

---

## VISIONEERING

*Pue, Carson. 2005. Mentoring Leaders: Wisdom for Developing Character, Calling and Competence. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.*

I began my professional ministry career 34 years ago - in spring 1987. I was young, inexperienced, idealistic and enthusiastic. I clearly felt God's call on my life and was committed to pursuing a lifetime of ministry. I have seen God work in me, through me, alongside my efforts, and in spite of my efforts. Now, as I reflect on my journey, and the subsequent years of personal growth, ministry experience, and the piecing together of my personal and ministry resume, I remember with particular fondness the days and ways that God began birthing in me a vision for a life of faith and a life of ministry. It has been a deep current and refreshing stream running through my life.

Today, I want to explore Phase 3 of Carson Pue's "Mentoring Matrix" that is presented in his book, *Mentoring Leaders: Wisdom for Developing Character, Calling and Competence*. My purpose here is not to speak to any definitive aspects of defining or developing ministry vision, nor to pursue particular methods of discerning and implementing vision - there are many others more capable than myself to instruct and inform particular and nuanced strategies and structures for that pursuit. My purpose is to provide a simple frame of reference for understanding a reasonable and biblical understanding of how God uses vision in the life of a leader, with the resulting end of assisting you as you navigate the visioning aspect of ministry leadership with your students.

My own experience with developing a vision in my life resonates with some comments that Pue makes concerning the process of vision discovery. Prior to this journey of discovery, he says, "Without a clear, compelling vision, I was acting out a part - pretending and trying to conjure up what I thought I should be and be about" (*Mentoring Leaders*, 89). It may be that some of our students are in a similar place - understanding and responding to a call to a role as a pastor or ministry leader, but not yet having the clarity that vision provides to guide them in their growth and development.

Like Pue, the vision discovery and clarifying process provided a framework and direction for me to embark upon. I still remember how joy-giving and fulfilling that time was in my youth ministry. Everything in the structuring, planning, preparation, and implementation became purposeful and meaningful. Now, one of my great joys in ministry is having those students and leaders comment on the intentionality behind the relationships and programming. That all was birthed by a vision that gave direction and purpose to our ministry's mission, planning, and implementation.

Like Pue, I have also come to realize that this kind of vision was expansive enough that it came with the realization that it would take a lifetime of investment. It has also proved to be an anchor point of sorts, guiding my understanding of the personal contribution that I would be capable of making in different ministries and at different stages of my life and journey. In fact, a principle has emerged that I like to share with others along the way - each step along the way has been preparation for God's plan for me in the future. That understanding has helped me navigate the inevitable change - both planned and unexpected - that accompanies pastoral ministry. It is undoubtedly one of the clear threads that has run through the fabric of my life and ministry journey. It not only gives me hope, it affirms my faith.

Vision is undoubtedly a principal key to our understanding of leadership, and while not the only leadership key our students must grasp, it is certainly a significant one. Speaking of emerging leaders, Pue says, "Our leadership really begins when the vision emerges within us" (89). In light of that, I would suggest that one of the significant results of our mentoring of emerging leaders is to watch for and nurture the vision that God is forming within our students.

I appreciated the approach that Pue brought to organizing and defining the visioning concept in this portion of the book. Allow me to summarize some of the key sections.

He uses the illustration of a percolator to describe how vision is developed in a young leader, utilizing the familiar terms of passion, vision, and mission but providing a helpful distinction in terms of process. He describes "passion" as the burn within an emerging leader that provides the internal heat source to percolate up a vision. "Vision" is defined as a clear picture that a leader sees of the future for the people and organization they lead. "Mission" then describes the commitment to act on the vision. Regardless of whether we agree with the organization and definition of these terms, there are implications that ought to draw our attention. Is there an identifiable "burn" in our mentee? Do you sense an emerging vision that should be nurtured? If a vision is present, what can we do to help our mentees clarify the mission that will guide the design and goals of mission fulfillment? Pue defines missional leaders in a particularly helpful way. "Missional leaders are those who have the ability to design and develop a program out of the vision they have received, whereby other people can be engaged in assisting the fulfillment of the vision and overcoming the obstacles that will undoubtedly form in front of the vision" (91).

Another section seeks to define vision. The story of scripture leans heavily towards vision being a product of God working in us. He creates the vision and we receive it. Pue draws from the work of other Christian leaders to highlight components of vision that help to define it further. He draws "future focused" from the work of Bill Hybels. He highlights "faith" and its potential from J. Oswald Sanders. From Leighton Ford, he highlights "compelling" as "the ability to see in a way that compels others to pay attention" (95). And from Dr. J. Robert Clinton, vision is "about God's purposes."

A particularly helpful section outlines three distinct expressions of vision. **Corporate Vision** is about who we are to be and how we are to live, and includes general principles that provide the foundation and direction for much of life for all believers - two great commandments, the great commission and implications from Christ's life (intimacy, character, community, and ministry). Pue reminds us of the tendency to elevate ministry vision to a level of primary importance to the detriment of the more primary focus on who God wants us to be. Within the ministry component, the corporate vision God gives is based on spiritual gifts given by his grace and by his power for the purpose of serving the body of Christ and God's eternal purpose. As per the priesthood of all believers, followers of Christ are to steward these gifts for the maximum benefit to the body of Christ and God's eternal purposes.

A second distinct expression of vision is **Special Vision**, a special revelation to a few select people. The example of Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus is used here, reminding us that this kind of vision is conveyed through a swift, sudden and clear communication, a task that is seemingly impossible without supernatural intervention, a result that may not always be considered successful from the world's viewpoint, and an expectation that requires a life-changing obedience without promise of realization of vision within their lifetime. Special Vision will always complement (not contradict) corporate vision and carries with it a greater burden and sterner judgement.

The third distinct expression of vision is **Process Vision**. The example here is Nehemiah, where vision grew from a process where he was overcome by a need, prayed and waited on the Lord, that was aided by circumstances, and led to an obedient and visionary response. Pue quotes Terry Fullam, who says, "Vision is a product of God working in us. He creates the vision and we receive it; it becomes a rallying point, a goal toward which we move as his people...Vision arises out of our burden to know the will of God" (99). John Maxwell provides further clarity, noting "one of the most valuable benefits of vision is that it acts like a magnet - attracting, challenging and uniting people" (99). Maxwell goes on to outline vision as starting within (with God), drawing on your history, meeting others' needs, and helps you gather resources. Pue draws three conclusions regarding Process Vision. First, for many leaders, vision seems to develop through a "Nehemiah-like" process of discovery. Next, to accomplish his purposes, God will utilize leaders to mobilize people. Finally, leaders (those gifted in leadership) will seek out God's desired purposes and mobilize others to accomplish his purposes.

James Lawrence, author of *Growing Leaders* and (at one time) director of Arrow Leadership Programme in the UK, provides a helpful summary for implementing vision as a three-dimensional process: gaining a Vision of God - seeing God for who he really is; gaining a Personal Vision - a God-given perception of what he wants for our lives; and gaining an Organizational Vision - a clear mental image of a kingdom-honouring future given by God to his chosen servants, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances (100).

Now, how does this apply to Mentoring Mastery? Let me start by attempting to ignite a spark towards establishing a personal vision for mentors investing in the potential of future leaders. Then I will close with some practical thoughts and questions to assist you in engaging in conversations with your mentees.

First a fact. God is calling, preparing, and raising up the next generation of leaders for His kingdom. This is true, whether we are aware of it or not.

Now a question (or two).

- *Are they among us? Are they your mentee?*
- *Do you see the potential in your mentee?*
- Follow up: *Do you see the potential that God sees in your mentee?*
- Follow up of follow up: *Have you asked God to reveal the potential He sees?*
- *Could it be that God has entrusted Northview with the next great evangelist, apologist or theologian?*
- *Would you change your approach and commitment if you knew that you were mentoring the next Billy Graham, R.C. Sproul or J.I. Packer? (Or Jeff Bucknam, Kyle Meeker or Andy Steiger)*

Here is my challenge to you. Northview is pursuing a compelling and significant vision for influencing and establishing healthy churches across our nation. Is it beyond the scope of our faith that God might also be honouring our faith-in-action by raising up the leaders of those churches and this movement for His desired future at Northview?

Now, let's move in a more personal and practical direction. How then do we engage our students in the visioning process? What is our role as mentors in the process of helping students discover and nurture a ministry vision?

For all of our students, certainly, the frame of reference for Corporate Vision will apply. It is possible that the potential for Special Vision may occur. It is most likely that our preparation will be towards Process Vision.

Two questions can assist in this discovery process with them.

1. Ask (*and persist in both the asking and answering of this question*) where is their passion? Help them discover the "burn" within and process why it is there, and what they can do, or are doing, about it.
2. A second question also lends itself to discovery and exploration of vision. Is there a sense of vision that is beginning, present or that has already taken hold? If so, there are many ways that Immerse can help clarify and establish the vision and its future implementation.

Carson Pue shares a story of how his mentor, Barry, responded to his exploration of the vision that God was birthing in him. I thought it provided a good example for us to follow. First and foremost, Barry listened, and along the way, he sought clarity for himself, and for Carson. When the vision was shared, Barry affirmed the vision, and he affirmed the calling behind the vision, and he affirmed the unique preparation and giftedness that were present in Carson to fulfill the vision.

Obviously, our mentees are at different phases in their development as ministers and leaders, meaning that we, their mentors, need to be aware - on their behalf - of where they are at as unique individuals in a unique trajectory of ministry preparation. There is the possibility that vision clarity is in its early stages, or not even on the radar of some of our students. There is a likelihood that our mentees will need to understand the role of vision and begin to define a unique vision based on who God has made them to be. And here is the opportunity - to help them begin to recognize its presence and seek to clarify its dimensions for their life and ministry as they move from a ministry role to the development of God's vision for their ministry leadership.