

## What's the Difference?

Tom Bandy

Time and again institutional church leaders get sidetracked because they can't tell the difference between "vision" and "mission". There seem to be thousands of books out there about planning, and countless definitions of "vision" and "mission", that seem to contradict each other. Pretty soon leaders get confused about what they are actually seeking. Is a vision a statement, a strategic destination, a summary of identity, or what? Is mission a statement, a purpose, a summary of programs, or what? The argument goes around in circles until most people despair of semantics.

This frustrating conversation usually has a very bad result. Leaders decide ... wrongly ... that there really isn't any difference between a "vision" and a "mission". This mistake has disastrous consequences.

Sometimes the church develops a great strategic plan to accomplish mission, but has no actual energy or ambition to accomplish it. This happens most often in established churches. The "vision" or "mission" (call it what you will) is carved in oak above the entrance to the sanctuary, emblazoned on billboards and bulletin covers, but business continues as usual.

Sometimes the church creates a great logo, but has no concrete idea how to translate a metaphor into measurable results. This happens most often in church plants. The "vision" or "mission" (chant it how you will) is tattooed on the biceps of the board and played like a national anthem before every meeting, but business still goes on as usual.

I suggest that two Yiddish words can easily settle this argument, and get church leaders back on the right track. (I humbly apologize to my Jewish friends as I borrow these words, but they are used in everyday language among us *goyim*). The two words are: *Chutzpah* and *Shtick*.

### Chutzpah (Hutz-pah)

Chutzpah is an attitude. It means: audaciousness, audacity, brashness, brass, brassiness, brazenness, cheek, cheekiness, effrontery, crust, face, gall, nerve, pertness, presumption, sauciness, sauciness, and temerity. It has to do with motivation. It is an attitude toward the world (and especially toward any power, principality, controlling personality, or stupid rules) that boots them out of the way so that you can get where you are going.

Chutzpah is what Paul demonstrated when he appealed to Rome in order to escape persecution by the temple authorities; and it is what annoyed Festus and Agrippa when Paul defended himself by describing his experience with Christ. Festus says: "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" Agrippa gibes sarcastically: "Are you so quickly trying to persuade me to become a Christian?" Paul replies: "Quickly or not, I pray not only you but all who are listening to me today might become such as I am ... except for these chains" (Acts 26:24-29 NIV). That's chutzpah!

Many church people might say that Paul's audacious vision was that every person might know Jesus as intimately as he did, and experience the fullness of grace upon grace ... but still experience social justice in their daily lives. It's a good goal ... but that's not quite what a vision is. A vision is what gives you chutzpah. A vision *is* the chutzpah. It's what gives you *attitude*. It's what compels you to take on the world.

Church leaders need to ask themselves: Do we have chutzpah? What is the compelling attitude that makes us constantly, consistently, audaciously, daringly, gallingly, in the face of the powers and principalities of our zip code? What exactly is it that makes us so gloriously annoying to the forces of evil, injustice, selfishness, and meanness around us ... and even in our own midst ... as a church?

Chutzpah isn't just something you invent. It is something that is given to you. And it isn't something that is offered for your choice. It is thrust into your hands, whether you want it or not. Vision is always a hot potato. You keep trying to toss it to someone else, and it keeps coming back to you. Eventually you just have to hold onto it and scream. It forces you to draw attention to yourself. It drives you manic, so that perhaps the wind of your activity will

manage to cool you off. Chutzpah is what you do in spite of yourself. You can't stop yourself. It's just what drives you forward, even at the risk of antagonizing enemies and losing friends, because, God help you! You just can't do anything different.

That's Chutzpah! That's what vision is and does. It's a God-Thing, a revelation, and it might come to you after a period of intense prayer, self-denial, and spiritual waiting; or it might come to you out of the blue when you are on a business trip along the Damascus Road.

### **Shtick** (Schtick)

Shtick is repeated action. The term is most commonly associated with an entertainer's routine, an actor's bit, stage business, or a gimmick to draw attention to you. More broadly it means any talent, style, habit, or other eccentricity for which a person is particularly well known. A "shtick" is what you do. It is your "thing", your "bag", or one's "routine". It is the activity that defines who you are. It is "what you are all about".

Shtick is what Paul and Silas did whenever they came to a new town. They automatically went to the nearest synagogue and argued with religious leaders that Jesus was the Messiah and it was necessary that he should suffer, die, and rise from the dead (Acts 17:1-3). If there wasn't any synagogue, as in Athens, their shtick was to find the nearest marketplace and argue with pop philosophers that Jesus was the Son of God and the fulfillment of their deepest spiritual yearnings (vv. 22-23). They did this over and over again, wherever they went. Of course they did other things, like earning a living, and nurturing new faith communities, and caring for the needy. But arguing with religious leaders and persuading spiritual seekers, about the incarnation of God in Jesus was what they were known for. It was their reputation. Sometimes they were welcomed and created celebrations. Sometimes they caused riots and were arrested. Their reputation preceded them, and local religious leaders and magistrates were often anxious because they knew what they would do. It was their shtick!

Many church leaders might say that Paul's mission was to convince Jews and Gentiles of the saving significance of Jesus Christ. That's a good thing to do ... but it's not quite what a mission is. A mission is what drives constant tactical innovation. Let's think of shtick as a comedy routine, and Christians as fools for Christ. Then a mission is the specific routine that separates the antics of one fool from another. I behave foolishly for Christ in this way; and you behave foolishly for Christ in another way. Paul's shtick is to argue religious and community leaders. Peter's shtick is to welcome ordinary slobs into the community of Christ, and demand higher accountability in daily living. Lydia's shtick was to multiple small groups in the homes of the middle class; Aquila and Priscilla's shtick was to mentor Christians to be better leaders. They all want to share the good news of the saving significance of Jesus Christ, but each has a special reputation for doing it in a unique way and among certain kinds of people.

Church leaders need to ask themselves: What's our shtick? What is the talent, style, habit, eccentricity, or routine activity that we do over and over again? With whom, exactly, are we always trying to connect? What, exactly, are we always trying to do? How, exactly, are we always trying to attract attention and open opportunities for blessing? What is the big thing, clever trick, or strategic action, which we keep doing over and over again? Like a great comedian, every sound, movement, and action; and every budget line, committee, and tactic; are all designed and coordinated to deliver this particular punch line. What exactly is it *that we do*?

Unlike Chutzpah, shtick really is something we invent. It comes from the cleverness of our minds, and our sensitivity to the public, and clarity about our purpose. Anyone will tell you that a shtick may look easy, but it requires incredibly hard work. Outsiders look at your hospitality, worship, small groups, outreach, fund raising, technology upgrades, and communication ... and are impressed by your results of more participation, more influence, and more social change. They say to themselves: "That's easy! We could do that! I'll take that back to my church in Illinois and we'll get that going by Christmas!" Yet it isn't easy. Shtick takes hard work. It's putting all the little pieces together, in just the right order, with just the right timing, to get just the right people to respond with the biggest laugh. Or maybe it's not the biggest laugh you are after. Maybe it's the biggest teardrop, or the biggest hug, or the biggest sacrifice, or the biggest blessing ... but whatever it is, it is *the biggest!* That's what mission is. It is aligning every resource of the church to get a particular, huge, result.

I hope you get the message. Vision and mission are not the same. *Chutzpah* without *shtick* is just wind and arrogance. *Shtick* without *chutzpah* is just dry routine. Yet both of these are foundational for all church life and work. Together these provide a sense of unity among people, and cohesion amid programs.

Think of a circus tent held up by a mammoth center pole. The tent is bedecked in banners and ribbons, rampant in color and texture. Some might call it gaudy, showy, and even uncouth. Yet it can be seen for miles, attracts the attention of all kinds of people, and can encompass thousands underneath its canopy. That is the vision, or the *chutzpah*, of a church. The tent is held up by a huge pole (*shtick*?). This pole is erected at a perfect right angle to the tent. It is tall, thick, and mighty. All kinds of supporting ropes can be attached to it, and all kinds of church programs can be supported by it. That is the mission or the *shtick* of a church.

The church is in deep trouble if either one is missing. Perhaps the church is all vision (*chutzpah*), and no mission (*shtick*). The canopy of the tent may be held up by air for awhile, but eventually it will flop to the ground. I remember seeing pictures of the Minneapolis Metrodome collapsed because it could not bear the weight of the snow on top. The pressures of the world cannot be resisted by *chutzpah* alone. On the other hand, perhaps the church is all mission (*shtick*), and no vision. The huge tent pole may stand erect for awhile, but it eventually it will fall down. The largest totems in British Columbia are very beautiful, but most are now horizontal and of no more use than a log on which to sit down.

Unfortunately, there is a third possibility that has become reality for countless churches. These churches have neither vision nor mission; neither *chutzpah* nor *shtick*.

These churches try to substitute denominational identity, or institutional heritage, for vision. They've got no *chutzpah*! They all look alike, and none stand out among the others. They only have *shmalz*, which is another Yiddish word we commonly use to describe *excessive sentimentality, gushing self-flattery, corn, and over-the-top nostalgia*. The good old songs, old-fashioned oratory, out-of-date technologies, trite dogmatisms, forgotten feast days, and cozy pot luck suppers do not build unity, inspire sacrifice, or change the world.

Churches also try to substitute myriad programs and frantic activity for mission. They've got no *shtick*! They are constantly raising money for this and that, recruiting volunteers for various tasks, and keeping the staff and everyone else running until they are exhausted, but there is never any real cohesion, rationale, or point. They have no *shtick*, and all they have is *schlock*. That's yet another Yiddish word for *cheap, shoddy, inferior, superficial, ephemeral, and ultimately worthless stuff*. At the end of the year people look back and ask: Why? All that energy, time, money, worry ... all those meetings ... and for what?

As long as we are learning Yiddish to try to understand the importance of vision and mission, let me offer two more words: *mentsh* and *meshugener*. The general public often use these terms to describe two different kinds of people.

*Meshugener* (**me·shu·ga'·nah**) are crazy people. This describes church people who have no vision or mission, but who still try to maintain an ecclesiastical heritage and pay institutional overhead. They love *shmalz* and *schlock*. What on earth are they thinking? You will notice that most healthy human beings try to avoid crazy people; and if a church of crazy people grows it is usually because more crazy people join it. *Oy vay!*

*Mentsh* or *mensch* (**mentf**) are honorable, decent, authentic persons who help strangers when they need help. This describes church people who do have vision and mission; who have a bold and audacious attitude, and a clear and powerful purpose. They have brassy *chutzpah* and love to repeat a clever *shtick*. Now that's interesting! You will notice that all kinds of healthy, curious seekers are attracted to those kinds of people. They long to share such a positive attitude; and they long to participate in such a powerful practice.

So now you know. *Shalom!*

Tom Bandy  
[www.ThrivingChurch.com](http://www.ThrivingChurch.com)