

Living the 21 Laws of Leadership

The Law of the Big Mo Momentum is a Leader's Best Friend

"You're either part of the steamroller, or part of the pavement."

— Vince Lombardi

Application Guide

As a leader, my greatest fight for continued momentum occurred at Skyline Wesleyan, my third church. I arrived there as the senior pastor in 1981, and as the church started growing, it did not take me long to recognize that we would need to relocate in order to sustain our growth.

At first I thought the project, though large, would not be a problem. A relocation that size is not easy, but we were in a good position for the move. We had started to develop great momentum, having doubled in size from 1,000 to over 2,000 in attendance. Through my application of the *Law of the Inner Circle*, we had put a great staff in place. Morale among the people was very high. I also had the advantage of having led both of my previous churches through building projects. What I failed to take into account was the depth of San Diego's bureaucracy and California's environmental protection laws.

There was literally one single pair of birds called Blacktailed Gnat-Catchers that single-handedly caused dramatic delays and cost tens of thousands of dollars. Everyone in California was protecting something and it seemed as though they could find at least one endangered species on our property. If they could not find one, then it was the habitat they wanted to protect in case "one" did want to live there. Then there were the things *not* living such as Indian artifacts and rock formations. From there freeway alignments came into play, property right-of-ways with the neighboring water district, as well as view sheds for neighbors anywhere remotely near the project. I could literally write pages of stories, some funny and some not so funny, and all expensive. This is enough to paint you a brief picture. The point is the presence of so many things that are momentum blockers.

When I was the pastor at my first church in Indiana, we had also gone through a rapid period of growth and decided to relocate. After the decision was made to construct a new building, a member of the church donated a plot of land, and we started building within a few weeks. In less than nine months, we had built a new facility and moved in.

Things could not have been more different in California. We started the relocation process in 1984. Local politics, neighborhood concerns, and environmental red tape, caused what appeared to be a 3-year project to drag out for more than a decade. It took 11 years just to get the zoning and building permits approved. In fact, I was not even the leader any more when it finally received approval. Jim Garlow, who followed me as the senior pastor, accomplished that along with a fine team of lay people.

The greatest challenge of my life as a leader was sustaining momentum during those last 5 years I spent at Skyline. The people at most churches facing similar circumstances would have given up, and before long their churches would have shrunk in size, but not Skyline. What saved us? The answer can be found in the *Law of the Big Mo*. I did everything possible during those years to build and sustain momentum.

There were so many momentum making and sustaining things we did to encourage the people

and continue growth as we took steps toward relocation. To name just a few: moving the walls of the existing sanctuary outward several feet to seat more people, renting off-site buildings to accommodate more people, and starting a fourth morning worship service on a second campus near where the new land was located.

I continually kept the vision for relocation before the people. We made it a habit to focus on what we could do rather than on what we could not, and we often celebrated our victories, no matter how small. During that time we also focused on strengthening the ministry infrastructure through developing small groups, a great staff, and volunteer leaders. The momentum we built was so strong that even an 11-year obstacle could not stop us.

I. Assessment

The following questions will give you insight as to how well you are living the *Law of the Big Mo*.

- A. How do you describe the difference between the Big Mo and Status Quo in your organization?
- B. Are you self-motivated and a self-starter?
- C. Do you sense urgency and intensity among your people?
- D. Have you identified any problems that may be blocking your momentum?
- E. Have you written a plan to solve the momentum blocking problems?
- F. Are you investing time into the lives of key momentum supporters within your organization?
- G. If your organization is experiencing momentum, do you know why?

II. Application

Momentum is a leaders best friend. If you have had it and lost it you know exactly what I am talking about. If you have never solidly had it for any length of time your organization is not realizing its full potential. I would love to just give you great momentum, but it is something you must develop in your context. The following thoughts will help you either start / re-gain, or sustain / build momentum.

- A. Starting or regaining momentum

1. Face your _____ honestly and forthrightly.

★ ***Low morale is a symptom not a cause. Low morale is not a problem, it is a warning sign of the real problem. Some leaders do not know a problem exists. Others know the problem exists but do nothing about it. The leader who taps into the Law of the Big Mo identifies the problems, admits they exist, and faces them squarely with a commitment to solve them.***

President Bush, though a wonderful person, was not honest with himself or the country about the problems the U.S. was facing and the status of the real issues. I do not believe for a minute that he knowingly "hid" anything from anyone. As Garrison Keillor would say, "He looked reality square in the eye and denied it!" Bush was quoted as saying: "The economy is not too bad." That is like saying a six month pregnant woman is not too pregnant!

If the problems are obvious, then go after them with aggressive resolve. Let the people know that you know what the problems are, and that you are committed to solving them. If you do not know what the problems are, ask your key people, if they are honest they will give you a few! If you think you do not have any problems, you can list that as your first problem! I promise you that as long as you are a leader working with people, you will encounter problems. The key is what you do with them. Your response can make the difference between the Big Mo and No Mo!!

2. Accept _____ for the bottom line.

Momentum builds inside the leader first. This is the quality or ability of being a self-motivator and self-initiator. Momentum can be a huge force, but it begins in the heart of the leader. The spark that motivates you is the spark that ignites those around you.

I met a Godly pastor, who loves his people, but will not take responsibility for the bottom line. His church is located in the Midwest and is undergoing a financial squeeze. The pastor could step into the pulpit and speak candidly to the people about the financial needs, but he chooses to let the "finance committee" handle the financial problems. I shared with him that their responsibility is to wisely allocate and spend the money, not raise it. That was the job of the senior pastor. Until the leader, in this case the pastor, takes responsibility for the bottom line, the *Law of the Big Mo* will not be experienced in his church.

3. Focus on the _____ issues with your _____ team.

Once the key problems or issues have been identified, it is time to include your core

team. This is not the same as "dumping" the problem on them as in the last story of the pastor and the finance committee. This is about including them in the process of designing and implementing the solution. Your leadership is still felt throughout the whole process, even in the areas that are implemented by others on the team.

Do not allow the group to become sidetracked by issues that are not important, or that do not move you closer to solutions. If you are in a scenario where the pressure is on, insist that "tempers and egos" are checked at the door and everyone functions with a unified attitude.

4. Develop a _____ and communicate it with confidence.

The value of writing out your plan:

1. Clear thinking
2. Thorough thinking
3. Visualization of the process
4. Transferability

In several places throughout this guide, I have communicated the importance of writing a plan. There is something about ink on paper that carries with it a strength and can even be motivational itself.

The plan needs to be clear, succinct, and logical to any reader. If you cannot communicate this plan to others with confidence, then you are not yet ready to communicate it. Get the plan right, or get your own confidence up, or both, before it leaves your lips. (Beyond your core people.)

5. _____!

In some of my leadership lectures to pastors, I like to say to them: "If there is no momentum, kick over a pew." And: "If things are really dead, kick over a pew while someone is in it." The point is do something! Momentum never just happens all on its own. **Action is the launching pad for momentum.**

Sometimes it just takes a phone call to get something going . . . the leader who understands this law, will pick up the phone! Indecision and procrastination kills momentum. Avoid these two momentum killers like the plague.

You may need to begin with small victories, that is fine, just take action.

- B. How do you sustain and build momentum?

1. Focus on the _____ not on the _____.

★ ***The potential of the future pulls you forward; this creates hope, which is the key ingredient in momentum. The baggage of the past holds you back; this creates discouragement which is a momentum killer. Even if the past has much success, dwelling on the glory days is lethal to sustaining momentum.***

2. Know where you are _____, and go full steam ahead.

When you are unclear on your direction, you are robbed of precious energy, which is one of a leader's most valuable resources. You are double-minded and unable to focus which decreases momentum.

There are two elements that support the second half of this point — "full steam ahead." The first is urgency. Leaders who create, sustain and build momentum know urgency is needed. This is not an "emergency room" in a hospital kind of adrenalin pump. The E.R. in a hospital is short term in its involvement, the leader must maintain a long term urgency. This is more of a lifestyle or attitude. Urgency communicates "we are doing something so important its worth doing it now." You have seen the sign in many businesses that says "You want it when?!" The sign has several faces laughing on it. This is a huge lack of urgency, not to mention poor customer service! Urgency is not panic, it is passion. You can tell the difference. Panicked leaders do things hap-hazard at the last minute. Passionate leaders go the extra mile because their heart is invested.

Intensity is related to urgency, but while urgency leans more toward timing and response to outward circumstances, intensity deals more with the leader's inner energy and emotion. The intensity is what creates the passion I mentioned under urgency. Intensity is not about taking yourself too seriously, but taking your work seriously. This is a great momentum builder.

3. Cultivate _____ so that people sense they're in it together.

Relationships can make or break your momentum. One of the best ways to ensure that the relational element of momentum stays high and positive is to bring the people together in social settings to get to know each other better, and enjoy friendships that develop on a natural basis.

Do not tolerate office politics, in-fighting, and petty relational problems. Confront them head on and insist that open, honest relationships are maintained. This does not mean that everyone will be "buddies" but everyone must be committed to resolving conflict quickly and in a mature way.

4. Establish and encourage a _____ environment.

1. Look for the best 2. believe the best 3. anticipate the best — that is the “big three” for a positive thinking leader. Other important elements you need, such as freedom to fail, encouraging creativity, sharing the credit, and good communication are covered in other laws.

5. Insist on _____ over _____.

★ *Sacred cows make gourmet hamburger! With the exception of India, this is a great principle!*

Statements like “we’ve never done it that way before” and “I am not sure that will work” must be outlawed from your organization. Even if it works, the marketplace is changing so rapidly that within less than 18 months, what caused growth and momentum, can literally put you in a tail-spin. Keep your eyes open and continually think of new and innovative ways to do things.

6. Concentrate on _____ over _____.

Momentum has a way of mowing down some problems because of high morale, but even with great momentum some leaders are tempted to over-analyze. It begins with good intentions . . . a leader should know *why* things are happening and what the trends reveal. A good way to lose momentum is to invest more time into charting the results than charting the course.

7. Find the _____ makers and multiply your efforts by investing into their lives.

In your organization you have some people of influence who may or may not be in key positions. These people are identified by those who cause something to happen. They are movers and shakers who get the job done. At different seasons in the life of any organization, this group of people may vary some. Sometimes it depends on the persons life, and other times it depends on the focus of the organization. The important point here is to make sure you have gathered around you the true momentum makers of today, not just the “club” of yesterday.

There are four kinds of people in an organization when it comes to mometum:

1. Momentum Makers
2. Momentum Fakers
3. Momentum Takers
4. Momentum Breakers

Once you have identified who the momentum makers are, invest quality time into their lives both professionally on a developmental level, and as time allows on a personal social level.

8. When the Big Mo is rolling, do not get _____.

Enjoy the momentum, but do not take it for granted. No organization has momentum forever. Ride it as long and as far as you can. Resist the temptation to get comfortable, this will cause you to lose your momentum and miss your potential as well.

III. Action Assignment

Set up an interview with the president or top executive of two organizations in your area that are experiencing great momentum. Choose one in the same field you work in, and select one that is different to expand your understanding of momentum. In the same two organizations, also set up an interview with a sharp support staff member, they will often offer different but helpful insights.