

# 4

## *A Bigger Mouse*

Kent was at a loss. There were simply too many good ideas to implement, too many mice vying for attention. But it was clear that any attempt to pare the list down was going to cause headaches, heartaches, chaos, and conflict.

There were too many congregational cats with too many pet mice. Too many choices. Some might conclude that Pastor Kent was suffering from decision paralysis. Although we all like to have choices, it turns out that if we have too many options, we have trouble making a decision. In fact, studies show that when presented with as few as seven choices, many of us will find ourselves unable – or unwilling – to make a choice.

But the real problem wasn't *which* good idea to choose, but whether it was wise to make a choice at all. It seemed Kent only had two options:

1. Make a choice and alienate the majority of the congregational cats; or
2. Make no choice and forfeit the possibility of “forward progress” – whatever that would have looked like.

Kent looked up from the list. “The fact is, everyone has their own good idea about what’s next and what’s best for this church. Some probably haven’t shared their ideas at all. Some have shared their good ideas without much comment. There are a few who’ve been trying to build coalitions to get their ideas adopted. And there are a couple who will pretty much do anything they have to ... including coercion ... to get their ideas implemented. Everyone wants to go off in their own direction.”

“What would happen if you somehow managed to implement everyone’s good idea and still had resources left?”

Kent stared at the list and paused for awhile. The magnitude of the problem began to dawn on him. It wouldn’t matter whether he implemented all the good ideas on the list or not. Once he had, those pesky mice would just multiply and he’d have *another* list of good ideas demanding to be chased. It was as if he was playing a game of Whack-A-Mole. If he brained one mouse, another one or two or ten would pop up every time. Of good ideas, there would be no end.

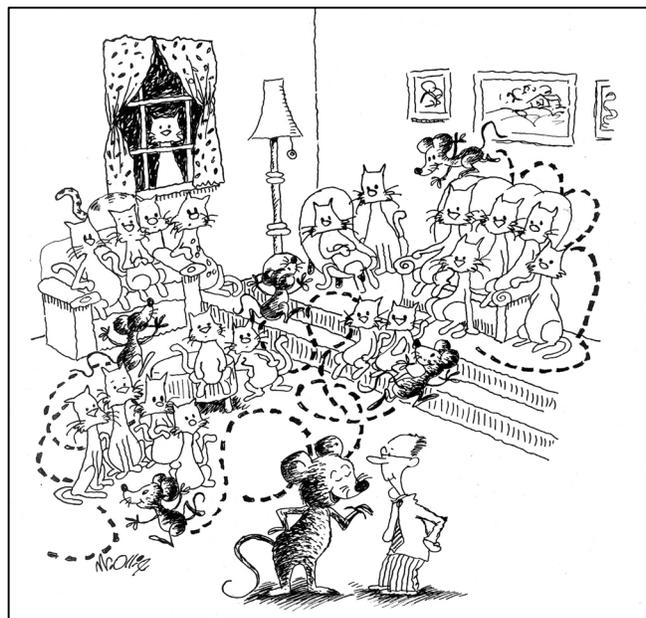
**[arts: Pastor Superman frantically trying to whack mice on a whack-a-mole game with amused cats looking on”]**

“The problem isn’t that your congregation has lots of good ideas. That’s actually a good thing. It means you have members willing to be engaged on some level. But engaged in what and to what end? *Everyone* has an opinion and *everyone* has a good idea. If you want to launch a movement, you’ve got to have an idea that’s so good – that’s so great – that it towers over and above all the other good ideas.

“Do you remember your comment about trying to herd cats? Well, there’s only one way to herd cats: you’ve got to get a bigger mouse.”

**[art: a big mouse in a multi-tiered room where there’s a cocktail party feeling with cats in groups of two to five, mice trying to get attention, and every cat’s eye on the big mouse with looks of admiration and interest on their faces]**

Whenever a big enough mouse steps into the room, every cat turns its head to size it up. If it’s a big enough mouse, the cats lose interest in their own pet ideas and begin to move as one toward the really big good idea. There’s a name for



that kind of really big good idea: we call it vision. Jim Collins of *Built to Last* fame named his big mouse BHAG – Big Hairy Audacious Goal. But no matter what you call it, to captivate and herd congregational cats the good idea has to be more than just a good idea ... it has to be visionary enough that everyday ideas disappear beneath its shadow.

It turns out most good ideas are just detours and distractions. It’s an unfortunate part of life that as we travel toward a promising future, a seemingly innocent good idea will pop up and entice us to chase it. When we do, we’ve become the proverbial cat that chases a mouse. That mouse – that distraction, that good idea – keeps us from reaching our dreams. We’re so intent on pouncing on one good idea after another, we don’t even realize our lives are off track from where we wanted to go in the first place. That’s why the teenager who has set her heart on becoming a veterinarian ends up with a career in project management. Instead of going to college right out of high school, a mouse

named “Take a Year Off to Explore Your World” peeks out from behind the valedictorian’s podium. Later, another good idea called “Summer Internship with an Excellent Stipend” materializes. By the time she looks up from her mouse chasing, her dream of vet medicine seems unattainable.

“It’s time to put down that list of good ideas and see if you can’t find a really big mouse that the congregational cats will chase without so much as a second thought about their own good idea.”

Kent took one last look at the list, reading over each one. They were all good ideas, but he had to admit to himself that there wasn’t a really big mouse among them. Together they’d been more mischief than helpful and he knew it was time to move on.

He folded the paper in half and pushed it into a folder. “So ... where do I find a really big mouse?”