

Employing the Wisdom of Small Creatures for Big Organizational Change

Many of us view ants and locusts as pests. Rather than thinking of these insects as a nuisance, however, what if we viewed them as little creatures we can not only learn from, but also unearth big organizational truths from?

After all, Proverbs 30:24 describes ants and locusts as “exceedingly wise.” Below, we explore the wisdom they employ, the resulting benefits, and how this applies to effectively running a ministry.

The Strategic Planning of Ants

In Proverbs, ants are described as “a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer” (Proverbs 30:25, NKJV). In other words, ants demonstrate foresight, with the ability to plan and set aside for times when conditions will not be ideal.

Many ministries seem to be able to focus only day-to-day or month-to-month in their planning. Yet they need a long-term approach that ties their vision to their strategic plan, and then to goals, and then finally to the annual budget creation process. When ministries fail to engage in long-term strategic planning, the following can occur:

- Annual budgets are created based on a simple percentage increase, without any thought given to the landscape of the upcoming year.
- Budgets are created with a day-to-day operational focus only, without consideration given to capital expenditures, emergencies, contingencies, or any other non-operational expenditures that would affect cash flow.
- Monthly budgets are determined based on an average of the annual budget rather than on seasons, ebbs, and flows. In other words, they are not created in the same manner the ant prepares for winter by gathering in the summer.
- Program activities and related costs are perpetuated without evaluating relevance to mission or effectiveness in optimizing results or outcomes, and alternatives are not considered.

- There is recognition of the need to maintain cash reserves, but there is not an intentional plan in place to achieve adequate and sustainable cash reserves or monitoring of cash cycles.

What creates the breakdown?

Many would argue that time constraints prevent proper planning; others would say that planning is not as important as other activities because it does not appear to directly contribute to the success of a program or ministry. This can also be enabled by being consumed with activities rather than having a priority to carefully evaluate and monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of efforts. In reality, however, an effective plan enables ministries to execute day-to-day task efficiently and successfully. Otherwise, the toil is without focus.

Development points

After identifying the need for a strategic plan, the next step is to be intentional about creating one. Your leadership team should place value on the strategic planning process by allocating sufficient time and viewing it as a means of effectively achieving your operational goals. Endeavor to create a budget process that allows for creative thinking and ideas.

The Cooperation of Locusts

Now let’s look at the wisdom of locusts: “The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks” (Proverbs 30:27). The locusts demonstrate cooperation with others.

What does this have to do with running a ministry? Many times departments, program leaders, and the support team have different agendas. Goals that are not united and in line with the ministry’s overall goals will lead to inefficiency.

Behavioral questions to ask

To determine whether your organization is acting cooperatively, ask the following questions:

- Are all departments and programs functioning together at a high level of efficiency?

- Are all programs yielding productive results, or only some programs?
- Are departments in conflict with each other regarding what the vision and goals are?

What creates the breakdown?

While some departments “catch the vision” of the organization, others do not. Sometimes department heads are more focused on individual goals rather than the overall goals and vision of the ministry. In these situations, department and individual goals take precedence over organizational goals — and in many cases they may actually be in opposition to the overall goals and objectives.

When departments are unclear about the organization’s overall mission and vision and are focused on achieving their individual goals instead, the entire organizational unit is not functioning as one. This creates inefficiency in the program and “back-office” functions.

Development points

In the first chapter of Joel, locusts devastate the land. Yet this devastation could only have resulted from proper cooperation. Conversely, positive cooperation in an organization can only yield good results.

If cooperation is a challenge in your organization, your leadership team can take the following corrective actions:

- Encourage unity within and among departments.
- Cast the ministry’s vision and consistently remind all team members of that vision so they can stay on target. Cast or recast the ministry’s goals and objectives.
- Lay out the goals and objectives of the ministry in writing, with consistent reminders.
- Create cross-functional teams that enable communication and participation across organizational boundaries.

The next step lies with management. Each department head should emphasize their department’s role in reaching the ministry’s objectives, and ensure that their team understands the inefficiencies that can arise when departments don’t work together to achieve the ministry’s overall goals.

Although they may be small, ants and locusts have pointed us to important wisdom and concepts we can expand on to create significant and important change in our ministries.

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