

# Guidelines for Leading Leadership in Major Decisions

by John Piper

I assume in the following that the “Leadership” (board, eldership, pastoral staff, etc.) are of one mind in a shared vision. At Bethlehem Baptist Church, Desiring God, Bethlehem Urban Initiatives, and The Bethlehem Institute, this vision is “*We exist to spread a passion for God’s supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.*”

With that assumption, the following guidelines are intended to guide a pastor or elder or director in writing recommendations that will help the Leadership (and, if appropriate, the congregation) understand, approve, and act on significant suggested courses of action. I don’t mean that all these guidelines must be followed for every decision the Leadership must make. They apply to more major proposals — the kind that will be costly, or will affect many people in important ways, or may seem to the Leadership different from an assumed path. In these cases, thorough, careful, Biblical persuasion is needed. The assumption behind these guidelines is that at every point truth is paramount.

## **1. Pray without ceasing.**

That is, bathe every part of the process of decision making in prayer. This will be largely invisible in the early stages of dreaming and conceiving if the proposal is coming from one person.

## **2. Meditate on the Word of God day and night.**

The person or group bringing the proposal should be in the Word and should ponder all aspects of the proposal from the standpoint of God’s Word and saturate all thinking and communicating about the proposal with parts of the Word which show the wisdom of the proposal.

## **3. Gather true information related to the proposal.**

Ideas for the future can be mistaken and unwise for several reasons. One of them is lack of relevant information: cost, people to be involved, skills needed, impact on other priorities, possible perceptions and reactions, possible outcomes in-sync with or out-of-sync with the vision.

Gathering this information involves research and imagination. One must put oneself forward into dozens of situations and imagine what the proposed reality will be like in order to have some idea of its implications. These implications are part of the information that must eventually be shared with the Leadership. The more of such information is brought to the table in advance the more confident the Leadership will be that the proposal is workable and wise.

#### **4. Think through as many implications of the proposal as possible.**

This step overlaps with the previous one, and adds “thinking” to “gathering.” Thinking requires time and energy and imagination and raw materials of information. It is hard work. It is solitary work. It requires writing, since the connectedness of thoughts are lost if they are not written down. And it requires rewriting, since the first set of connections that one sees must usually be adjusted as other thoughts come to mind. Thinking is analytical, imaginary, and constructive.

- One must *analyze* how things will work, how people will think, what costs will be, what skill will be needed, how all these will affect what already exists, and how all of these relate to each other.
- All along this process, *imagination* is required. The most persuasive leader will have the best imagination of what the future will really look like and how everything will relate to everything else. The success of his proposal will hang largely on how well he has used his imagination to foresee the implications of all that he is proposing. The quality of his leadership will be seen partly in that he has already asked and answered the questions the leadership will have. This does not happen without hard thinking in solitude while writing.
- Fruitful thinking must also be *constructive*. That is, one must apply one’s mind to construct an integrated whole. It will not do to simply share fragments of an idea with the Leadership. If we want Leadership to affirm our idea for the future, we should bring them a coherent, unified picture of what it looks like. This only happens through constructive thinking. This is often the hardest work. It forces us to do the kind of tough thinking that saves Leadership time and effort.

#### **5. Write the proposal including a coherent and orderly presentation of the proposal, an explanation of it, the implications, and the rationale.**

- First, state the proposal clearly and briefly in a few sentences.
- Second, explain the proposal. That is, unpack its terms and make sure that it is clear.
- Third, spell out the implications: people involved, time commitments, expenses, effects on present practices and people, etc. Foresee and state fairly and answer as many objections as you can.
- Fourth, give a compelling rationale that would justify the implications and link the outcomes to the Vision.

#### **6. Give copies of this written proposal to the Leadership sufficiently in advance of the meeting at which it will be considered.**

Avoid pressure to act without adequate time for discussion and prayer.

#### **7. Read the proposal to the Leadership or read a coherent summary of its key parts at the meeting when it is to be discussed.**

Most busy people will not have the details in their mind when they come to a meeting and will need to hear the written proposal read, or a well-prepared summary of it. It is almost always a mistake to try to “talk one’s way through it” as though that would save time. Generally it does not save time and is harder to follow than a simple reading, or a well-prepared summary. In addition, by jumping around in the paper one often loses the listener who cannot follow. If

significant things need to be added to the paper by means of a “walk through,” the written proposal was probably not thorough enough.

**8. Seek a thorough discussion of the proposal, with all the Leadership urged to participate in the discussion. Allow the head of the Leadership group to guide the discussion to appropriate action.**

The person bringing the proposal should be a well-prepared advocate, but not usually the leader of the discussion. After the presentation, he should speak when asked questions or given permission, but not dominate the discussion. He should encourage the Leadership to give themselves to prayer and the Word in the process.