Redeem the heart and soul of your organization. Align your practices with God’s purposes and realize the power to clearly guide your team, grow your organization, and empower and serve others.

WOULDN’T IT BE GREAT TO

• Lead your company with more confidence and clear direction
• Know that your key leaders are on track with the same vision
• Have a strategy and roadmap you trust will actually work

Plumb the mind of the Master with this biblical approach to growing your organization. Follow the journey of a leader called upon to address critical challenges, rally the support of others, and overcome obstacles and opposition in bringing an enormous task to successful conclusion. This step-by-step guide is based on the biblical book of Nehemiah, where you will find timeless principles to apply to your present-day strategies.

FROM THE BUSH TO THE BOARDROOM — About the Author: Kathy Thomas

“How does God challenge you with a vision bigger than yourself? One day, when I was about to buy a book on leadership, he got my attention with the thought: ‘Don’t buy another book—you write it.’ As a small business owner, I was busy being busy but not achieving significant results until I put the principles found in this book into action. Desiring to help other leaders effectively lead their organizations, focus their time, and establish priorities aimed at accomplishing their vision, I felt God prompting me to write Growth Strategy Impact to provide a step-by-step, practical guide on strategic planning and growth from God’s perspective.”

After twenty years in business and education, in 1996, Kathy was challenged to put her faith in God and strategic planning skills to work designing and implementing a large-scale literacy program set to impact 200,000 people in Ethiopia, East Africa. Now, drawing upon that experience, a master’s degree in organizational leadership, and her passion for God’s Word, Kathy coaches organizations to grow as faithful witnesses in the workplace and impact the communities they serve.
GROWTH STRATEGY
impact
Practical planning for strategic growth

Master’s Mind Strategies
See Clearly • Lead Confidently • Grow Intentionally
GROWTH STRATEGY
impact

Practical planning for strategic growth to enable you to...

- **Experience deep satisfaction**—when your passion and God’s purpose align
- **Achieve powerful growth**—with clear vision, laser focus, and a process that leads to results
- **Gain confidence**—to lead your team to greater levels of performance and service
- **Enjoy the blessing**—of helping more clients and being positioned for financial generosity

By Kathy Thomas, MAOL
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Are you spinning your wheels—exchanging frantic activity for transformational results? Or do you feel you are scrambling—competing for the same limited resources or client base? Does it seem like there is never enough time, money, and energy? Here’s the good news—there is enough when your organization is intentionally focused on the important rather than the urgent.

Our instant information age provides endless options to be busy being busy. The markets we need to attract have a limited attention span and competing distractions. Planning brings it all into order. It requires us to slow down, take stock, seek direction, and focus our efforts intentionally. Planning narrows our options and reveals the best uses of our time, talent, and resources. When your organization is focused on the essentials, powerful transformational results can lead to lasting impact.

If your eyes glaze over at the mention of planning, this step-by-step, biblically inspired guide provides a fresh approach. It engages visionary leaders to apply biblical principles, answer tough questions, and develop plans that are intentionally focused, appropriately prioritized, and thoroughly implemented with sustainability in mind.

This guide equips you to communicate your vision so others see what you see, and it arms you with confidence to lead where others are afraid to go. Your completed plan will provide direction for making clear decisions about securing resources and how to spend time, money, and energy to intentionally grow your organization and transform your community in this rapidly changing environment. Get ready to make an impact!
Preparing for Impact

Do you have a vision for how something should be? I am impressed by people who, against all odds, stay committed to a plan of action and see results—the fulfillment of their vision. It requires us to trust God for something bigger than we can accomplish by ourselves—a vision that creates impact.

Impact describes the change that happens when one object comes forcibly against another. Impact is when your organization’s results are so powerful they are creating a positive ripple effect that touches more than your immediate constituency. Like a stone hitting water, your organization generates the original impact, then that ripple creates the second, and the second ripple the third, and on and on. Your organization creates an impact when its positive influence reaches beyond its immediate context and into the community. A God-given vision, effective planning, and successful implementation can create such an impact.

What will live on because of you?

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

Perhaps this kind of impact seems out of reach right now. Maybe success hasn’t come as you thought it would. If it hasn’t materialized, are you questioning if the inspiration really is from God? Are you doubting your ability to accomplish it? Whatever your experience has been in the past, act now in obedience and trust, believing that God can do what you cannot—cause the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary. If your vision is from God, he will help you carry it out. I’m convinced that, as a God of order, he has a divinely inspired processes to take the dream to the doing.

ON TAKING ACTION

As you consider what is going on in the world, do you see God honored in our institutions? Are Godly principles practiced in business? What kind of witness are we modeling to future generations? Or is our failure to act giving consent to a fallen world?

The world we live in needs hope. It needs those who will lead with integrity and excellence. Those who have faith that with God’s help, the world can be a better place. From beyond the walls of the church every believer, and every business and organization, can impact their culture and community when their passion, purpose, principles, products, and processes all give witness to the glory of God.

Whether you are frantically chasing a multitude of opportunities or aimlessly paralyzed, my hope is that this guide will help you harness your energy and accomplish unimagined results.
Intentional Effort/Sustainable Results

When tuned into a divine process, your organization or business can make an impact for God and for good. Whether you are an individual or a leader of a business, a church, or an organization, you can make a difference. It starts with one person determined to take action. Making a difference comes from intentional effort. Planning intentionally commits your organization to a course of action that can accomplish a vision for a better future.

What planning model is best?

Inspiration for the Guide

I’ve observed that for most people, the planning process is like mental gymnastics. People struggle to wrap their minds around concepts and terminology.

This tool guides you through a simple, step-by-step, strategic planning approach using story, questions, and assignments to complete your plan. If you need a business plan, this guide will provide necessary definition and clarity for its preparation and a process for its implementation.

A Biblically Based Planning Tool

This unique planning tool follows a biblically based template. I believe the Word of God is a reliable, timely guide, and following a biblical approach to planning adds a divine dimension to the process. This guide follows a model found in the Holy Bible’s book of Nehemiah when a visionary leader was needed to change the challenging conditions of the time. It serves as a simplified template for the planning process.

Where Sacred and Secular Meet

Is a biblically based model relevant for the secular as well as the sacred? I say, yes. A guide applicable for nonprofit and profit sectors promotes the concept that as believers, we are joined in one mission: to bring glory to God and accomplish his purposes.

Church leaders often shy away from employing business practices, fearing that planning may take the place of relying on the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, those in secular organizations may not realize that biblical concepts have application in the marketplace as well. Using the Bible as an inspired and practical guide unites the sacred and secular on common ground.

Divinely Inspired

Without God, our efforts seem to blow away as chaff in the wind. Like Nehemiah in our Scripture selection, we need the favor of our God, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a plan of action, and intentional implementation. This guide, combined with inspired Scripture, prayer, and guidance from the Holy Spirit, will help you lead your organization to create a powerful impact!
Change Your Mind about Change

With the environment always in a state of change, how is planning even possible? Things change at the speed of light—or at least the speed of fiber optics! Websites pop up overnight, giving credibility to virtual companies without a physical address. The book *Built to Last* gave way to a book titled *Built to Change* in response to the reality that organizations that don’t anticipate change don’t last. Practices that once helped organizations and companies endure now prove fatal. Positioning in the marketplace for ten years is now obsolete in six months. How many times have you bought a new phone or computer, and two weeks later a new model arrives that is light-years better? Since rapid change is inevitable, how should we plan for change?

To stay viable, companies must be flexible and willing to reinvent themselves. Organizational leadership must stay light on its feet, ready to respond to the serendipitous opportunities God brings and yet remain steady and focused. Still, it’s difficult to plan not knowing the future. In Isaiah 42:16, Scripture says, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them,” and that we can know the season by the signs. God has given us the ability to imagine, to innovate, to bring form to dreams and ideas. He has given us the ability to read the signs through our intuition, life experiences, and our five senses. Proverbs tells us there is wisdom with many advisors. We do not depend solely on our own ability to read and respond to the times. We filter them through our God lenses, but also listen to other voices that provide different perspectives to broaden our view. Being a positive agent of change requires believing in impossibilities, being lifelong learners as students of the Bible and human nature, resisting contentment, pushing the envelope, and fearlessly taking action.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16-17
Preparing for Vision Planning

What is your response to the mention of planning? Does it excite you or does it seem a tedious task? Are you actively following a plan, or is it a volume occupying space on a shelf? Admittedly, it is difficult to plan with circumstances in the environment changing so quickly.

Turn your frustration to planning by harnessing the energy you’ve been expending in old ways of working and redirecting it to strategically address the future. Planning strategically ensures that efforts are focused on accomplishing the vision of the organization and making an impact.

Developing a planning document that is solidly grounded but realistically flexible and functional is the first step to the results you want to achieve.

Failure to plan is planning to fail.

Involve Your Team

As leader of the vision, you want “buy in” from your leadership team or advisory board. Involving them in the planning process will help them take responsibility for the vision, and you will benefit from their various perspectives.

Be prepared for different responses from your team to the planning process. Your big-picture types will enjoy the visioning aspects and the upper-level work. They will be valuable in setting direction for the organization. For those who are into facts and figures asking, “Why are we doing this?” explain that a plan ensures that time, money, and resources will be maximized. Their attention to details will

CASE STUDY—FROM FUN TO FRUSTRATION

The staff excitedly engaged in teambuilding activities, but when we moved to the planning session, I noticed eyes glaze over and the previous energy turn into silent frustration. As we engaged in the process, brilliant brains seemed to go numb. This planning guide was birthed to remedy scenarios like this.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD guides his steps.
Proverbs 16:9
help in breaking goals down into action steps. Managers will have ideas for the implementation phase.

Not everyone on your leadership team will need to be involved through the entire process. If some of them are not suited to planning, instead interview them or ask them for their input at various points along the way. Whether you have natural planners or reluctant plodders, this guide will take your team step by step through a process that should prove to be pleasurable and profitable.

Planning for Change

How many times have you heard, “But we’ve always done it this way”? It is the kiss of death for innovation, growth, and survival in today’s fast-paced world. Today more than ever, it is important to stay open to new ways to continue to grow and stay relevant. To ensure that your organization lasts, plan for change. Organizations that last are firmly focused but flexible enough to adapt to the winds of change and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Why We Fear Change

Change can be frightening because it is unpredictable. People don’t like surprises. They want to be in control. Paradoxically, when you let go of control and empower others, your organization is better positioned for growth. However, with growth comes change.

Change disturbs our peace because it requires energy to move out of our comfort zones. It disturbs our security because the unknown future has no guarantees. Change is not optional—the survival of your organization depends upon it.

Staying Relevant

Think about it. God’s creation is always in the process of change! Our bodies are designed for change. Our cells live and die. We breathe in and breathe out. Our heart rate changes to adapt to our activity. It is the ongoing process of change that keeps us and our world alive. Yet in the midst of this changing environment, there is comfort in the fact that God never changes. His foundational truths remain the same. He is in control.

God desires transformational change; it begins from the inside and works out. Change for change’s sake rarely solves problems; it just creates different ones. When considering change, rather than fearing the worst, anticipate the best and look for opportunities. Ask God to expand your vision to see what he sees.
An open mind changes your perspective to consider how the impossible can become possible. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT), it says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”

**Planning from God’s Perspective**

Do not miss God’s best for your organization by basing decisions only on what you can imagine. Proverbs 16:9 says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD guides his steps.” I believe this two-part verse holds a promise for planning for change. When we plan with a God-sized vision, it stretches us to consider new possibilities—even impossibilities. I think God is delighted when we make plans far beyond our human ability to accomplish, so our faith is stretched to trust him for the gap. However, as circumstances change, plans must adapt, and as the verse points out, God is there to direct the steps.

Planning for change means plans change. Remain flexible about adapting your plans. An organizational plan that is firmly anchored but flexibly adaptable will be able to weather the storms of change.

**Ask God for vision to make possible the impossible!**

Using this Guide

In preparation for planning, read the Scriptures in the book of Nehemiah and provide this guide to each member of your planning team for review.

**Terminology**

There are differing planning models that basically describe similar concepts using different terms. Planning has its own challenges, so this guide uses terminology that is simple and most familiar. You are welcome to substitute terms that are most useful to your organization. The objective is to use the biblical model to focus your efforts and plan for action.

**Biblical References**

The biblical references found in the book of Nehemiah are intended to be inspirational and useful in guiding your planning. Chapter by chapter, this guide covers the steps necessary to take you from passion to planning, planning to implementation, implementation to results, and results to impact. It studies the leadership style of Nehemiah and how he accomplished his vision to see the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. It follows him through the process of heartbreaking passion, enlisting resources, casting vision, engaging people, overcoming obstacles, celebrating completion, and ensuring sustainability. If this is what your organization needs, then this guide is for you.
Context for this Guide

The Model

This guide is inspired by a model from the book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. The account describes a time when a visionary leader was needed to challenge and change the conditions of the time. Nehemiah was the man. Discover how his course of action is relevant and practical for your organization today.

Historical Context for this Guide

In 587 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the capital, Jerusalem, leaving only a remnant of Jews. Those who survived were taken into captivity. Later, in 539 BC, Cyrus, the King of Persia, overthrew the Babylonian Empire. Under Persian rule, the exiled Israelites were slowly allowed to return to Jerusalem. That remnant, after much opposition, had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. This was significant for the Jews because the temple was considered God's dwelling place. To come to the temple was like coming into the presence of God.

During this period, Nehemiah was in service to the Persian king, Artaxerxes. The account begins with Nehemiah hearing a report of the conditions in Jerusalem; the place intended to bring glory and honor to God was a disgrace and the walls were in disrepair. Nehemiah determined to do something about it.

Dear Glorious Father, help us to make your name known throughout the earth. Equip us with everything we need to bring your kingdom to our circles of influence, and enlighten us to know your will in planning for the future. Help us proceed in faith, expecting you will supply all the resources we need. Protect our minds from disappointment, fear, and worry. Protect our health and our families. Help us not to strive in our own energy, but to work together as the body of Christ. Strengthen us with the power of your Holy Spirit, and give us an ear quick to hear your directions and promptings. May it be to the praise and glory of your name, Jesus. Amen.
What ignites your passion? Do you want to transform your community, make a change in your organization, or take your business to the next level? Maybe you lack passion for anything right now, or discouragement has overwhelmed you. Passion is often birthed from pain. What discomfort prompts you to take action?

What breaks your heart?

After the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, followed by the Persians, Nehemiah, a Jew, was cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. While this dangerous and important task required obedience and servitude to the king, Nehemiah took a leap of faith after he heard something that broke his heart.

This chapter will help you examine what passions motivate you or drive your organization, and assess your positioning and ability to take action.

Nehemiah’s Inquiry

One day, Nehemiah, far away from his home in Jerusalem, asks for a report on the conditions there.

The News: Nehemiah 1:1-4

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

The news of the disgraceful state of Jerusalem deeply grieved Nehemiah, but before he took any action, he prayed and fasted.
What in your ministry, organization, or business brings you grief?

What motivates you to take action?
Share your answers within your group.

Inquiry

The news about Jerusalem ignited Nehemiah’s intense determination to help. These questions help you analyze your situation and what arouses your concern.

1. Describe your the current situation in your environment.

2. What conditions in your “Jerusalem” are challenging you?

3. Describe what you have in mind to do about it.

Your Situation

Nehemiah’s strong desire for God to be honored instilled passion for action. What positive changes are you motivated to bring about? What mission are you compelled to complete? Consider what conditions might cause you to commit to action.

- Obeying God—answering a call
- Alleviating pain—yours or someone else’s
- Securing safety—to ensure survival, maybe the survival of your business
- Altruistic compassion—to improve unsatisfactory conditions in order to create a better future for a greater good
Passion to Take Action

Maybe you are not feeling passionate about anything right now. If you want to be moved, stay abreast of the news, seek out information about the problems and struggles of your neighbors, your staff, customers, or your community. Your Jerusalem might be your target market—those with whom you have a natural affinity, where your knowledge, experience, and credentials can be applied. If you need compassion about the conditions around you, ask God to break your heart over the things that break his.

On the other hand, your need to take action may not be so profoundly inspired. Maybe you have a mandate to fulfill or an assignment to complete. Whatever is motivating you, it is important to commit to taking action and completing the task. If you need inspiration, seek God’s help. Nehemiah grieved, prayed, and fasted.

Your passion for the problem becomes the “why” for your organization: why you are in business, why you do what you do.

On the next page, note Nehemiah’s passionate, prayerful petition as he worshiped God, confessed sin, reminded God of his promises, prayed on behalf of the people, and asked for favor.
Assessment

As Nehemiah prayerfully considered the conditions in Jerusalem, no doubt it deepened his passion and commitment to take action. To understand your current conditions, answer these questions.

**S** List what is working well in your organization. What skills, expertise, and resources does it have to offer?


**L** List what isn’t working well in your organization. What expertise, skills, tools, or resources are missing?


Prayer for the Process

Planning begins with prayer. Look to see where God is already at work. Consider what is consistent with his will and desires, and ask how you can be involved.

Nehemiah’s Prayer Model: Neh. 1:5-11a

Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.” They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.
You have just completed a S.L.O.T. analysis. The acronym S.L.O.T. stands for your internal Strengths and Limitations, and your external Opportunities and Threats. This gives you a summary of your organization’s situation. (You may have heard this elsewhere called a S.W.O.T. analysis, using Weaknesses instead of Limitations.)

**Strengths** are the assets and skills within your organization that can help it seize opportunities and accomplish its mission.

**Limitations** are what your organization lacks in terms of resources or capabilities to accomplish its mission.

**Opportunities** are the external conditions that favor the accomplishment of your organization’s mission.

**Threats** are the external conditions that will hinder or block your organization from accomplishing its mission.

Take time with your team to complete the S.L.O.T. chart on the following page. Keep this snapshot of your organizational situation in mind to help guide your thinking later in the planning process.
## Application

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*Pray, asking God to equip your organization with what it needs, to grant you favor by opening doors of opportunity, and to break down barriers that block you from making progress.*
CHAPTER THREE

Leading the Vision

What do you see for the future of your organization? How might it look when it is fully operating? This mental picture, or vision, focuses your efforts and keeps you headed in the right direction. A plan provides a road map and action steps to make the fulfillment of that picture a reality. Obviously, clarity of vision isn’t enough. You need people to help you accomplish it.

The Visionary Leader

Not all people can visualize this future; you might have to help them. A visionary leader sees what others can’t see, and confidently leads where others are afraid to go. If you don’t have a vision and want to discover yours, think about what disturbs you. Consider your dreams and aspirations. Ask what could be better in your working environment, your community, the nation, or the world. Imagine doing something about it without the limitations of personal circumstances, professional credentials, or finances. What would it be?

If your deep desire is to change the conditions around you, make a difference, or create an impact, God might be calling you to be a visionary leader.

What does it take to lead a vision? In the Nehemiah passage, we saw that it started with prayer and a conviction that conditions could be better.

A visionary leader sees what others can’t see, and confidently leads where others are afraid to go.

Nehemiah Broken for Leadership

Consider Nehemiah going about his regular duty, when the news of the conditions in his beloved Jerusalem struck at his heart and drew him to his knees.
Deeply grieved, perhaps Nehemiah questioned what he could do so far away with obligations to a foreign king. Maybe he struggled with God to understand if he was the one to take action on the problem. After confessing the sins of his people and reminding God of his promised faithfulness, Nehemiah determines to risk his life to accomplish the vision of a restored Jerusalem. He asks God for favor and success in presenting his request.

Plea for favor: Nehemiah 1:11b
“Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king.

Q Have you asked God for favor and success? Why do you think it was granted? Or why not?

Q Troubled by conditions in your workplace, community, or the world, you can do something about them.

Q Has God burdened your heart with something you need to take the lead on? What is it?

Q What hesitations do you have?

Q For what do you dare to trust God?
In preparation for leadership, Nehemiah confessed shortcomings, reflected on God’s promises, and asked for success and favor. Like Nehemiah, you can start with prayer and seek God’s direction.

Write a prayer to God affirming your reliance on him and asking for what you want.

Leaders are Followers First

Nehemiah desired to first follow God. Your team will more likely follow you if they know you are seeking God’s guidance. Inspire them with a vision that captures imagination, a mission that motivates action, and a plan that guides direction.

The Keeper of the Vision

Nehemiah might have been keeper of the king’s cup, but God was calling him to a new assignment. Nehemiah became responsible for the vision when he saw something others did not. The residents of Jerusalem could not see that the condition of the city was a disgrace to the LORD. Perhaps in the busyness of their daily affairs, they had become accustomed to the sights around them. They were looking, but not seeing.

Scripture is filled with examples of unlikely people God has chosen for leadership. If you see what needs to be done, maybe God is calling you to lead. As keeper of the vision, you must keep it alive and ensure that it is carried out.

Cupbearer to the King

Not overestimating his personal power, Nehemiah trusted God completely. After his prayer, Nehemiah made one humble statement: “I was cupbearer to the king.” Maybe he recognized how unlikely it was for him to receive this call. As cupbearer, he had important responsibilities, but his heart and vision qualified him for his new assignment. Could it be that a motivated and obedient heart is what God is looking for above all other qualifications?

What is God showing you that others aren’t seeing?
Revealing Emotions

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

Which is better—an inspiring leader or an inspiring vision?

God may ask you to carry the vision and wait to release it. Some leaders want to start things and move on to the next thing before completing the first. While the program or project is still in development, staff and volunteers need your passion and clarity to inspire and direct them. You will know your followers have become leaders when you hear them sharing the vision.

Carrier of the Vision

It is said that a person isn’t a leader if no one is following. While some people may follow a charismatic leader, it is more likely that they will engage because the vision and mission inspire them. Followers want to know their part in accomplishing the vision. They follow the person they trust will guide them to the goal. With his goal clearly in mind, Nehemiah trusted God as he shared his burden with the king.

A Life and Death Decision

From previous recorded accounts, we know that Artaxerxes didn’t always rule favorably toward the Jews. In this passage, Nehemiah risks his life revealing his emotions in the king’s presence. (No wonder he prayed long and hard!)

Revealing Emotions: Nehemiah 2:1-4

Being keeper of the vision doesn’t mean you keep it to yourself. You might have to wake people up to see what you see. As steward of the vision, your assignment is to preserve, establish, and invite others into it. Since ideas originate with the Creator, there is danger in thinking the vision belongs to you. At some point, you may be asked to release the vision so it can grow beyond what you can control. To achieve maximum impact, involve many others to carry the vision with you.
Nehemiah’s commitment to God and to the assignment gave him boldness in spite of his fears. God must have been at work in Artaxerxes’ heart for him to inquire about Nehemiah’s sadness.

Nehemiah was not just a servant who brought the king’s food and drink. As the trusted cupbearer, he would be greatly missed since it was his job to taste the drink to ensure it didn’t contain poison before serving it to the king. As manager, he would have to carefully watch over the source and storage of the food and drink. Would the king let him go?

Q What are you willing to risk for the sake of your vision?

Leadership Character

Nehemiah, formerly a trusted cupbearer, had now been entrusted by God to carry the vision. He not only exemplified the commitment of a leader, but also demonstrated the character of a leader. Character in leadership is a heart that chooses to glorify God and not self, honors God in all practices, insists on truth, accepts responsibility, and empowers others.

Nehemiah’s Leadership Characteristics

In the following chapters, watch for the qualities that make Nehemiah’s leadership effective. Consider these:

- Compassionate
- Passionate
- Visionary
- Humble
- Respectful
- Prayerful
- Responsible
- Courageous
- Bold
- Resourceful
- Inspiring
- Persevering
- Empowering

Likely, Nehemiah did not naturally possess all these qualities, but the Holy Spirit enabled and equipped him as necessary and when needed. As a leader, pray for and recruit people who complement your abilities. God designed us to work together in relationship. If your vision seems too big to humanly accomplish, praise God because you won’t be tempted to trust your own ability and strength.
Nehemiah accepted responsibility for the vision and boldly brought his need before the king even though it meant risking his life. Commitment, character, and courage are necessary because leadership comes with challenges.

Leadership Challenges

Are you already pursuing your vision as leader of a business, an organization, or a ministry? How is it going? Has your big-picture vision faded over day-to-day concerns for resource allocation, operating funds, profits for shareholders, marketing, production, and delivery? Have you lost sight of why you serve your constituency?

Can you relate to this leader’s challenge?

CASE STUDY—FEAR OF LEADING

Peering through the windowed door of the director of a large organization, I noticed his back was to the door and his desk faced the wall. I hesitantly knocked. He invited me in, and after some small talk, I asked how it was going. Because we had an established relationship, he answered honestly, “Kathy, sometimes I just don’t think I’m a good leader.”

Having observed the operation for some time, I answered, “Well, maybe you just don’t know the direction to lead.”

This director lost sight of his vision. Without vision, he didn’t have clarity of purpose, and without purpose, he didn’t have direction. It should be mentioned that this was not entirely his fault. Conditions had rapidly changed in the organization, and since plans were not clear in his mind, he didn’t know how to advise his staff. His closed door and desk to the wall sent an intimidating message: “Don’t disturb me!” It hid the truth: “If you come in and ask me a question, I’m afraid I won’t have the answer.” Are you challenged by changing conditions in your organization, work environment, or the community that you serve?

Are you weary of doing good? Putting forth effort with no results? Do you secretly question your leadership? Get quiet before God and ask him for inspiration to renew your vision and focus to plan for the future.

Q Have you ever felt like this director? Share with God your insecurities and seek his help.
Like most leaders, this director’s worst fear was of being found inadequate. To remedy the situation, we started with an examination of the things that were not changeable: looking at the organizational vision, purpose, and plans. We reaffirmed the nonnegotiables and the unique purpose of the department. We interviewed staff to understand their frustrations. We then engaged the team in an off-site planning session where we restated the vision, defined clear direction, adjusted workloads, and assigned action steps. A few months later, it was exciting to see obvious improvements and renewed energy in the department.

I believe that leaders want to lead well, but sometimes they just don’t know how. When under stress, leaders sometimes demonstrate compensating behaviors. Do you recognize some of these leadership behavior types?

- **The reluctant leader**—unsure of his or her calling or abilities to influence and lead; may appear as a false sense of humility.
- **The insecure leader**—unsure of his or her abilities or direction, but covers it with aloofness or intimidation.
- **The self-assured leader**—driving results with little regard for people.
- **The charismatic leader**—focused on promoting self rather than others, or making a show rather than getting results.
- **The courageous leader**—achieves results through God’s help, and as a servant leader, he or she engages, equips, and empowers others in the accomplishment of a common goal.

With the exception of the courageous leader, each style focuses on the leader’s personal abilities. It’s easy to fall into the trap of believing that the success of the endeavor or organization is all up to you. There are forces out there that do not want you to succeed. Self-sabotaging doubts creep in if your confidence isn’t based on the all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-powerful God.

Q What challenges your leadership? Or what challenges are you experiencing due to the leadership in your organization?
Courageous Leadership

It takes courage to be committed to the vision, convinced of the course to take, and confident in providing leadership guidance. Being a courageous leader may require going counter to convention, accepting criticism, pressing on in trials, and willingness to admit a mistake.

God wants you to be a courageous leader. He is ready to supply you with power, provision, and protection when you place your trust in him as the source. With God, you can make an impact that reaches far beyond yourself.

Some courageous leadership qualities include:

- Humility
- Self-awareness
- Authenticity
- Self-leadership
- Servant Leadership
- Integrity
- Good Stewardship
- Legacy Leaving

Humility

Humility isn’t about questioning one’s abilities, but rather trusting in God’s provision. Humble leaders are confident, but not puffed up with their own importance. They value others as strategic members of the team. People follow leaders who demonstrate that their help, strength, and success come from the Lord.

Self-awareness

According to one study, two qualities consistently stood out among successful leaders: self-awareness and authenticity. Self-awareness is a realistic understanding of personal talents and natural abilities, as well as nonabilities and weaknesses. Authentic leaders demonstrate behavior that is in alignment with that awareness.

Authenticity

Authentic leaders are genuine and don’t try to be something they are not. Their actions are consistent with who they are on the job and off the job. Rather than following the latest and greatest prescriptions for success, they lead from God-given abilities and inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Self-leadership

How a person leads himself or herself correlates with effectiveness in leading others. Those who self-lead know what they value—their non negotiables. They exercise self-discipline and control, and demonstrate behavior consistent with good character. This forms a foundation for servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

A servant leader, patterned after Jesus, does not expect to be served, but serves others. They engage, equip, and empower others to join in accomplishing the vision. These leaders invite teammates that will complement their strengths and supplement their weaknesses. They are not
afraid to align with someone who brings a different personality or perspective.

**Integrity**

Leaders who practice integrity do the right thing and do things right regardless of the consequences—even if it is counter to common practices. They practice excellence, adhere to impeccable ethical standards, and exercise fairness.

**Good Stewardship**

Leaders who trust God as the source of supply use resources wisely but not miserably. They take care of their equipment, their staff, and their constituency. They recognize that God cannot bless them if they aren’t generous with what they have.

**Legacy Leaving**

With a concern for long-term impact rather than short-term personal success, the leader who invests in leaving a legacy secures sustainability for the future of the project or organization. They mentor successors and release leadership when the time is right.

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**Mini Leadership Self-Assessment**

Many qualities are not natural, but acquired. Pray that God will equip you with everything you need for doing his will for his glory! Use the following lists to get you thinking about your leadership characteristics. Underline those words that most describe you and note areas needing improvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Abilities</th>
<th>Giftings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>Create things/ideas</td>
<td>Extraordinary—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>Influence others</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merciful</td>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>Take the lead</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Persevering</td>
<td>See patterns</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruthless</td>
<td>Excitable</td>
<td>Find facts</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>Provide a process</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Entertain</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>Hard working</td>
<td>Change conditions</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faithful</td>
<td>Influential</td>
<td>Direct people</td>
<td>Insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courageous</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Empower people</td>
<td>Healing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Dependable</td>
<td>Speak truth in love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td>Factual</td>
<td>Teach/train</td>
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<td>Timid</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Listen/learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Crunch numbers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distractible</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Administrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>Team player</td>
<td>Access priorities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Careless</td>
<td>New excites</td>
<td>Make good decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Envious</td>
<td>Old is safe</td>
<td>Understand feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Prayerful</td>
<td>Solve problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>Follow directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Process oriented</td>
<td>Champion causes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Work in background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Tenacious</td>
<td>Take criticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ability to—**

Speak a healing word

Forgive past offenses and move forward

Bring unity

Anticipate the unexpected

Generate wealth

Rally others around a cause
Application

**Affirmation Statement:** Write a statement affirming God’s call to lead your vision, company, organization, or ministry and how it will help serve others.


List your top leadership strengths and natural abilities.


**Divine giftings**


**Acquired Skills**


Of the leadership character qualities listed on the previous page, which ones are you committed to improving?


His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our LORD Jesus Christ.—2 Peter 1:3-8