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Breakthrough Catalysts
INJOY Insights

Dear Church Leader,

What is that elusive "one thing" that allows you to break through to the next level of growth in your church? In this article I attempt to, stage by stage, offer you the single key focus in the form of a breakthrough catalyst that takes you from one level to the next.

Breakthrough Catalysts
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I have often been asked "What is the one key thing to break through to the next level?" My answer always begins with "That is a complex, multi-layered answer that depends on the church's culture and location, the pastor's gifts and vision, the people's commitment and energy, the churches resources and the mindset of the board." (And that is a partial list.) Then the pastor says: "Yeah, but what is the ONE thing I need to work on to break through to the next level?" So I then talk about the "big three" – prayer, evangelism and leadership development. Inevitably, the pastor breaks in and says, "Yeah, but what's the ONE thing I need to focus on to break through to the next level?!!!" Against my better judgment, I'm going for it. I know you will likely say, "But what about?" Hey, I'm just trying to answer a very popular question.

If you will grant me a huge amount of contextual grace for my grand generalizations, I will attempt to give you the ONE thing. First, let me say that the real catalyst is the Holy Spirit. It is the purpose and power of God that makes it all happen. But that is a given. And keep in mind that each level builds on the previous. You don't get to forget the breakthrough catalyst that got you to your current level as you tackle the next.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 0 - 200 Pastor

At this stage, the pastor is the key player. The volunteers matter, resources matter, the energy level matters, etc., but nothing is more critical to breakthrough 200 than the pastor. His or her leadership is essential. Vision and communication skills are important, but candidly, I've seen hundreds of churches breakthrough this level where the pastor loved God, had great relational skills, worked hard, and loved the people but was neither a great communicator nor strong visionary. These pastors understand the Great Commission and just go for it. If they are good communicators and visionary leaders that provides all the more fuel for stages to come and helps the process move faster.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 200 - 400 Organization

Up to about 200 a church can function in a very organic, fluid, single-celled gathering of people. Everyone knows everyone and the pastor keeps his watchful eye on everything. This is good, in fact, I often counsel pastors not get too organized in that 0 – 200 stage. A large percentage of churches I've worked with in that stage are over-organized and under-evangelized. Don't put so much energy into lining up the ducks, focus on getting more ducks!

But when you pass 200 you need to get organized. I don't mean organized like lots of committees, but organization in the sense of empowering volunteers to take some key roles from the pastor. I'm also referring to being organized in terms of multiple networks of service opportunities and environments for community. Volunteers serving well and small groups gaining momentum and functioning effectively are critical at this stage. A number of things must be able to function without the pastor.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 400 - 800 Staff

You have probably read ahead and seen that I have listed staff twice. This is not a mistake. I'm listing staff at each stage with a very different emphasis or distinctive edge. At 400 – 800 staff members are critical in terms of their ability to enlist, organize and equip volunteers for service. (I don't mean this in a demeaning way, really, but staff in churches from 200-400 often do a lot of ministry themselves. They help the pastor get things done. That's good, but not at this level.

The ability to enlist others or recruit is the first step that separates those who get a paycheck and those who don't. Many volunteer leaders can recruit well, but most don't. It is not an option for staff to be expert recruiters. I would never give a paycheck to a pastor or ministry director who could not recruit well. From that leadership baseline, the staff members ability to equip (effectively train people for ministry) and organize people is key. Staff at this level must be able motivate volunteers to sustain meaningful, productive and enjoyable service.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 800 - 1200 Vision

Remember, none of the previous catalysts can be ignored, we just add the next catalytic emphasis. From 800 – 1200 the breakthrough catalyst is a compelling vision. I have seen many churches get nearly to 1000 with some vision, though not always inspiring or owned buy the whole congregation. In fact, some churches can get that far by merely sustaining a focused emphasis on the biblical mandate found in Matthew 28:19-20. I think God blesses that. But to go past that, I don't know of any church that has done so with out a crystal clear, consistent and compelling vision. They know where they are going, why they are going, and how they will get there. The vision is not easy nor is success guaranteed, but it is clear.

I believe that God gives that to the lead pastor, and then confirms it through the key volunteer leaders and staff. The vision must be fresh, powerful, inspiring, biblical, and truly maintain the heartbeat of God. Vision can take almost any shape or form, but it must come from God.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 1200 - 1800 Communication

So, check it out, the pastor is a leader, the church is organized, the staff is mobilizing volunteers, and the vision is clear. Now what? The pastor's communication skills must become top notch. To get this far the pastor must be a good teacher or preacher who is articulate, biblical and practical. But at this stage, the pastor, or teaching pastors, must grow to the level of a strong communicator. The leader now rises above leveraging (in a good way) his or her beloved status as pastor and relationships with the people, and communicates as a leader who can move the people, even people that he never gets to know personally. There is quite a difference between teaching those who know and love you and inspiring a large flock with whom you cannot possibly have personal relationships with everyone.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 1800 - 2400 Staff

We now return to staff for a second catalytic breakthrough. At 400 - 800 the staff must be experts at recruiting, organizing and equipping. Good management skills go a long way at that stage. At 1800 – 2400 the staff must be able to empower and develop others to lead. In short, they must be leaders.

Much has been taught on this subject, but few are really good at it. I often say if you have anyone on your staff that is a truly gifted and effective developer and can empower other leaders, then take really good care of them. It is one thing to recruit, organize and equip people to do the work of ministry. It is quite another to develop and empower leaders who can recruit, organize and equip other leaders for effective ministry. These are the most natural and gifted leaders. Few church staffs will be comprised of this caliber leader across the board, but you need to have several on staff like this to break through this level.

* Breakthrough Catalyst 2400 - 3000 Execution

3,000 is the new 2,000. Two thousand used to be the great divide amongst mega churches. It was the size that seemed to stop 99% of churches from going further. God has seen fit to see many churches blast through 2,000 and thrive, but only to slam into the new wall of 3,000. Personally, as one who loves the local church I look forward to the new code that helps hundreds of churches break through 3,000.

But until that time comes, the current catalyst to move up to that stage (3,000) is world class execution. Execution is not complicated to understand, but really hard to do. It is doing what you promise you will do and doing with premier excellence – and here's the kicker – consistently, fifty-two weeks a year, year after year.

Staying focused, keeping things simple, remaining aligned, keeping the main thing the main thing, and fighting for a lean ministry is tough at this size church. But these things are essential to world class execution. And while you are doing all that, to simultaneously raise money, cast vision, deliver world class programs and services requires mind-numbing attention to detail and relentless diligence. This is no job for the faint of heart and like all the previous stages, it requires a boat load of God's blessing.

There you have it, for better or worse, I gave it my best shot. Sincerely, I hope this is helpful to you. So find your ONE thing, and go for it.

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