
Making Great Decisions Part 1: This One Perspective Changes Everything

Is your lack of organizational focus keeping everyone too busy - especially you?

Do you feel like most days you are running on a ministry treadmill? You know the feeling – it's when the busyness of ministry creates a progressively irreversible hurriedness in your life as a leader. The sheer immediacy of each next event or ministry demand prevents you from taking the time to look to the future horizon – and sometimes even today's calendar – until it crashes in on you.

All too often, today's demands can choke out the needed dialogue for tomorrow. When this occurs, your multiplied activity accomplishes little of value and prevents you from ministry with a clear sense of what God has called you to do.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [The Signals Are Talking](#), by Amy Webb

Amy Webb is a noted futurist who combines curiosity, skepticism, colorful storytelling, and deeply reported, real-world analysis in this essential book for understanding the future. *The Signals Are Talking* reveals a systemic way of evaluating new ideas bubbling up on the horizon - distinguishing what is a real trend from the merely trendy. This book helps us hear which signals are talking sense, and which are simply nonsense, so that we might know today what developments-especially those seemingly random ideas at the fringe as they converge and begin to move toward the mainstream-that have long-term consequence for tomorrow.

With the methodology developed in *The Signals Are Talking*, we learn how to think like a futurist and answer vitally important questions: How will a technology-like artificial intelligence, machine learning, self-driving cars, bio hacking, bots, and the Internet of Things - affect us personally? How will it impact our businesses and workplaces? How will it eventually change the way we live, work, play, and think-and how should we prepare for it now?

Most importantly, Webb persuasively shows that the future isn't something that happens to us passively. Instead, she allows us to see ahead so that we may forecast what's to come - challenging us to create our own preferred futures.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION - Forecast the Future

Though it may often seem like it, tomorrow doesn't arrive fully formed, but develops in measured steps. The tomorrow in question is not a calendar day, but the whole spectrum of actions, activities, and personalities that together make up your future.

No, your tomorrow begins taking shape with seemingly disparate events from all directions around you. They may seem random, but in the right context these points will be discerned first as a fuzzy pattern before developing into a meaningful whole. Before you know it, your future has arrived.

Are you ready for the future? Maybe the bigger question should be, did you see it coming?

No one should plan for a future she cannot see.

Futurists are skilled at listening to and interpreting the signals talking. It's a learnable skill, and a process anyone can master. Futurists look for early patterns – pre-trends, if you will – as the scattered points on the fringe converge and begin moving toward the mainstream. They know most patterns will come to nothing, and so they watch and wait and test the patterns to find those few that will evolve into genuine trends.

Each trend is a looking glass into the future, a way to see over time's horizon. The advantage of forecasting the future win this way is obvious. Organizations that can see trends early enough to take action have first-mover influence. But they can also help to inform and shape the broader context, conversing and collaborating with those in other fields to plan ahead.

One of the reasons you don't recognize this moment in time as an era of great transformation is because it's hard to recognize change. The pace of change has accelerated, as we are exposed to and adopt new technologies with greater enthusiasm and voracity each year.

Forecasting the future requires a certain amount of mental ambidexterity. Just as a piano player must control her left and right hands as she glides around the keyboard playing, you need to learn how to think in two ways at once – both monitoring what's happening in the present and thinking how the present relates to the future.

Amy Webb, [*The Signals Are Talking*](#)

A NEXT STEP

Mapping the future for your church begins with identifying early signposts as you look out on the horizon. In order to chart the best way forward, you must understand emerging trends: what they are, what they aren't, and how they operate.

Amy Webb has developed a six-part process that can help you forecast the future. These six steps were developed during a decade of research at the Future Today Institute.

1. **Find the Fringe** – Make observations and harness information from the fringes of society or a particular area. What can you observe about the groups of people in your church that might look or act different from the majority? What motivates or demotivates them?
2. **Use CIPER** – Uncover hidden patterns by searching for Contradictions, Inflections, Practices, Hacks, Extremes, and Rarities. Are there any “unwritten” rules at your church in parking, arrival time, or ministry patterns that tell a story?
3. **Ask the Right Questions** – Determine if whether a pattern is really a trend.

4. **Calculate the ETA** – Ensure that the timing is right for the trend and for your organization.
5. **Write Scenarios** – Scenarios inform the strategy you will create to take the necessary action on a trend. Talk through any changes that you might make as a result of the discoveries above. What complications and opportunities emerge as you think through the impact on the congregation.
6. **Pressure-Test the Future** – Are your scenarios comprehensive enough? Is the strategy you're taking the right one for the future?

Write each one of the six steps above on a separate chart tablet. Set aside three hours with your team to work through the six steps above, answering the question "What is the future of X?" where X is a proposed new ministry initiative.

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*This is part of a weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** Book Summaries for church leaders.*

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