

4 Pastors in Which Vision Thrives

I was having a conversation with [Bryan Rose](#) on the Auxano team recently. We broached the topic of "pastors who get it." That is, we discussed the kinds of pastors who really press through the vision process to gain great clarity. These pastors lead with humility and tenacity. These pastors build great churches. These pastors see the kingdom grow right in front of their eyes. These are the true visionaries.

We believe these leaders fit almost perfectly into one of four categories or four types of pastors.

These are four types of pastors that are willing to learn, discern and do the hard work of visionary leadership. Another way to say it is that these pastors are leading today what will be the great churches ten and twenty years from now.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR TYPES?

#1 - The relevant rookie pastor: "I don't know what I don't know"

These pastors are sharp younger leaders (20s and 30s) who are in tune with their personal calling and dialed in to the prevailing issues of popular culture. They are probably in a new role that brings new responsibility; or they may be launching out on their own as a church planter.



They are naturally hungry to learn. **They are culture savvy and they are connected to the people they are leading.**

They understand that they don't know everything about organizational leadership. They are humble enough to invite a coach to the table. But their humility does not dilute their tenacity. They are the new breed of visionaries. They are tired of the old scorecards and will do whatever it takes **to communicate the substance of the culture and vision of the church.**

Client profile: [Jason Webb](#) at ElmBrook Church recently completed a 9-month vision framing process. "Rookie" doesn't reflect Jason's stellar church planting track record. But as a 30-something leader walking into a 5,000 plus attendance church, others might assign that adjective. (Especially when following in the footsteps of [Stuart Briscoe](#) and [Mel Lawrenz](#), two former senior pastors.) Jason did an amazing job stewarding a vision process with a highly tenured team. They are 8 months into their vision roll-out. The

completely new sense of team is felt and focus on the future is extraordinarily clear. Their passion is to help spiritually adrift people become rooted and released in Jesus Christ.

#2 - The legacy minded pastor: "I want to leave something valuable"

On the opposite end of the "rookie" spectrum is the legacy minded pastor. These pastors have likely led for decades in the same church. **They have a lifetime of trust building and faithful service creating solid and influential ministries.**

But they know that times are changing. **They are now aware of the generational pattern of failed successions of senior pastors.** They are not quite ready to pass the baton or even make any long-term succession announcements, but they want to start putting the house in order. They are probably 3-7 years away from leaving their position. They want to be more relevant. They want to re-clarify what their church can do best and re-align ministries to strengthen impact. They are tired of just doing more and want to prune ineffective ministries. **They want to leave a strong and self-aware church to their eventual successor.**

Client Profile: Pastor Clint has been leading his church for 25 years. At age 62, he feels that he has at least five more years left. He has built one of the best megachurches in North America. The church is getting older than people want to admit. Even though younger leaders are present, they are not present with serious responsibility yet. Pastor Clint has raised the money to do a 12-month vision process and it has reinvigorated his life and ministry like nothing before. As each month brings increasingly clarity, he is leading better, allowing others to lead better and is gaining confidence toward the long-range future.

#3 - The newly stuck pastor: "I have barrier that I now realize is not going away and I am not exactly sure how to fix it."

The newly stuck pastor has a very simple story. You keep growing until you don't. **After five or 10 years of year-over-year growth, the church just stops growing.** Giving is not going up; or at least not as much. By the way, you know you are in this place when you push really hard to "feel like you are growing" even though, deep inside, you know you are not. For example, attendance may be flat, but you put your hope in the fact that the church had slightly more attendance at Easter. Or you keep focusing on a few months where giving is slightly higher. You take momentary relief in the trend that your [most faithful members attend church less.](#)

To make matters worse, if you look around the church, everything is going fine. All cylinders are hitting. Buildings are great, staff is relatively healthy. **It's hard to know why the growth is not just happening any longer.**

The truth is that the organization is perfectly designed to get the results that it's getting. **Something about the structure, the culture, or the complexity of the church is holding it**

back. But because all of the successful years, the answer is not obvious or automatic. Finally something happens: you realize you **need some perspective from the outside.** You'll do whatever it takes to break that glass ceiling.

Client Profile: Pastor Dan is 55 and has been leading a church for 10 years. Five years ago the attendance plateaued at around 1,600 in weekend services. He has kept hoping for the best and has become increasingly bothered by their lack of growth. In fact, they built seating capacity to handle double their current attendance. Every Sunday, Dan feels the pain of the empty seats. On Sabbatical two summers ago, he read Church Unique and began to think about both his vision and his organization dynamics. Recently he finished a 12-month vision framing process. He is more excited than ever to be in ministry. He is seeing people excited as he creates and models a culture of mission. He is leading with vision like never before. Attendance is already on the rise and giving has dramatically picked up.

#4 - The rapid growth pastor: "I don't want to grow bigger, unless bigger is better."

There are two types of rapid-growth pastors: those who fixate on attendance only and those with a passion for disciple-making in a growing church context. I work primarily with the latter and that is the profile I am now describing.



These pastors understand that all growth is not good growth. They understand that growth out of alignment in the human body is called cancer. What then, do you call growth in the body of Christ that is out of alignment with the DNA of Jesus?

The rapid growth pastor sees a growing attendance as a critical stewardship. It's a starting point not an end point. Are there clear next steps not just to "get involved but" to really grow as disciple-making disciples? Is leadership development and people development taking place? Is growing attendance happening under the banner of a vivid sense of the church's impact for the next 5-10 years? Are we sending as well as we are attracting? **Are we managing our culture or letting the growth manage us?**

Client Profile: David Saathoff leads [City Church in San Antonio](#). Dave has engaged the Vision Framing process several times since he launched the church 20 years ago. He

continually manages clarity in the complexity of growth and the messiness of reaching people far from God. He has literally reached thousands with the passion to become catalysts of spiritual and social change in the city. He has one of my favorite mission measures which codifies the practices of "how we live" across a large church community. Even if new people are added at a fast rate, the expectation of disciple-making is delivered at concurrent speed. How do they articulate it? How we live: We listen to God, be the church, share a meal, downsize to maximize, peel the onion, keep our passport current and lean towards green.

These are the four types of pastors that excel at vision. **Which one are you?**

> [Read more from Will.](#)

Would you like to learn more about the vision clarity process? [Connect with an Auxano Navigator and start a conversation with our team.](#)