

# 13 Steps to a Successful Growth Program

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## 13 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROWTH PROGRAM by Jim Montgomery

At the heart of the DAWN strategy for saturating countries with evangelical congregations until there is one for every small group of people in every ethnic and cultural setting is the Church denomination. It is the denominational growth programs in the Philippines, for example, that have brought about the doubling of the rate of growth for that whole nation in the past ten years and has kept them on target for the goal of 50,000 churches by 200 AD.

A study of those denominational programs--and those in other nations as well--reveals at least 13 common denominators that seems to be essential ingredients for any successful growth program.

Though addressed to denominations, it is assumed that these same 13 factors apply for growth programs in local churches or groups of churches in a regional setting.

Here are the 13 steps to a successful growth program.

**STEP ONE:** Dream great dreams; see large visions. The first common factor is that growing denominations have a vision larger than themselves. They have a driving concern to see their whole region, their whole country, won for Christ. Such a challenging goal as a church in every barrio appeals to them. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

"Where there is no vision," the Proverb says, "the people perish."  
(Proverbs 29: 18) The verse reminds me of one denominational leader who said, "We are the largest denomination already. We don't have to grow." The result was very slow growth. And, by the way, they are no longer the largest denomination either.

Another denominational leader, on the other hand, had a burning desire to see his whole province filled with churches. The result was hundreds of churches planted and thousands of converts being disciplined.

When you dream great dreams and see large visions, you are driven to work persistently towards seeing them accomplished.

**STEP TWO:** Develop, maintain and use a solid base of data. The Living Bible translates Proverbs 18:13 this: "What a shame--yes, how stupid!--to decide before knowing the facts." (Proverbs 18: 13)

The second common denominator in successful growth programs is that denominations not only have their heads in the clouds but their feet on the ground. They see that the way to accomplish their dreams is not through sentimental, emotional fantasizing but through a concrete understanding of their situation.

These denominations study their context to see who is responsive to the gospel and how to best reach them. They study their own resources to see how big they are, how fast they are growing, what their effective and ineffective methods are and so on. They study other growing churches and denominations to find good ideas for their own programs.

I have a whole seminar I give on this topic, but I think you already have a growing appreciation of the importance of keeping detailed records on each aspect of your church, of gathering and analyzing that data, and of using it to set goals and make plans.

**STEP THREE:** Set challenging, realistic and measurable goals. This I believe, is at the heart of effective denominational growth programs. Challenging goals stir up and mobilize the people. Laymen and women get involved to an extent that surprises even themselves. It is exciting to work together towards a worthwhile and challenging goal.

Realistic goals are set so as not to discourage the people. If goals are not based on previous experience (the facts) and in terms of what is possible, they can be worse than no goals at all. Goals should be set large enough to be challenging, but realistic enough to avoid discouragement.

Measurable goals are set so the people can rejoice in their achievement. Specific numbers and specific dates get members involved.

I am frequently told that people in non-Western nations do not respond to goals, that they are more relational in orientation. But setting goals worked, I believe, because it is biblical and therefore above culture. Goals set under the guidance of the Spirit are "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11 :!)."

In other words, goal setting by the Christian is an act of faith, without which "it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:5)"

**STEP FOUR:** Achieve goal ownership. In one very large denominational program with which I am familiar, the foreign missionaries got together and set their 10-year goal. Then they had a very difficult time getting the Church to work towards it.

In their second program, however, everyone had a say in what the goal should be. They argued and wrestled with each other until everyone was satisfied it was the right goal. since everyone now "owned the goal, they all worked hard to achieve it.

This is a very crucial step in a successful growth program, and can be skipped only at great cost.

**STEP FIVE:** Give a name to your program. The denominational programs mentioned above give evidence of creative thinking in this area. The best names are not only colorful but also descriptive of what the goal is. "Strategy 1085 by 1985" and "Expansion 100" are good examples.

How would your children feel if they were given no names? Lost, ignored, unimportant! So a program needs strong identity if it is to be supported and completed. Give it a good name.

**STEP SIX:** Develop a functional organizational structure. As we see the Church enjoying explosive growth in the book of Acts, we find that many changes had to take place. One of these is recorded in the sixth chapter. As the Church increased in number, there developed a problem in administration. This was solved by the development of a new layer of leadership and giving a whole group of laymen more responsibility.

As one denomination after another developed growth programs and actually experienced increased growth in the Philippines, we found that they also had to redesign their organizational structures. Leaders had to be found to oversee the total program, take leadership in a host of committees, oversee prayer programs, supervise the recording and reporting of statistics, develop and produce various publications, handle training programs and so on.

For your growth program to succeed, you will have to break out of some of your traditional organizational structures. In the process, you will also have the joy of seeing many more laymen and women switch from being bench warmers to active participants in the church. And your denomination will grow spiritually and numerically.

**STEP SEVEN:** Depend on prayer and the power of the Spirit. Critics of the type of movement in which you are involved sometimes have the impression that concern for numbers and the wisdom of men are substitutes for the work of the Holy Spirit.

My observation is that just the opposite is true. Denominational programs that are truly successful are those that have been solidly backed by prayer.

The Target 400 program of the CMA is a good example. They appointed a national prayer chairman and made her a member of the executive committee. She helped organize hundreds of prayer cells in their churches and kept them supplied with a stream of prayer requests for the movement. The result was thousands more laymen actually involved in group prayer than they ever had before.

The book of Acts certainly models this need for dependence on prayer and the power of the Spirit in relation to the growth of the Church. The 120 spent many days in fasting and prayer before the advent of the Holy Spirit and the first 3,000 converts. Then it was a miracle of healing that led to the conversion of the next 2,000 men.

Acts 16:5 says "The churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." Both from the Word of God and the present experience of His Church we must conclude that spiritual dynamic and growth of the Church go hand in hand.

**STEP EIGHT:** Keep your members motivated and informed. In various growth programs I have observed many creative ideas for keeping people from losing interest. First and foremost is a steady stream of announcements, reports and related sermons from the pulpits of the local churches.

Almost all have found it necessary to put out a regular publication that reports outstanding results, answers to prayer and progress towards goals. Such periodicals include articles on the biblical and practical foundations of the

movement and feature men and women who have made outstanding contributions.

Added to these basic tools of communication are a host of other motivators such as annual rallies, special sessions and annual meetings, yearbooks with pictures of each church, seminars, and even such things as printed T shirts and book markers.

Denominations need to give much thought, planning and prayer to the teaching and activity necessary to keep the program moving forward month after month and year after year. Of course, the greatest motivator of all from a human standpoint is the thrill of actually reaching the goals that have been set.

**STEP NINE:** Train your members. This has been an indispensable part of any significant growth program, as might well be expected. The biblical strategy is to equip (train) the saints (laymen and women) for the work of the ministry.

In successful denominational programs members are trained for every aspect of the program. This includes training for starting and pastoring churches, starting and leading evangelistic Bible study groups, leading committees for record keeping and for data gathering and analysis, prayer groups, finances, executive leadership, communications and so on.

Training is given in every type of situation from Bible schools and seminaries, to short term and TEE (Theological Education by Extension) training programs, to informal and apprenticeship programs. Equipping and training are the basic ministry of the Church. No program will reach its goals without effectiveness in this area.

**STEP TEN:** Create sound financial policy. Denominations creating strong, new growth programs are forced to evaluate their whole financial structure. For one thing, they need to evaluate just how they are spending their money. Frequently, funds can be diverted from lower priority items to the challenging evangelistic thrust before them.

Another matter is developing methodologies for promoting the program, training the workers, starting new churches and so on that are effective, yet within the means of local churches and national denominations.

A third matter is effective fund-raising programs. No denomination or church I know of is seeing their members come anywhere near a standard of a tithe

of total income. Good teaching and creative planning are needed in this area.

No growth program is going to reach its goals without an overhaul of its finances in these three areas.

**STEP ELEVEN:** Send out missionaries. When the Conservative Baptists saw their annual growth rates fall from above 20 percent in 1974 to 12.1 and 12.8 the next two years, they realized the program was in trouble unless some firm action was taken. Among other things, they sent out missionaries.

Vic Andaya went to the province of Nueva Ecija and saw 84 converts enter his new church the first year. Dave Billings pushed this work out to include Nueva Viscaya and Isabela provinces.

At about the same time, Robert Skivington was developing a thorough plan for a responsive tribe way off in Mindanao. In the first year alone they saw about 400 come to Christ and into new churches.

This missionary thrust re-established strong momentum for their ongoing program and is a beautiful example of how local churches and denominations must see beyond their own circumscribed areas for continued growth. Every church needs to be challenging, training and sending out missionaries to neighboring barrios and more distant provinces and peoples. A vast new emphasis on missions, which is actually now developing, is crucial to reackring local, denominational and national goals.

**STEP TWELVE:** Regularly evaluate progress. The strength of having measurable goals is that it is always possible to see just where you are in relation to those goals. In the illustration just mentioned, the Conservative Baptists might never have developed such a strong missionary emphasis if they had not known they were falling short of their goals. After all, they were still adding new members and new churches at a rather good rate. How would they have known they were slowing down if they had not set a goal and evaluated progress in terms of that goal?

Leaders of each program must constantly be aware of progress being made toward goals, problems that are arising in any of these 13 steps we are presenting and new opportunities and trends in their community, region and nation.

An annual evaluation with data in hand and lasting two or three days is the twelfth essential ingredient in an effective growth program.

**STEP THIRTEEN:** Make new plans. By far, one of the most heartening aspects of the 50,000 by 2000 movement in the Philippines is the sequence of growth programs. Scarcely is one goal reached and one program successfully completed when another, grander goal is set.

I remind you of the CMA "Target 400" program being followed by the : "Target 1000,000" plan which gave way to their "Two, Two, Two" project: 20,000 churches and 2,000,000 members by the year 2000. Several others could be cited.

In this way evangelism and church planting become a regular part of the church life rather than an activity engaged in only at long, irregular intervals. In this way, and only in this way, will the goal of 50,000 by 2000 be reached.

Each year as the current project is evaluated, new plans must be made for the coming year, made in light of the evaluation. As each five or ten-year project nears completion, it too must be evaluated and new plans made based on this evaluation.

The Church of the Philippines will make a great leap ahead in the discipling its nation and in the cause of world evangelization with this good habit of making and carrying out plans, evaluating progress, and making new plans in light of the current situation.

These, then, are the 13 common denominators I have discovered existing in successful denominational programs in the Philippines as well as other nations. Study them, pray about them and develop your program incorporating these 13 essential steps.

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Figure out the rate-limiting step in your growth, and pour as much fuel on the fire as possible. But for this to be beneficial, you need to take the following steps: 1. Establish a value proposition. Developing a growth strategy isn't a one-size-fits-all process. In fact, due to changing market conditions, making strategic decisions based on someone else's successes would be foolish. That's not to say that you can't learn from another company, but blindly implementing a cookie-cutter plan won't create sustainable growth. A specific plan is a successful plan. When you tailor your growth strategy to your business and customers, you'll keep your customers happy and fulfill their wants and needs, which will keep them coming back.