

Plan Backwards to Reach Long-range Objectives

Reverse planning helps designers of all kinds achieve far-reaching projects. Start with the final aim, whether building a railroad over mountains, landing men on the moon, liberating a city from a tyrant, or planting a cluster of churches. Then ask, “What prior step must occur before that final conclusion? After that ask, “What must happen before that prior step” and so on until you have planned backwards to where you are now. Then it is safe to plan forward, projecting feasible steps.

Backward planning by believers starts with a God-given vision of what will exist in the future, based on Jesus’ Great Commission, and works back to where they are now, envisioning and describing what needs to be done along the way. Workers entering a pioneer field must envision churches multiplying like the grain in Jesus’ parables, and plan accordingly by faith, trusting God to do what He has promised to do.

Premature forward planning starts by looking at currently available resources and building on them in the most obvious way; it focuses on costs and immediate obstacles rather than on what must be in place ten years hence. Unwise church planners ask, “How can we get more money to do more of what we are already doing?” This leads to slow growth, usually in only one place, and relies more on money than on the Holy Spirit.

If you plan for a movement in which churches or cell groups multiply, take a moment now to plan backwards. Consider the mobilization actions listed below. As you read it, picture your final objective in your heart, and reason back to the present, defining for each action what must happen prior to it. Each item focuses on a different type of people. Numbering starts with 14 and works down to 1, to aid thinking in reverse. Skip steps that do not apply to your work, and be ready to modify the order as needs arise.

14

Regional congregations cooperate to enhance fellowship, edify each other, achieve vital projects and continue multiplying.

Discern the following, along with your coworkers, before planning specific details:

- What must exist to organize effectively in a large region?
- Who will be prepared to take responsibility for organizing many churches?
- What must already be in place to let closely-knit churches multiply widely?

13

Proven, mature workers prepare to serve with humility, at a regional level, to coordinate inter-church cooperation.

Local leaders oversee newer shepherding elders. They acquire this skill from “apostles” who take responsibility for each new leader’s fruitful ministry, as the Apostle Paul did for his apprentices. Otherwise, the first regional leaders, lacking maturity in such work, become grasping and demanding.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will pastors acquire the skill needed to become regional “servant leaders”?
- Who will model servant leadership for them?
- How will they model it? In what setting?
- What must already be in place to prepare regional leaders as pastors of pastors?

Plan Backwards to Reach Long-range Objectives

12

Local congregations mature and serve the needy, including those outside of the church.

New churches, led by caring servant leaders, grow in Christ and do vital New Testament ministries. These new leaders not only shepherd their flocks but also mobilize newer shepherds for ministry, acquiring this skill on the job. In pioneer fields, workers from the outside demonstrate those skills to the first new leaders.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will you see that churches do all ministries required by the New Testament?
- How will you make sure that their shepherds practice servant leadership?
- Who will model servant leadership for them?
- What must already be in place to let to provide pastoral training that mobilizes servant leaders for practical action?

11

Train as many new leaders as will be needed to multiply churches throughout the region.

Experienced leaders guide new ones. Leaders learn to shepherd their people with loving care and not just preach and enforce rules. Pastoral trainers do not simply pass information on to students. They train them to edify and equip their flocks for ministry. Teachers work in harmony with those who have different spiritual gifts, as God requires in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. In fields where new shepherding elders cannot neglect their flocks to go study elsewhere, trainers avoid institutional training. Youths hoping for a paid church job eagerly seek academic credentials but, lacking models of effective shepherding, fail to link what they are learning to their future ministry.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will you prepare both leaders and followers to value servant leadership?
- What kind of discipleship training will lay a foundation for servant leadership?
- What must already be in place to model basic, loving discipleship training?

10

New Christians learn through a caring, relational, discipleship training, to exalt Jesus by obeying His commands.

Disciple makers teach new believers to obey Jesus' commands before and above all else. Jesus requires His followers to believe, repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit; then to love, break bread, pray, give, and make disciples. Lengthy indoctrination before obedience training stifles loving discipleship; students become passive hearers. Later, it would be hard to rally them for ministries other than teaching. Building on obedience, the new believers practice New Testament church body life, and serve one another with their diverse God-given gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit. They observe trainers forming loving relationships needed for such obedience. Trainers make disciples in a way that new believers can imitate at once with their family and friends.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who will provide this discipleship training for new believers when there are no local leaders yet?
- What kind of churches will provide the right environment for it?
- How will trainers learn to do it?
- How will you merge evangelism and serious disciple making, as the apostles did?

Plan Backwards to Reach Long-range Objectives

- What must already be in place so that disciple makers spend quality time with seekers and new believers?

9

Seekers take their first steps of faith with the help of a caring church body

When seekers discover new, holy, eternal life in Christ, workers confirm their repentance with baptism (Acts 2:38-41). Workers help seekers sense the crucified, risen Christ living among them, and model a sacrificial pilgrim's life in a hostile world.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will you provide a caring church body as soon as seekers receive Jesus?
- Who will lead the infant churches?
- How will churches begin discipleship training immediately, and not merely teach abstract doctrines?
- How will you help church planters do relational evangelism and disciple making?
- What must already be in place so that evangelism brings not only God's forgiveness but also health, peace of mind, relief from extreme poverty, and freedom from demonic oppression?

8

Workers penetrating a new community identify strongly with most of its social norms and culture.

Workers from the outside bond with the people and their culture, and, when necessary, learn the language. They use methods of evangelism and teaching that the people can afford, imitate and use immediately. They focus on a specific people group and culture and penetrate it. They use different spiritual gifts to deal with diverse needs of the people. They avoid technology, equipment, and methods beyond the reach of the local people, providing an easy-to-imitate model. Workers from a very different culture seek helpers from a similar culture to be "door openers" who readily identify with the people.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who will join a task group that can embrace the local culture?
- How will your workers thoroughly bond with the people and culture?
- How will you engage workers from a culture like that of the people you serve?
- What must already be in place to mobilize an effective church planting team?

7

Bring workers from the same, or a similar, culture to help, at least during initial evangelism.

In fields with a very different culture, collaborate with workers from churches that are culturally close to the people you will serve, who can readily relate to them. Do not rely on anthropological orientation alone, to adapt to a new culture. Seek witnesses for Christ who share similar background, race, dialect, economy, politics, social status, education, family size, rural or urban life-style and worldview.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will you mobilize workers from churches with limited resources?
- Who will provide a bridge to the other culture?
- How will you avoid forcing your cultural values on workers from other culture?
- How will you avoid making poor workers financially dependent on you?

Plan Backwards to Reach Long-range Objectives

- How will you train workers to serve in hostile fields?
- What must already be in place to engage “tentmakers” like Aquila who have two vocations: church planting and a job that authorities accept (Acts 18:1-3)?

6

Bi-vocational workers develop businesses or other means of support wherever authorities ban missionary work.

Only bi-vocational missionaries can reside in most of the world’s neglected fields. Like Paul, they need cross-cultural church planting experience, formal commissioning and employment like a small business that enables them to mix with the working class.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How will bi-vocational workers receive training?
- Who will develop the second, secular vocational work?
- If you start a business, how will you assure mutual respect between the leaders of both the business and the church planting? (Rarely can one person do both well.)
- Who will help you do the things for which you lack experience?
- What must already be in place to help sending churches prepare workers to multiply churches in neglected fields?

5

Workers practice skills working with small groups in their sending churches, to help churches multiply similar groups in pioneer fields.

Needed skills may include working with two vocations, language acquisition, network evangelism, small group worship, organic church body life, training leaders the way Paul did, and church multiplication.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who will model needed ministry skills for workers who enter other cultures?
- How will trainees practice these skills realistically, and not just talk about them?
- What must already be in place so that workers acquire skills needed to serve in pioneer fields?

4

Skilled trainers prepare workers in a way that transfers such training to fields where institutional education is impractical.

Trainers communicate with field workers that are multiplying churches, to know what skills new workers need. They practice non-academic training methods, to prepare leaders the way Jesus and His apostles did.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who will train the field workers?
- How will those trainers be prepared?
- What must already be in place to work with an agency or sending church that deploys workers who use effective methods in neglected fields?

Plan Backwards to Reach Long-range Objectives

3

Mission agencies and sending churches cooperate to work in neglected fields, especially where workers must serve secretly.

Agencies accustomed to institutional methods rarely start churches that multiply.

Discern, along with your coworkers, before planning specific details:

- How can sending churches cooperate with cooperative mission agencies to see that workers are prepared wisely?
- Who will orient church or mission agency leaders who lack strategic perspectives but are open to learn them?
- What must already be in place so that agencies and sending churches develop productive working relationships?

2

Strategists impart strategic guidelines to sending churches, mission agencies, trainers and field workers.

Churches prepare missionaries in small groups that serve as training cells, since most of the essential skills cannot be acquired in classrooms.

Discern, along with coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who in your church, school or agency can help you teach these guidelines?
- How can strategists share these guidelines with missionaries, trainers and agencies, without appearing to be telling others how to do their job?
- How will trainers discern things that only experienced field workers in other cultures can understand, to avoid meddling in areas beyond their grasp?
- Who will engage effective coaches in sending churches and agencies?
- What must already be in place to avoid career advisors and agencies steering workers into an agenda that primarily serves their own organization?

1

Strategy planners and career advisors help believers prayerfully think through plans based on objective facts and Jesus' Great Commission.

Heed only unbiased mission career advisors. Advisors who recruit for an agency usually steer workers into a preconceived agenda. Consult recruiters only if you know their agency will deploy you to do what God has called and gifted you to do. Unbiased career coaches help potential workers receive the right training in the right way, line up with the right coworkers, and avoid going to fields that don't need them or that are not receptive.

Career advisors should keep in mind these fourteen categories of people, letting workers explore options to discern where they fit in. A good coach presents options truthfully, and keeps workers' objective in mind, if they have one; both advisor and worker weigh the worker's gifts, experiences, resources, plans, relationships and accountability.

Discern, along with your coworkers, before planning specific details:

- Who will serve as mission career advisors?
- How will they prepare to advise others in an unbiased way?
- Who will lead strategic planning, keep the final objective in mind, and list the preliminary actions needed to reach it.