

7 REASONS WHY **VERY LARGE** CHURCHES GET STUCK

BY TONY MORGAN

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We'll define very large churches as 3,000 in attendance and larger. This category reflects less than 0.5% of all the churches in the country. The team at The Unstuck Group actually has quite a bit of experience in these churches. By my count, 13 of the 19 people on our team either serve or have served on staff teams of very large churches. We've also been provided coaching and consulting to many other churches that reach well into the thousands. Churches this large have some unique opportunities and obstacles.

Here are some common challenges:

1) They are typically personality-driven.

By the way, it's not a sin to have a big personality with lots of charisma. If God's given you that unique wiring, you should leverage it for Kingdom purposes. The challenge, though, is that if everything revolves around the personality of the senior pastor, it makes it very difficult to engage people in next steps beyond the weekend service.

One key to turning the corner is to develop a teaching team to model what team-based leadership and ministry looks like.

2) The leadership culture is top-down and authoritarian.

There are many examples of very large churches, on the contrary, that have a collaborative, team-based approach to leadership. One way to begin this culture shift is to develop a strong senior leadership team. This team-based approach to leadership needs to be reflected throughout the ministry.

As the church grows, leadership needs to be less focused on execution of details and more focused on empowering leaders to use their gifts to engage a clear vision and strategy.

3) There's not an intentional strategy for leadership development.

This challenge becomes pronounced as very large churches launch multisite locations. As the number of locations increases, the number of leaders required, both staff and volunteers, increases dramatically. An if-we-build-it-they-will-come approach may work to get new people to attend your church, but I've never seen that strategy work to increase the number of leaders.

Very large churches need to be proactive in helping future leaders develop spiritually, relationally and in the required competencies to lead well.

4) They hold on to traditions.

Very large churches typically have experienced some run of growth in the recent past. The challenge is that not everything a church did in the past will necessarily lead to future health.

Many times it's the very large churches that have the biggest challenge re-embracing new. They become too big and lose their ability to be nimble and welcome change. They get predictable. It may take a new set of voices, either inside or outside the team, to bring a new perspective.

5) They haven't developed a sustainable financial model.

Growing churches tend to spend every dime they take in to keep up with the growth. This challenge is compounded if the church is reaching many people outside the faith or people who have recently accepted Christ. There's generally a lag between giving and spiritual maturity.

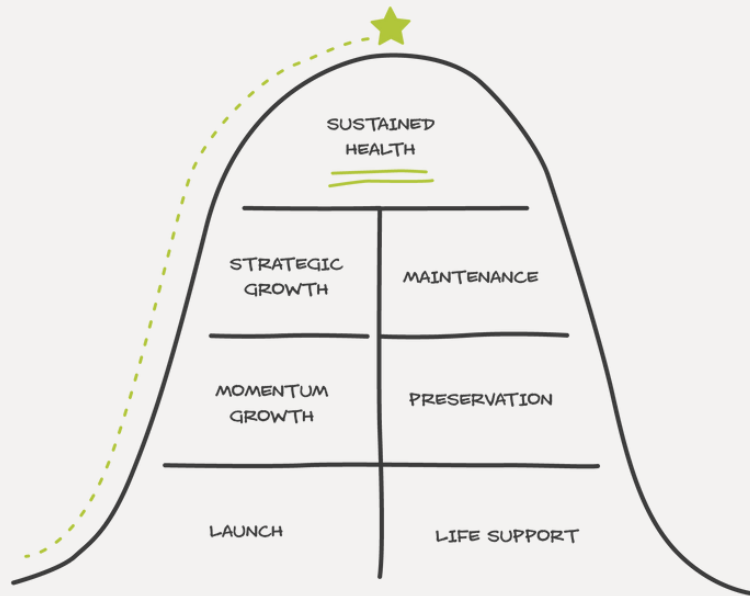
With that in mind, very large churches need to establish new financial disciplines where they regularly spend a percentage less than they anticipate receiving in offerings. This may necessitate a one-time adjustment in staffing, typically where the biggest financial investment occurs, in order to create margin. But with financial margin, you create flexibility to fund future vision expansion.

6) They don't deal with the complexity creep.

As attendance increases, the complexity of ministry programming, calendaring and communications also grows. The challenge, of course, is that you can't develop a focused communications strategy unless you begin with focused ministry programming and calendaring. Very large churches need to become more adept at saying no to good opportunities that will pull for mission priorities.

7) Ministry silos begin to develop.

A natural outgrowth of the increased number of people and ministry programs is a tendency toward silos. Rather than focusing on the overall health and growth of the church, ministries become very protective of their own programs. They begin competing with other ministries for leaders, volunteers, finances and attention. The only way to combat this is to embrace a collaborative effort to develop unified vision and strategy.



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.

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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.