I don’t consider myself to be a mean person. And I don’t think most people around me would say I’m mean. I like to think I’m good with people. I’m mostly an extrovert. I’m a neck hugger. I regularly tell people I love them. I try to draw people out and show them I care. Of course I’m not perfect, and I have been known to act or speak in ways God might not always be proud of, but I like to think meanness is not a major characteristic of my personality.

Are you a mean leader? You may have picked up this book thinking I was going to give you permission to be a mean person. Frankly, though, there are too many mean leaders out there today. And, believe it or not, this is true especially in ministry! Regardless of where we all are on the mean spectrum, being mean about the vision is not about being mean to people. In fact, it’s exactly the opposite.

Having a vision statement is just a small slice of the pie. It’s one thing to say we have a vision. It’s another thing to live it out. That’s where being mean about the vision comes in.

My prayer through our time together is that God would give you a vision not only for your life but also for the organization you lead. My prayer is that God would also give you the clarity and the strength to be as mean as you need to be—until God does everything He wants to do in and through you and your organization.

I’ve always found that writing in a journal helps me better absorb the events of a busy day, along with the new ideas I encounter. Throughout this book, I’ll offer some questions for reflection that will help you apply the key principles in each chapter. I hope you’ll take some time to consider how these ideas might play out in your organization.

1. Does everyone in my organization know our vision?
2. Is everyone passionate about the vision? Why or why not?
3. Where are we going?
4. Where do we want to go?
5. How can we take everyone with us?
ONE

BEING MEAN

In My Journal

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▶ Does everyone in my organization know our vision?
▶ Is everyone passionate about the vision? Why or why not?
▶ Where are we going?
▶ Where do we want to go?
▶ How can we take everyone with us?
IT ALL STARTS WITH VISION

In My Journal

► What is God’s vision for me? Have I wrestled with God until it has become crystal clear?

► If not, how can I pray until this happens?

► What does success look like for me? Why?

► What is the difference between a good idea and a God idea?
All starts with Vision

My wife, Tricia, and I, along with our then six-month-old daughter, Hannah, moved to metro Atlanta in 1999 to start a new church. As it is with any new vision, I was scared to death, but I had so much fire in my bones I couldn’t be quiet or sit still. The longer we don’t act on a vision out of fear, the greater the odds are that the vision will die in us. I was afraid that would happen to me, so even though I didn’t feel like I was ready, my family and I took the leap anyway.

We really didn’t know anyone in Atlanta. And really, did Atlanta need another church? You can spit and hit a steeple there. But regardless of its public image, metro Atlanta is not the buckle of the Bible Belt anymore. Most churches are not growing there. Statistics show that like most regions, most people don’t attend church regularly there.

Our family knocked on countless doors and talked to hundreds of people in order to see if this was true.

Vision and Success

I truly believe that any organization can be successful if three key points are in place: if an organization’s vision is clear, if it is compelling, and if there is consistency over time. Put another way: Success = Clear Vision + Compelling Communication + Consistent Direction

This means that vision is the deal breaker or deal maker! In his book Built to Last, Jim Collins discusses research findings on the principles that allow companies to be successful over the long haul. His research shatters many of the common myths about what makes organizations successful over time. I want to take just a minute to highlight his findings, but then apply my own experience in debunking these myths.

If we give in to the myths above, we will spend our days trying to fix things that won’t fix things. We will waste our days and our energy trying to make things better, only to realize our work has been futile.

On the flip side, think about it: Isn’t it encouraging to know that we don’t need to have a revolutionary idea that no one has ever thought of to be successful? Isn’t it encouraging to know that we don’t have to be the best communicator or charismatic leader in the world? Isn’t it encouraging to be reminded that we don’t have to do it like someone else is doing it? Isn’t it encouraging to know that people leave because of the vision not just in the absence of one? Everything rises and falls on vision. If we get that right, and we stick to it, everything else is secondary.

In My Journal

- What myth about vision have I tended to buy into?
- What do I need to do to debunk this myth in our organization?
- What is the most encouraging truth about these myths?
A VISION WE’RE WILLING TO DIE FOR

In My Journal

▶ What am I good at? What are my gifts?
▶ What can I be the best at?
▶ What one thing does my organization do better than any other?
▶ Would I die for the vision? Why or why not?
▶ What are some things my organization could benefit from not focusing on?
In My Journal

- Is the vision hot or cold in me? Was I ever more passionate than I am now? Why or why not?
- Could my pace be silently killing off the vision in me?
- If so, what can I do about it?
- How can I keep the vision alive in me on a consistent basis?
- Does the vision dictate my day? Or does my day dictate the vision?
KEEPING THE VISION ALIVE IN OTHERS

In My Journal

► Is the vision in danger of becoming stale in our organization? How can I keep it fresh?
► Does everyone in our organization know what we value?
► How are we holding each other accountable to what we value?
► How can we circle the wagons more in our organization to re-cast the vision?
► In what ways can we communicate the vision more creatively? Both verbally and visually?
IDENTIFYING A VISION HIJACKER

In My Journal

- How can I discern the difference between a critique and a criticism in my organization?
- How can I be more discerning in identifying potential vision hijackers?
- What might the potential fallout look like when a vision hijacker is not dealt with?
- How can I deal with potential hijackers, while displaying care and compassion?
KEEPING THE VISION FROM BEING HIJACKED

In My Journal

- What role does vision play in my discussions with potential leaders?
- With whom do I need to have a courageous conversation regarding the vision? Why?
- How and when will I do it?
- How will I balance grace and truth? Speak the truth in love?
WHEN IT’S NOT WORKING OUT

In My Journal

▸ If I were starting the organization today, would I re-hire everyone who is currently on our team? Why or why not? If not, who?

▸ Right now, if I had to write down the name of someone who is at risk of being released from our organization, who would it be? Why do I think so?

▸ Do I really believe that releasing someone from our organization could also benefit them? Why or why not?

▸ What could potentially keep me from releasing someone who needs to be released?
GETTING BACK ON TRACK

In My Journal

► What changes need to be made in our culture?
► Who would I begin with and how would I start gaining support of change in our organization’s culture?
► When and how am I tempted to give up on the vision?
► Take some time here to map out a rough draft of the transition process to get things back on track. Include key people, events, and meetings.
ELEVEN

PLEASING THE RIGHT AUDIENCE

In My Journal

▶ Who or what drives most of my leadership decisions?
▶ Do I care too much about what people think? Why or why not?
▶ How can I better differentiate the critiques from the criticisms?
▶ What adjustments do I need to make in my life to live more for an audience of One?
TwenLe

Releasing the Vision to a New Leader

In My Journal

► When was the last time I wanted to quit? Why?
► If I could do anything to my organization before leaving, without fear, what would it be?
► What is my plan for the vision to outlive and outlast me?
► What decisions am I making now that could work against that?
► What decisions do I need to begin to make now to prepare my organization to love beyond my leadership?