

7 REASONS WHY LARGE CHURCHES GET STUCK

BY TONY MORGAN

THE
UNSTUCK
GROUP®



Let's define large churches as those between 800 and 3,000 in attendance. These congregations reflect less than 5% of all churches nationally. There's nothing magical about 3,000. It's really more of a mindset that churches need to transition through if they're going to continue growing. There are some churches with a larger attendance that I'd still put in this category because they haven't appropriately wrestled with these challenges yet.

Here are the common challenges we find in large churches:

1) They have a complex organizational structure.

Over time they have added boards and committees as the ministry has grown, rather than unifying under the oversight of one board with a clear understanding of its role, empowering staff to lead the day-to-day ministry, and developing a pathway for the right leaders to join the board.

2) The spiritual formation path is not defined.

When the church is smaller, the path doesn't necessarily need to be defined. In small churches, next steps are driven relationally—people develop a relationship that leads to a next step. In large churches, people will need to take a step before those relationships develop. It's essential to clearly define a path, supported by systems and leadership, and routinely communicate it.

3) They have too many programs and events competing for attention and resources.

An ill-defined path typically compounds the problem of over-programming. That said, it's not enough just to clarify the path. Large churches must also get focused with their programming and events. This becomes particularly necessary if the church is going to embrace a multisite strategy.

4) Systems and strategies have not been developed, particularly around communications.

I mentioned the need for systems above as it relates to spiritual formation. The reality is that healthy systems need to be developed around every key touchpoint within the church. Examples of touchpoints include connecting new guests, registering new kids, connecting into a Sunday School class or small group, volunteering, etc.

A communication strategy and systems may be the most important need because it touches

every area of ministry. Without a solid communication strategy, churches either try to give every ministry an equal voice or the ministry with the loudest voice wins. In either case, the most important next steps don't get the priority messaging and promotion they deserve.

Also important to note here: Most of the systems churches do have are focused on people already connected to the church and to faith. Very few large churches have developed effective "reach" strategies and systems—that is, strategies for connecting with people far from God or spiritually curious—and this easily becomes one of the reasons they get stuck.

5) Their model leans too heavily on large group gatherings that don't foster relationships.

It is really impossible to engage discipleship outside of relationships. The challenge is that when churches are smaller, most of the environments were small enough to foster relationships. As the church grows, there needs to be a strategy to encourage people to step into environments where relationships can develop. That may be small groups, ministry teams, one-on-one mentoring or some combination of the three.

Eventually, people will become dissatisfied if their only connection to the church is a large group gathering or service.

6) They haven't shifted to a staff-led structure.

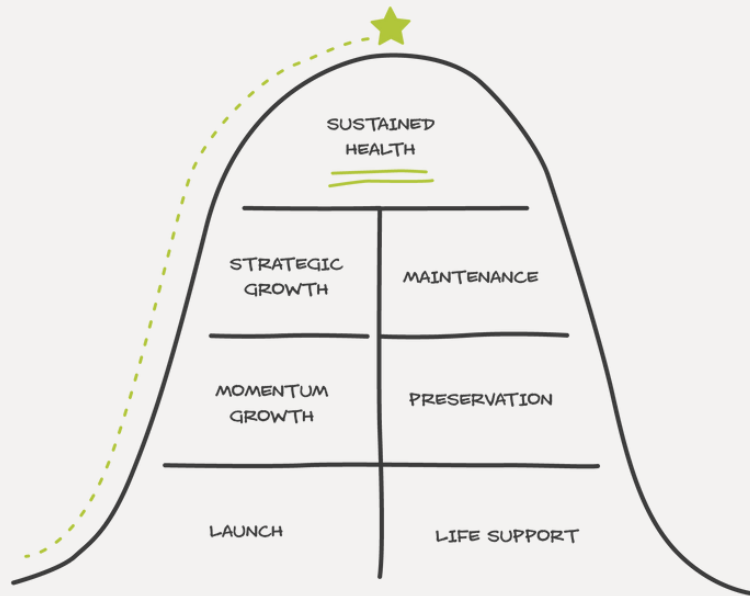
As churches grow, the demand for paid professionals to drive day-to-day decision-making also increases. At some point, it becomes impractical for volunteer lay leaders to continue making day-to-day decisions regarding people, property and money. By the time most churches get to this size, they've already eliminated ministry-specific boards or committees.

At this size, though, the next step is for lay leadership teams to release day-to-day decisions to the staff and instead elevate their focus to overarching mission, vision and ministry resourcing.

7) They don't have a clear digital ministry strategy.

Beyond posting a video of each service online, they don't have a strategy for reaching new people or engaging people already connected to the church using digital tools. And, they also haven't shifted finances or staffing to support digital ministry.

Since the front door of the church is now online, the lack of a clear digital ministry strategy becomes a major gap that inhibits future growth online and in-person.



Most organizations start, grow, thrive, lose momentum, decline, and eventually end. That doesn't have to be your church's story. Over more than a decade, we've helped 500+ churches clarify the vision (where they believe God's called them to go) and their strategies (how they are going to get there). We believe God desires every church to live out its purpose at the pinnacle of sustained health.

You can lead an unstuck church. We can help you.

>> Learn more and start a conversation at theunstuckgroup.com.

ABOUT TONY MORGAN:



Tony is the Founder and Lead Strategist of The Unstuck Group. Started in 2009, The Unstuck Group has served 500 churches throughout the United States and several countries around the world. Previously, Tony served on the senior leadership teams of three rapidly growing churches including NewSpring Church in South Carolina. He has five published books including, *The Unstuck Church*, and, with Amy Anderson, he hosts the The Unstuck Church Podcast which has thousands of listeners each month.