

A regular column featuring lessons from Church-Planting Movements around the world



MOMENTUM THROUGH THE HURDLES: THE CPM CONTINUUM

STEVE SMITH / Steve Smith works with the International Mission Board (SBC) globally to catalyze learning lessons from and training for biblical Church-Planting Movements. He is the author of the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources 2011). You can follow Steve's musings from his devotional thoughts and kingdom ministry on Twitter @kingreigncome and Kingdom Kernels on Facebook.

Recently I trained a group of colleagues laboring faithfully in one of the harshest areas on earth. Yet after years of witness, the results have only been isolated individual disciples. Virtually all the disciples are first generation, that is, they have been led to faith by the foreigners. Progress toward sustained church planting movements (CPMs)—characterized by at least four generations of new disciples and churches—has been slow.

As I pondered why they were stuck at 1) isolated believers (not groups or churches) and 2) first generation only, two thoughts became startling clear:

- Progress *had* been made. For many years, teams had reported no salvations or baptisms. Now they were getting baptisms. A huge obstacle had been hurdled and it was worth celebrating.
- But then the reality hit me: They were getting what they were aiming for—new first generation

disciples—*not* churches and *not* second, third, or fourth generation disciples. Their very success was keeping them from getting to movements.

This is the quandary that many CPM-focused laborers face. We know that generations of new disciples and churches must emerge and multiply for this to become the spiritual DNA that births an on-going movement. And faced with the stark lostness of a people group, we know that the first major hurdle to clear is winning new believers (first generation).

Leaping across the first hurdle is cause for a major celebration! You should have a party just like heaven does (Luke 15:7).

PROBLEM #1: GETTING GOOD AT THE FIRST HURDLE

But winning the first generation is just the first hurdle. Church planting movements or disciple multiplication movements are characterized by at least

four generations of new disciples and churches. Therefore the next hurdles are winning enough believers to form Christ communities—churches—and envisioning and equipping new disciples to win another generation of disciples themselves, who in turn will do the same.

Getting good at the first hurdle—trained outsiders (e.g. missionaries) winning the first converts to Christ—sometimes is the chief enemy of crossing the next few hurdles. We are so thrilled to finally have believers that we continue our same actions and get the same results—isolated individual disciples that do not result in new churches or a second generation of believers.

The more proficient we become at winning the first generation, the more difficult it is for that generation to emulate our stellar efforts. And perhaps the less motivated we become to train them to do so.

PROBLEM #2: GETTING WHAT WE AIM FOR

This points to a second problem: we are getting exactly what we have been aiming for. We have been aching for new believers for so long that we have not aimed beyond that. From the beginning our aim should have been fourth generation believers and churches, and beyond.

Imagine a hurdler running a 400-meter race. He has ten hurdles to jump, the first at 45 meters. The gun fires and the sprinter emerges from the

blocks full of energy. He successfully leaps across the first hurdle and the next hurdle looms 35 meters ahead. But suddenly he pulls up and stops.

With a grin on his face and hands on his hips he jogs back to the blocks and gets set to run again. Once more he shoots out of the blocks and clears the first hurdle a bit more cleanly. Once again he pulls up.

Over and over he runs the race—of one hurdle. He is getting much better at what he is aiming for—crossing the first hurdle—and his times improve with each venture. But that was not the design of the race. The race was ten hurdles. His end-vision is wrong.

In the same way, when our aim is first generation believers, we eventually get there, but not much further, because we forget the race is multiplying generations of disciples and churches.

PROBLEM #3: NOT LETTING MOMENTUM FROM EACH HURDLE PROPEL US OVER THE SUBSEQUENT HURDLES

At some point in time the hurdler realizes he needs to cross the second hurdle. He lines up at a point in the track after the first hurdle and starts sprinting toward the second hurdle. But his speed and momentum fail to carry him across it successfully. Repeatedly he tries, becoming more fatigued and frustrated with each attempt. Eventually he labels the second hurdle as “impossible” to clear.

Remarkably, this is the same label that many laborers in the kingdom put on their contexts—“*impossible*.”

“It’s impossible to get enough believers together in the harsh environment to form a church.” “It’s impossible to get first generation believers to lead others to faith.” “Missionaries can do it, but locals cannot.”

WE WORK SO LABORIOUSLY ON WINNING THE FIRST GENERATION THAT WHEN WE FINALLY GET THEM, WE CAMP OUT...

We work so laboriously on winning the first generation that when we finally get them, we camp out and focus only on their spiritual health, not helping them boldly win another generation within hours and days. Perhaps this is because we fail to realize that spiritual health includes *their* ability to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20).

Frequently we assume that if it took us weeks or months to lead them to Jesus, that they require the same time for winning their family and friends to faith. While it might take us weeks or months, it may only take them hours or days to win family and friends to faith because these people know and trust them. A common refrain by workers in multiplication movements is: “It took me days (or weeks) to lead him to faith, but in just minutes (or hours) he led his friends to faith.”

That brings us to a final problem: we fail to let momentum from each hurdle carry us through the next hurdle. Track and field coaches will attest that the forward lean and momentum of a sprinter are the keys to carry him through each hurdle. He must not slow down, stand too erect or stop short, or the next hurdle becomes difficult or impossible to clear. Instead he must lean forward and increase speed in clearing each successive hurdle.

Practitioners that are getting to movements have in their mind the tenth hurdle from the moment they start out of the blocks and look at each hurdle as the opportunity to carry them through the next hurdle. They expect each generation of disciples to be the momentum toward the next. *Did we win our first believer or our first household? What will it take to help them win the next generation within days and start a church within weeks? What will it take to help this first generation equip the second generation to start a third generation within weeks and months after that?* Crossing each new hurdle should require less time, not more time. The race should accelerate. Otherwise spiritual momentum is not at work.

The best way to cross hurdles is to push through them as rapidly as possible.

In CPMs the exhilarating speed of momentum, while unnerving at times, is our friend. We are running a race to see multiplying generations of new disciples and hundreds of new churches emerge

into movements that can saturate a people group and beyond.

PUSHING THROUGH THE CPM CONTINUUM

Steve McGill, hurdles coach, comments on one of the elite hurdlers: “[In the 60m hurdles], compare [Terrence] Trammell to the other hurdlers as they descend off hurdle one. See how the others stand up, whereas Trammell stays forward. For five hurdles and through the finish line, Trammell never stands erect. I think that’s where being a sprinter and having a sprinter’s mentality helps him. Sprinters are taught to drive for as long as they can. Thirty, forty, fifty meters. Hurlers who don’t have a sprinter’s mentality stop driving as soon as they clear the first hurdle.” (<http://hurdlesfirstbeta.com/free-articles/training-tips/maintaining-forward-momentum-emphasis-added>)

As I coach missionaries and church planters, I advise them to keep the end-vision in the forefront of their mind and to let each breakthrough be the fuel toward the next one. If they view their work as a progression along a continuum from lostness to a sustained church planting movement, then they keep asking the question: “What will it take, by God’s grace, to get us to the next stage and the one after that in the next few weeks and months?”


As they evaluate the status of their situation on the continuum below (e.g. “We’re about at a 1.5—first generation believers”), then their

efforts are focused on what it will take to get to a stage 2 (second generation churches), and then a stage 3 and so on. Each hurdle is occasion to lean forward toward the next stages on the continuum.

In a number of CPMs, missionaries and local believers have pushed from stage 1 to stage 3 or 4 in a year’s time. Part of the reason is because they tenaciously press through the hurdles with all God’s power working within them (Col. 1:29). Their goal is not to get to a “1” but to get to a “3” or “4” in that span of time. All their efforts are focused on finding the people God has prepared, developing them into Christlikeness and maintaining momentum with them.

Such missionaries and church planters never stop first hurdle work (personally leading people to faith and discipling them) but they give more and more attention to clearing the subsequent hurdles. Failure to do so results in loss of momentum and failure to get to a movement of God. Like McGill comments above, we must view ourselves not as hurdlers but sprinters gaining momentum throughout the race.

So one of the most effective tools for evaluating the current status of our work and what is needed is the CPM Continuum. It gives us a chance to celebrate each hurdle passed and points to the next hurdles to clear.

What are you aiming for? What is the status of your work? What would it take, by God’s grace, to move it two whole steps forward in the coming year? Now run! 

The CPM CONTINUUM

0—You are in your new context but have no CPM plan yet

1—Moving purposefully 0 to 1— Trying to consistently establish first generation believers & churches

1.1— Purposeful activity trying to find and win persons of peace but no results yet

1.2-1.3 Have some new first generation believers

1.4-1.5 Have consistent first generation believers

1.6-1.7 Have one or some first generation churches

1.8 Have several first generation churches

1.9— Close to second generation churches (you can see it happening soon)

2—Moving purposefully 1 to 2— Purposefully moving from first to second generation churches and starting to see the some second generation churches emerge

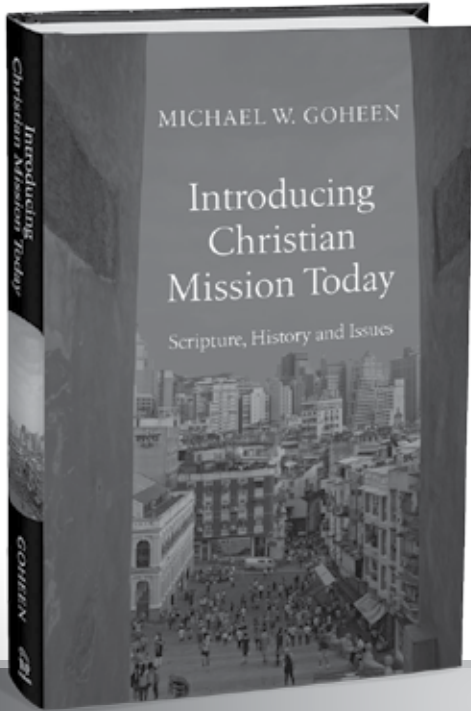
3—Near CPM— Some third generation churches are emerging

4—Emerging CPM - Some fourth generation churches are emerging

5—CPM - Consistent fourth generation and beyond churches in multiple unrelated streams (multiple contexts)

6—Sustained CPM— Visionary, indigenous leadership is leading the movement with little or no need for outsiders. The movement has stood the test of time and the assault of the enemy.

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