

Lessons learned on the way: Plumblines for ministry

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When Six Flags Over Texas started its second season in 1962, one of the most popular attractions was “Casa Magnetica,” also known as “The Crooked House.” It was so popular, it remained active longer than most attractions at the theme park and reopened for the 60th anniversary of the park last year.

The house was really one big illusion with many applications. It was built on an extreme angle so when people toured the house, everything acted strangely, as though gravity had been twisted. A broom appeared to stand straight up on its own. Fruit would roll up a table and out a window. A chain seemed to hang at an odd angle. The entire experience was based on the confusion caused when people lose their perspective, because the house is not level and square.



John Crowder

Since your church or organization is made of diverse people with different priorities and varied backgrounds, it quickly can become a place of confusion or even conflict. You might expect things to roll in one direction but be surprised when they seem to go uphill or backward.

The church can at times function somewhat like Casa Magnetica. The people's perspective is skewed, or confused because the house is not square.

For thousands of years, builders have relied on the plumbline to keep everything straight and square. The plumbline consists of a weight attached to the end of a long string. That weight (plumb bob) usually is pointed on the end, and it pulls the string straight and true. Once the plumbline stops swaying, the builder knows that he has a straight, vertical line. Using a series of plumbines, he can build a level and square structure.

If you structure your church or organization with a series of plumbines that define who you are, you can avoid much of the confusion that comes from a lack of perspective. Choose a handful of plumbines that define your priorities and purpose. Then build your calendar, budget and committees off those plumbines.

Ideas that do not line up with those plumbines are not adopted. Money and resources are not spent on projects that fail to "line up." As the people you lead become familiar with the plumbines, they gain a sense of meaning that can only be found in a shared purpose. They also experience a healthy balance of comfort and challenge since they have the true perspective on what the church or organization is all about.

Identifying five plumbines

For example, First Baptist Church of West is structured around five plumbines. We build everything we do from one or more of these plumbines:

1. **God deserves our best.** We serve an awesome God who is worthy of the very best we have to offer. Settling for the easiest thing or the most convenient way is not enough. God deserves only our best

efforts.

2. **We need to focus on church health instead of church growth.** The church is more of an organism than it is an organization. Since it is the body of Christ, we must do all we can to make sure it is healthy. When the church is healthy, growth will happen, but growth alone cannot be our goal.
3. **We do church best when we do it in small groups.** Corporate worship is vital to the life of the church and the life of the believer. However, we learn, grow and serve most effectively in small groups.
4. **Worship is about what we do for God, not what the church does for us.** Corporate worship is not primarily about what you can “get out of it.” It is not about the kind of music you like the best. Real worship is about God’s people giving God glory through sacrifices of praise. It is about God, not us.
5. **The local church should have a positive impact on its community.** We are to be salt and light to the community in which God has placed us. The church should be actively involved in the community and should work to make its community a better place for all its neighbors.

Trust a consistently reliable guide

While plumb lines still are used by builders from time to time, lasers usually do the work of creating level and straight lines now. Those lasers must be periodically recalibrated, and they depend on batteries that must be charged. They are accurate, as long as they are maintained appropriately.

Plumb lines require very little maintenance, because they depend almost entirely on the unchanging laws of physics.

I recommend that leaders use the concept of the plumb lines instead of

lasers because they are consistently reliable. Once the people you lead understand the plumb lines and approve them, they will have confidence your organization is being built in square and level ways.

One significant difference between the modern laser and the classic plumb line is the time involved establishing the straight line. Lasers show that line immediately upon being powered up. Plumb lines are reliably straight and true once the plum bob stops swaying. That means you have to wait a little while and watch it carefully.

That is how your church or organization wants to prepare your plumb lines, as well. Do not rush to make a list of priorities based on trends or in reaction to recent events. Take your time to understand your organization, your setting, your people and your purpose.

As you invest that time in watching, praying and preparing, the plumb lines will become clear. Once you have discovered them, let them guide you as you build a church or organization that is true to its purpose and square with its priorities.

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