

The Salvation Army Leadership Letter



Issue 28:

Have you found your new corps/church dream?

Discovering the second key to growing congregations

Leadership is the first key to growing a corps or church; the second is vision.

Leadership focuses on **who** will lead the attack on the hill we'll take for God (see Letter 22); vision focuses on **what** we'll see on the journey and at the top of the hill.

Most NZ churches are under-led and under-visionsed so they plateau or die. As a result, most New Zealanders stay outside the church because 'where there is no vision the people perish' – ie, the people in the church die on the inside and people outside the church die without being reached for Christ.

A crippled and disabled church is the greatest tragedy that can hit a nation.

Well-led churches with clear vision break out of this downward spiral – as they once did in Wesley's England.

Vision – What is it?

Great leaders describe vision in different ways.

Bill Hybels says a vision is **a picture** of the future that produces passion in you – just as the vision of a free Europe inspired and empowered the World War II allies to land at Normandy in France.

Bennis and Nanus say a vision is **a target** that beckons, like Kennedy's plan to put a man on the moon. So a vision always refers to something in the future – it's the bridge between the present and the future.

Maxwell says that vision is everything for a leader because it **leads** the leader and **paints** the target. Leaders without vision don't go anywhere, he says, they just go round and round in circles.

Master teachers, Kouzes and Posner, whose *Leadership Challenge* has been Andy Stanley's primary leadership text since 1988, go further. No doubt remembering Martin Luther King, they use the words 'vision' (and the more powerful word) 'dream' interchangeably.

They say that all organisations and social movements begin with a dream – and the dream or vision is the force that **invents** their future. So real leaders *inspire a shared vision*; they gaze across the horizon of time and see the wonderful opportunities ahead for them – and their people – when they reach their destination. True leaders want to change things, make things happen, and create something that no one else has ever created. Indeed, these leaders live their lives backward because they see what the completed project will look like before they've started, just as architects draw pictures of buildings before anything has been built. And good leaders get excellent buy-in to their vision because they anchor the vision in people's hopes and dreams, as Martin Luther King did before them.

So, a vision is a **picture** of the future, a **target** that beckons, it **leads** the leader and **invents** the future.



In 25 years on the road, I've never seen a well-led church with a clear vision fail and I've never seen an under-led and under-visions church succeed.

Everything rises and falls on leadership and for leaders themselves, vision is everything exactly as Maxwell says.

Vision – Why do we need it?

We need vision because despite all our schemes and programmes, the national church is dying. Increasing numbers in the church are disillusioned with it, and the crowds outside the church get larger and larger.

Get out the Willow Creek CD we're using (CDLS0504) and **play** tracks 2-7 on vision and engagement. **Note** what Bill Hybels says about the tragedy of his Dad in a visionless church and the tragedy of multitudes of lay leaders who are disillusioned with church because their pastors do not, cannot, or will not put a target on a wall somewhere for them to aim for.

Bill is not exaggerating, that's how it is in America, and in NZ; people inside and outside the church perish because churches don't have the visions that could **invent** their future.

To try to grow a local church without a vision is like trying to drive a car without fuel – it'll go down hill beautifully but you'll have to push or tow it the rest of the way.

We need local corps/churches with vision because the national church is dying.

Vision – How do we get it?

Leaders get church-shaping visions and dreams (the term Martin Luther King preferred) in different ways:

1. For example, leaders with a **strong leadership gift** see their preferred future as clearly as an architect sees the finished house before it is built (so Kouzes and Posner).

A friend who founded a church a generation ago, and has grown it to 2000 on Sundays – saw the 5000-person church of his dreams as clearly as if it had already been built, including the various stages along the way and the expensive land they later purchased to build on. He saw it unfolding because he's got a strong leadership gift.

2. Leaders who **struggle with the shape of their dream** can take a leader or two with them to study a church that has already made it to where they want to go. They find out all they can about how the church got to that point, how they got their people on board, what challenges they met and how they handled them, what lessons they learned, and what advice they'd give to other leaders as they begin the same journey.
3. **Most leaders** discover vision in their ongoing journey with their leadership team. They, or one or two of their leaders, become unhappy with the status quo. They start exploring possible options until they narrow down their vision or dream to a preferred option, which they take to the congregation for comment and possible refining; then they go forward from there.

Broadly speaking, this is what Willow Creek did when they **reinvented** (Kouzes and Posner) their weeknight New Community meetings (as you can hear on CD DM004). Even in a church of their size, with leaders as gifted as they have, they took their dream to the people who modified the concept (to build in plenty of praise and worship!) and everything went forward from there.



But, however senior leaders find their dream, whether in these or other ways, all are committed to **prayer** and **involve** their leaders and people in different ways; and all are convinced that a vision is a picture of the future that produces passion in us – the passion that helps us last the distance in the long campaign to take the hill.

Vision – What should we Include?

In the strictest sense, a vision refers to the new world of our dreams, and the mission statement and related documents cover the campaign period from the present to the future. Martin Luther King taught us that in the broadest and most powerful sense, dreams or visions **begin** with ‘the urgency of the moment’, **take in** the broad sweep of the future journey, and **paint** a glowing picture of the new world ahead of us.

The two views are complementary because we can have a large overarching vision with smaller visions for each stage of the journey – just as my friend had a vision for each stage of his 5000-person church journey, with his unchanging mission statement guiding him from vision to vision. In this blended model, our overarching vision is the great mountain in the distance and our smaller visions are the succession of ranges we climb to reach the mountain top – with our ever-changing mission plan shaping our campaign strategy for the year ahead.

With this model as our guide, we’re now ready to put some details into our plan for the initial stages of our campaign to take the hill. Churches do this in different ways.

1. If we’re a Salvation Army corps/church, **we start with the Army’s mission statement** to care for people, transform lives, and reform society; so we could almost say that these three focuses are like attacking a target by land, sea and air. However, how we work that mission statement will vary from corps to corps because each corps develops its own dream – to go for seekers, families, youth, people struggling with addictions, and so on.
2. In addition to its mission statement, The Salvation Army also has four **Territorial Strategic Mission Plan (TSMP) Goals** to keep it focused on the battle to take the hill – grow dynamic disciples, increase the number of soldiers, eradicate poverty, and create a connected, streamlined and mission-focused Army. So whatever else we may do along the way in taking the hill, eg, going on Christian tours, we focus on these four great activities.
3. The Army also does a **Mission Review** of corps each year, focusing on seven areas, and corps then carry goals for 3-5 of these areas into their **Mission Plan** for the coming year. These 3-5 goals may focus on evangelism, discipleship, caring for people, reforming society, stewardship, children’s ministries or youth ministries. Each corps chooses its own goals and some goals may be a combination of two goals – eg, evangelism and discipleship, or evangelism and reforming society if the programme is reaching disadvantaged people for Christ.

If we’re a Salvation Army corps, these mission/campaign understandings shape the kind of picture we want to see from the top of the hill and the kinds of things we’ll prioritise in taking it, ie, the Martin Luther King approach. That is, we create or **invent** our future exactly as Wesley and Booth did before us and Kouzes and Posner now advise us.

Looking back on Wesley and Booth, it is clear that their vision for the future produced immense passion in their people.

Vision – How then should we Shape it?

Some NZ churches profoundly shape their communities – permanently or for a season.



If our dream is to become that kind of church, where families are transformed, community values are changed, and the poor are given hope, then, if we're a Salvation Army corps, we may shape our initial vision this way.

1. We may decide that to take this hill we'll always stress doing **Sundays** well so many people come to Jesus, many who've started following him become dynamic disciples and many disciples also become soldiers. Sundays will therefore open the front door into the church and grow those already in it. This takes in TSMP Goals 1 and 2.
2. Throughout our journey, we may also decide to focus strongly on **Small Groups, Discipleship** (and **Soldiership**) and **Pastoral Care** to close the back door of the church. Seeing that we're growing *dynamic* disciples, we'll encourage more discussion groups to master *The Doctrines of The Salvation Army* – so people are well-grounded in the faith they live out and pass on to others - and we'll write this emphasis into our corps vision documents. This focus on robust small groups and pastoral care also takes in TSMP Goals 1 and 2.
3. Since most churches have few people in their late 20s to early 50s, we may decide to develop a strong focus on **Family Ministries** with special emphasis on Children's Church, Pre-school Ministry, Junior Youth and other Family Ministries as we're able to develop them. In fact weekday family ministries are the first major fishing ground for most churches because it's out in the workday world that we have the most meaningful contact with those who don't yet follow Jesus. Family ministries pick up on TSMP Goals 1-3.
4. Being an Army, we'll always be passionate about **Key Community Ministries** which will vary from corps to corps because Key Community Ministries focus especially on people struggling with life's challenges. Key Community Ministries are our second major fishing ground and reflect TSMP Goals 1-4 and especially Goal 3.
5. Many churches develop ministries that don't fit neatly into the first four categories but rather into **other ministries**. So, Salvation Army churches especially may also develop an ongoing church strategy for reforming society using Letter 21 as a guide. This is Goal 3 and ties back to the Army's mission statement to reform society.
6. Further, to drive the **business** side of the dream we may prioritise developing **business** excellence as Goal 6.

Finally, to tie everything together and give high visibility to our dream, we may also develop a **striking graphic** to put in our foyer, use at leaders meetings and feature in our services. If we use Rick Warren's *Five Purposes* we could develop an old-style temple front with five great pillars or columns – one for each purpose. If we want to make our emphasis particularly striking, we could develop a **cross-shaped graphic** (the symbol of our faith) with our growing downwards into Christ, inwards into the body/church, upwards towards God in corporate worship, and outwards into the world – thus capturing the dynamism of mission (saved to serve and transform). Or, we may want to use the **Strategic Plan Summary** model at the end of Letter 22 putting in our own details, as some corps do.

Since vision dies in less than 30 days, and 89% of what we learn is visual (Maxwell), we'll get much more mission traction if we underline our mission plan with a striking graphic because a memorable picture is worth a thousand words. And we can put our mission plan (with a slightly reduced font size) on one side of the sheet and our graphic on the other side – making a PowerPoint presentation of the graphic for high-impact preaching.

A compelling and well-presented vision that grips and inspires people is an absolute requirement to grow a church over the long haul.

Vision – Getting Started on the Journey



Having decided the **kind** of church we'll become and **what** we'll emphasise on the journey, we're now ready to create our first mission plan to get started on the journey to our distant hill.

Our plan might look roughly like this:

1. If our first key issue is **Sunday mornings**, our goal might be to develop meetings/services where seekers find Jesus and believers are inspired, empowered and equipped to serve Him. To get started, our steps for the first year might then be to raise the bar from people's arrival to their departure, with well-led meetings, singable songs, upskilled preachers and a well-led Children's Church at the same time as the meeting. This would be our Goal 1 and would advance evangelism and discipleship in the life of the corps/church.
2. If our second key issue is effective **Life Groups, Discipleship and Pastoral Care**, our goal might be to make small groups a critical part of church life with pastoral care that extends beyond the small groups to the whole church family. Our first-year steps might then be to identify the core values of effective small groups, appoint a small group champion to drive the programme, train present and future leaders, and link life groups with the Sunday messages. This would be Goal 2 and would advance evangelism and especially discipleship in the corps.
3. If our third key issue is the **Mainly Music** part of Family Ministries, our goal might be to help MM adults and children find and follow Jesus – with first-year steps to empower leaders to build relationships with MM families, develop key events to help families travel towards faith in Jesus, and pass on success stories and challenges to the wider corps family. This would be our Goal 3, and would advance evangelism in the life of the corps.
4. If we had a special ministry to **disadvantaged children and their families** (as some do), our goal might be to empower the leaders to build relationships with the families, connect them into the life of the corps/church, and develop appropriate events where they can move towards faith in Jesus. This would be our Goal 4 and would focus on both evangelism and eradicating poverty in the community.
5. With our corps starting to grow, our final focus might be on appointing a **business champion** to develop and drive our business strategy with the appropriate setting-up steps. This could be our Goal 5 or simply another action we take in the coming year so we become a more connected, streamlined and mission-focused Army.

We could do our first mission plan this way; or alternatively, we could spread these five emphases strongly through the seven 'areas' we mentioned earlier, from evangelism to youth. Both models work well for Salvationist and non-Salvationist churches.

Whichever option we choose, a strong, focused start to our hilltop journey makes it much easier for us later on.

Vision – Keeping the Troops Fired up

With our vision and plan in place, we're ready to focus on keeping our troops fired up and focused in the long campaign to take the hill – lest none make it to the top because they ran out of rations.

But note this:

With vision dying in less than 30 days, we've got to keep pouring it into people or the stunning vision-casting message we preached at the beginning of the year will be forgotten in a week or two because we leak vision – and there's not a person on earth who can stop it happening!

In fact, Bill Hybels says, 'you or I could deliver a mind-blowing, God-honoring, pulse-quickenning vision talk on Sunday that leaves everyone revved up to go change the world, but by Tuesday many people



have forgotten they were even in church the previous weekend'. Shocking as that may seem it is frighteningly true because that's the real world we 'do' church in.

So what can we do about it – when our best messages leak out of people in a *few days*? There's only one thing we can do; we've got to keep vision casting with all the skill we can, on every occasion we can, through as many leaders as we can, and to as many people as we can. And our prime target must be Sunday mornings when we have our biggest gathering of people.

Here are some vision-casting tips:

1. **Take** your copy of Maxwell's *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* and **read** the chapter on *Communication* carefully, **note** his four points and especially his page 27 comment that 'If you dump a bunch of information on people, you're not communicating. Every time you speak to people, give them something to feel, something to remember, and something to do'. Yes, do it every time!
2. **Pass** this insight onto your senior Sunday contributors so your meeting and worship leaders drip-feed vision into their leading through their prepared choice of words and prayers – we don't want them speaking longer, we do want them speaking more effectively with vision-tinged words. **Get** your best communicators to do the Sunday notices – briefly and with a vision flavour, as they're scrolled through on the screen. **PowerPoint** your graphic and **coach** your ministry champions (like your Mainly Music leader) to bring well-prepared 3-4 minute persuasive updates (as in Maxwell above) on their ministry. **Encourage** all your preachers to weave vision into their messages using your graphic frequently as they preach. And **coach** your team leaders to pass vision onto their teams in the same way as you do to the corps.
3. **Evaluate** what you're doing to see it fits your vision and **celebrate** your victories frequently – as Practice number 7 of *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* reminds us. Remember the author's advice, 'If you want a behaviour repeated then you need to reward it'.

You'll never get to your hilltop dream, nor anywhere near it, till you fire up your troops frequently, fervently and persuasively. They're in a long, hard campaign so give them the rations they need to last the distance.

Vision – Learning from Nehemiah

Long ago, Nehemiah showed us how to get these vision things together in a classic book on leadership.

Note these points:

1. The 'church' of the OT, based on Jerusalem, had **declined** even more than the western church today (1:3).
2. Nehemiah **did** a very careful assessment of the situation (2:11-15), as we should with our church/corps, because if Bill Hybels is any guide (see end of Letter 27), we're either growing or dying.
3. Nehemiah **acknowledged** the problem was very serious (as it is with many NZ churches) and **challenged** people to join him in going for a new dream (2:16-18) – as we should challenge our people, because more of the same won't do.
4. Nehemiah **used** a very clear strategy to reach his dream (3:1-32) and we should do the same because victory doesn't just happen.



5. Nehemiah **met** and **countered** very stiff opposition along the way (4:1-23; 6:1-14) and, wise though we may be, we too may be opposed by those who don't buy into our corps/church dream.
6. Nehemiah **focused** strongly on helping the poor and reforming society as he pursued his great hilltop dream (5:1-19) just as we should today. Mission is never just about either evangelism or helping the needy etc – it is always both, at the same time, full on and without all the stops!
7. Despite all the difficulties, Nehemiah **reached** his great dream (6:15) and if we have the same commitment we'll reach our corps dream too – stage by stage until, at last, we stand on the hilltop of our dreams.
8. The completed dream had a **stunning and God-honouring impact** on vast numbers of people round about (6:16) – just as some dream-reaching NZ churches have a phenomenal impact on their communities and mission overseas; for example, my friend's church has planted hundreds of churches in two continents and the Pacific.

True, Nehemiah lived 2500 years ago, but he showed us how to bring all these mission things together and extend the kingdom of God against all human odds.

When we follow the right mission principles, and work with people in the right way, we can regrow the work of God on the ruins of the past.

Nehemiah did. John Wesley did. And so did William Booth.

If only we followed them more!

Vision – The Great Challenge!

Today, in the broad sense, we face a similar challenge to Nehemiah, Wesley and Booth.

God's work is declining, with most NZ churches plateaued or dying while the needy cry out for help on every side. Nationally, more of the same won't turn the tide no matter how good our individual programmes and statistics may be.

The only solution is a leader-driven, vision-focused movement that **reinvents** (Kouzes and Posner) the future – as Nehemiah, Wesley, Booth and the later Martin Luther King invented the future in their day.

Nothing is more powerful than vision, for as a giant searchlight that illuminates the area around us and flashes towards the horizon, vision's dazzling light pierces 'the urgency of the moment', sweeps towards the distant horizon and settles on the hilltop of our dreams.

Maxwell (quoting Foch) says, 'The most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire'.

At the church level, visions that fire people up start with each church and corps finding their own mission dream.

Have you found yours?

Questions for you and your team (to work through slowly and carefully)

1. **Read** Martin Luther King's Dream speech on the internet and **play** tracks 2-7 of Willow Creek's CD CDLS0504 on vision and engagement. Then answer these questions:



Is your **picture** of the future producing passion in you? Do you have a clear **target** that beckons – and what is it? Is vision **leading** you – or is something else? And is your vision so clearly **inventing** your future that you can see it now, just as architects see sketched buildings before they're built (cf. the extraordinary detail in Martin Luther King's Dream Speech, eg, the little black and white children and what they're doing; it's an amazing vision!)?

Answer each question separately and grade yourself from 1-10, 1 being poor and 10 excellent, then strategise on the steps you'll take to become a leader who **invents** the future – turning the steps into a personal development plan for yourself (take this exercise very seriously because it will shape your ministry for years to come).

2. While playing the above CD tracks, do the same exercise with your team, measuring their **passion** level, the **clarity** of the target you're all aiming at, the extent to which your team vision is **leading** you and **inventing** your corps future (yes, *inventing* your future!).

Test them first at a **personal** level (as you tested yourself), and then at a **team** level so they apply each question to themselves and to their team. Wrap the exercise up with a team development plan and encourage each leader to also write their own brief personal development plan.

3. What steps will you and your team now take to find a compelling vision that grips and inspires people, eg, **visit** a church that's got to where you want to go, **create** a vision at a leaders retreat, or **develop** it at leaders meetings? Write down the steps you'll take and when you'll take them.
4. With your vision in place, **weave the insights** you gained from this Letter into your next mission plan – either spreading them strongly through the seven areas mentioned, or building specific goals around them. Have a preliminary discussion now about what you'll include in the plan so you capture fully the compelling vision you've agreed on. Write the specifics of your discussion down and feed them into your mission plan discussions when you take them up later.
5. With vision often dying in a few days (Hybels), **discuss** and **record** the steps you'll now take to keep your leaders' white hot vision before the congregation – eg, weaving it into your meeting songs, notices and preaching, etc.
6. Remembering my comments on graphics and a picture being worth a thousand words, **work very hard** to develop a simple and compelling graphic that you can use frequently so that despite the fact we leak vision, your people become passionate about the dream they've signed on for.
7. Remembering how Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10), try to **capture your local corps dream** in an easy phrase or two that matches Jesus' simple wording – ie, no big words and no long-winded phrases.

Start with 'helping people find and follow Jesus and change the world they live in' and develop something from there. Remember you can shorten this slogan for different contexts – eg, 'Helping people find and follow Jesus', 'Find, Follow and Change' or even 'Find and Follow'. But whichever slogan you come up with, it must be short and simple and use everyday words because that's how vision works; and when you've got your slogan you can use it repeatedly to keep your people fired up and focused because 'the most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire'.

8. Having read this and worked through the questions, are there any **other steps** you now want to take to develop your personal life and ministry further? Write the steps and action points down and begin implementing them immediately.

And may God bless you as you go forward with Him!