

THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN A BUILDING PROGRAM

by David Batten

AS A CHURCH CONSULTANT, I work with pastors and church leaders as they prepare and plan for their upcoming building projects. They are usually chomping at the bit to see the ground dug up and to see buildings where grass used to be. Many don't realize the months of planning that will go into the project before the actual construction. They are ready to jump in with both feet—yet, they have a church family that they are accountable to. If this program isn't successful, if the family doesn't see the value of the building, then they might as well have not built at all. Over and over again, I hear the dreams of leaders, who by their nature, are visionaries. Pastors are vision oriented. That's what makes them great at

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what they do. In many cases, however, there seems to be a big gap between the vision and what I see everyday as reality;

ESTABLISHING THE BUDGET

ESTABLISHING THE NEEDS LIST

MAKING THEM MEET EACH OTHER

THE FAITH PART

therefore, I caution these leaders to stop and consider what I believe to be the Four Most Important Things in a Building Program:

Once these four things are taken care of, the rest of the project will fall into place.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU SPEND?

This is one of the first questions I always ask when I meet with a ministry about possible expansion. They almost always look at me with faces that say, "I can't believe you asked that?" Some think it's a personal question, but how can I steer you if I don't know where we're going? Some don't trust me yet and feel that if they answer "X," then that's what the building will cost. The reality is, though, that we're not at an auction or buying a

finished product like a car, we're planning a construction project with hundreds of variables. With today's modern contracting methods, open book accounting quickly eliminates the fear.

However, most of the time church leaders don't answer because they can't. They don't know! The good news is that once we have this piece of honesty on the table, we are ready for our real work. This is when we proceed to analyze the church budget and come up with the gross maximum price of this expansion. Keep in mind, though, that today, at this meeting, there is no floor plan, no rendering, no specifications, nothing but dreams and visions. Does this sound ironic to you? It may at first, but think about it a little. This is really the only place to start.

Steven Covey, in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* said to "begin with the end in mind." Solomon said, "It is foolish to build a tower without first counting the cost." Jesus said we should be good stewards and "feed my sheep."

Our main thing is to reach people. So, how much can we afford to spend and still have the money to fund our ministries? Hundreds of churches in America have bought into the secular idea that "we must have this" and plunged the church into financial burden. Many have had no choice but to

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HUNDREDS OF CHURCHES IN AMERICA HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE SECULAR IDEA THAT “WE MUST HAVE THIS” AND PLUNGED THE CHURCH INTO FINANCIAL BURDEN. MANY HAVE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE MONEY FROM MINISTRY TO SERVICE DEBT.

take money from ministry to service debt. I'm not against debt, if it's managed properly, but to take the lion's share of a ministry's income to pay interest is probably not what Christ had in mind.

So, ask yourself these questions:

1. How much cash do we have to put toward this project?
2. How much can we effectively raise with a good stewardship firm?
3. How much monthly payment can we make and not have to rob from ministry?

These three simple questions will lead you to a guaranteed maximum price. If you need help with this, e-mail me and I'll help you with it.

THE NEEDS/WISH LIST

Once you have the budget established, it's time to list the things we need in the new facility. This part is usually fun and easy. Vision is usually not in short supply. My advice here is to be creative. Think outside the box. Learn what others are doing to reach people. If you need help with being creative, the NACDB (www.nacdb.com) offers education to churches and ministries at many different venues across the United States.

One mistake I see that planning teams tend to make is being short-sighted.

They all mean well, but many times their only perspective comes from within their own congregation. The trend we see in growing churches is that they are becoming “seeker friendly.” In other words, consider going outside your church family and learn what your community would like to see in a church. Please understand—I'm not suggesting that you change the message, but some of your methods may need adjustment.

A good way to get to know your community is with a demographic study. A great source for this is the Percept Group (www.perceptnet.com). They can provide you with more information than you can imagine about the people around you.

NEEDS VERSUS BUDGET—MAKE THEM MEET

Here is something you just can't do alone. You need a good church architect or design-builder to help. You must have someone with enough knowledge and church experience to take your

realistic budget, analyze your existing facilities, consider your needs list and create workable solutions for you to consider.

Many times this will mean compromising some on your wish list, but remember, the budget is the main thing. One of the worst experiences a planning team can have is to have finished drawings, which cost thousands of dollars, and be too much over budget to build.


THE FAITH PART

There is one more factor that is very impossible to measure. That is the “Faith” part. Remember, it is still true that “nothing is impossible with God.” This is the part I cannot predict because it's personal and unpredictable.

My suggestion is that you go through the three steps (Budget, Needs, Bring the Two Together) and see what light that shines on things. Then ask God if He wants you to trust Him for more. Then will come the hardest part—waiting! Wait for His guidance.

Remember—He is God. It's His church. He does not follow us, we follow Him.

GUARANTEED SUCCESS

Follow these steps—Budget First, Needs Second, Marry the Two and add Faith—and your building program will not only be successful but will create energy in the congregation and be a fun experience. 

FOLLOW THESE STEPS—BUDGET FIRST, NEEDS SECOND, MARRY THE TWO AND ADD FAITH—AND YOUR BUILDING PROGRAM WILL NOT ONLY BE SUCCESSFUL, BUT WILL CREATE ENERGY IN THE CONGREGATION AND BE A FUN EXPERIENCE.
