensures success.

For the other, we keep in view that the goal is never precise implementation of the model. The model is only a means to the end. Methodological exactitude is not a self-justifying virtue. We use the method to the extent that it helps, but keep our eyes entirely on the goal, not on precise adherence to the model.

Now for the model, in two parts, with four elements:

Core ideology: the conceptual framework for organizational direction, comprising: core values and core purpose.

Envisioned future: what we hope to become, comprising: *BHAG* ('big, hairy, audacious goal') and vivid statements.

¹ 'Prolegomena' (proh-li-gom-uh-nuh, n.pl.; sg 'prolegomenon'), from Greek 'pro' + 'lego', (a) 'before lego', i.e., first-generation prototype of now ubiquitous children's plastic toy blocks; (b) 'before' + 'say', i.e., what you need to say before you say what you want to say.

Core Ideology

Core values: What values capture the essence of who we are and what we do?

- core values are essential & enduring tenets, timeless & unchanging
- core values have intrinsic worth; external justification is not necessary
- core values matter so much that an organization will hold them even if they prove to be a competitive disadvantage: if necessary, the organization will change its 'market' before it changes those values
- core values are few in number, usually 3-5, few enough to focus all that we do

Core purpose: What is our fundamental reason for existence? Why are we here? What accounts for what we do, and the way we do it?

- our ideological motivation for existence, something nobler than just turning a profit
- 100-year time frame: core purpose does not change
- ask '5 whys?': what do we do? why? why? why? ...

Illustrations

- Disney
core values
wholesome entertainment
imagination and creativity
fanatical attention to quality
core purpose: to make people happy (not just to make cartoons)
- Sony
core values:
raise the status of 'made in Japan' (formerly meant 'cheap')
pioneers of innovation that makes the impossible possible
encourage creativity
core purpose: to experience the joy of advancing and applying technology for public benefit
- Merck
core values:
corporate social responsibility
excellence,
science-based innovation
core purpose: to preserve and improve human life

Envisioned Future

BHAG: 'big, hairy, audacious goal'

The goal provides a unifying focal point, and serves as a catalyst for team spirit. It has to be big enough to challenge the group, to be beyond our current reach unless we all work together and extend ourselves beyond our usual limits. The goal should be engaging enough to bring a sense of excitement and achievement if accomplished.

10-30 year time-frame, with a clear demarcation of the finish line / expected results

Goals take a variety of forms, e.g.,

quantitative: Wal-Mart: \$125 billion company by 2000

qualitative: 1920s Ford: to democratize the automobile

common enemy: 1970s Nike: to crush Adidas

role-model: Stanford: to become the Harvard of the West

internal transformation: to diversify a defense contractor into a high-tech leader

Vivid Statement: The final step of conceptualizing is to put the vision and the goal in pithy, memorable terms, such as values statements, vision statements, *BHAG*, etc.

All this, of course, leaves out strategies and execution (as does the article by Collins and Porras). We will give some thought to that also, especially in the ministry areas that come under the jurisdiction of study group members.

In short, we ask three questions:

What do we care about? (core values)

What does God call us to do about it? (core purpose, BHAG, vivid statement)

What steps can we take toward that end? (strategy)

3. A method for analysis

As a convenient framework, we begin by breaking down our deliberations into four areas of Christian life and ministry: (1) God, (2) Christian community, (3) individual, and, (4) mission (including evangelism, missions, mercy & justice, and public policy).

It would be far simpler if we were just to sit around a table, ingesting large quantities of sugar and caffeine, and spewing forth ideas that spring spontaneously to mind. That method suffers from two weaknesses.

For one, while the answers which intuition provides are sometimes right, other times they are off-mark, and intuition is ill-equipped to distinguish the one from the other.

More importantly, what we call intuition is generally a combination of our basic personality type and our cultural environment. The ideas that come spontaneously to mind are typically those which derive from our culture or appeal to our particular personality. Either way, they are not from God, nor do they reflect careful analysis of our culture.

Cultural analysis is a particularly important part of what we need to do. We are all subliminally shaped by our culture. So ideas that just seem reflexively right, and practices that work well, do so not because they are either biblical or logical or moral, but because they fit our cultural context. Some of what fits our culture will be consistent with scriptural values; some will be neutral; some will be antagonistic. The only way to distinguish each is first, to engage in cultural analysis, and then to evaluate in the light of Scripture.

So, for example, the cultural phenomenon known as modernity shaped Christianity in ways that people did not realize at the time. Toward the end of the modern period, sociologist James Hunter pointed out some of the ways modernity distorted biblical Christianity, our faith and practice.² The problem was: by that time, our culture shifted into the worldview of postmodernity. Ironically, reacting to the corruptions of modernity, many Christian leaders and churches unreflectively advocated postmodern values and practices, unaware of the new distortions they were introducing.

So we begin each new section with surveys of two trail markers: (a) recent sociological analysis of contemporary trends, and (b) biblical teaching. Our goal is to bring both (a) and (b) to bear on our thinking and strategizing about each issue. What this means in practice will become clear as we move ahead.

² James Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandry of Modernity*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983; also *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.