

MOVEMENT KILLERS

BY **JIM YOST**

Jim Yost and his wife Joan pioneered a church-planting in Irian Jaya, Indonesia (now Papua) in February of 1977 among the northern Sawi tribe located in the southern lowlands of Papua. After 20 years in that tribal location they moved to the north coast city of Sentani where they are now involved in ministry to troubled youth as well as to broken families. The power of God to transform broken lives has been evidenced in disciples making disciples who in turn are making disciples. Jim's growing burden is to catalyze Disciple Making Movements in Papua, throughout Indonesia and beyond.

For the last 20 years “movement thinking” has gained attention in the missional world. Whether you call it Church Planting Movements or Disciple Making Movements or Exponential Discipleship, it's undeniable that we are witnessing the book of Acts unfolding afresh with 3000 coming to faith in one day, 8000 in one week, 20,000 in just a few weeks. Movements are happening everywhere and if God is doing it in one place, it probably means He wants it to happen in all places!

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I am a DMM Catalyst and often I am contacted by folks who ask me, “Would you show us how to make a movement happen?” It's almost like people think I have a bag of secrets and all I have to do is put my hand into the bag and pull one out and give it to them and then a movement will take place. I always answer, “No man or woman can make a movement happen. Only God can cause a movement to happen. But when God is on the move, we can sure get in His way! Unknowingly we can thwart or slow down what God is doing. These are called “movement killers.” Here are five movement killers that we have recognized in recent years.

POPULARITY

When something we're doing is proving successful, the word gets out and it becomes popular and everyone wants to get on the bandwagon. Then innovation begins to stall because we've started focusing on things in the past or trying to “package” something for the general public. It seems like movements continue longer when they are kept a secret so we try to keep them under wraps until they are quite obvious.

In the last few years Disciple Making Movements have become quite popular in the region where I live and serve. Books have been published, seminars conducted, and it's been marketed as the new way to grow a church! A lot of attention has been given to one element of DMM—the Discovery Bible Study. A number of churches have plateaued in their growth, so when they hear about Discovery Bible Study they grab hold of it and turn all of their cell groups into DBS groups. They succeed in turning their church into a “Discipleship Church.” However, the end goal of not-yet believers coming into faith as part of a movement is never realized.

TRADITIONAL CHURCH CRITICISM

There are times when a spark of something very “contextual” begins and starts taking off, but when news of this reaches influential traditional church leaders they condemn it as heretical because it is not under their power or control. That criticism makes emerging leaders in a new movement question what they are doing.

In one fairly isolated rural area, a movement developed with hundreds of local people coming to faith. One of their emerging indigenous leaders suggested that as they showed their allegiance to Jesus in baptism that each person should carry a piece of firewood down to the river. They would make a big fire at the side of the riverbank and each baptismal candidate would lay a piece of wood into the fire stating, “This is my sin to be burned up to ash and the wind to take it away never to be seen by me again.” Then they would go down into the water and be baptized. It was a demonstrative way that they all would “feel” how their sins were forgiven by Jesus' sacrifice. News of what they were doing traveled to a nearby area where a church had been in existence for over 10 years. When the leaders of that church heard this news they were upset. They traveled for two days to get to this location where the movement was happening to tell everyone to stop. They said, “We received the Good News about Jesus before all of you so you must do this the same way we do it.

This wood burning stuff is not of God and must stop.” For a period of time, it did stop. But when these leaders returned to their region, the local emerging movement leaders started up again! So even though the movement slowed down, it didn’t completely stop.

LACK OF SPIRITUAL “FATHERING AND MOTHERING”

This is really connected with the previous movement killer. Despite criticism and even some faltering first moves, these emerging leaders can still make it *if* they have someone backing them up in a spiritual parenting role. This is huge. There are no movements without spiritual parenting.

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I am a product of the Jesus People Movement in California some 50 years ago. It was during that hippie era when God really got ahold of my life. It was very messy and seemingly out of control. People were coming to faith rapidly but people were falling pretty fast, too. There was only one mature leader named Pastor Chuck Smith. He raised up leaders from the harvest—young people coming out of bad backgrounds—and put them into leadership positions only to see them fall. But Pastor Smith had a “father’s heart” and would pick the fallen back up and say, “I believe in you. You can do it.” That was the engine behind the Jesus People Movement. Movements are messy and they must have spiritual parents to succeed.

INAPPROPRIATE FUNDING

This is a tightrope that we always have to be walking. But the bottom line is this: if a movement isn’t happening without money, then it won’t happen with money. Whatever kind of assistance is needed, the timing and the people involved should always be determined by those in the middle of movements on the ground. When this type of information is offered from the outside then movements begin to stall.

A bottom-line value of movements that I’m associated with is this: no financial proposals are allowed. We take Luke 10 and Matthew 10 quite literally—the person inviting you into their house or *oikos* should provide shelter and food for you—so the not-yet believers are the

ones subsidizing movements! Why would they do that? Because they see the added value your presence makes among them. All ministry in movements is holistic and brings the kingdom of God to earth in practical ways that people see and want to get behind. People on the ground know where funds are most needed and how to get the assistance to where it’s needed without outside organizations insisting on foreign procedures.



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A growing movement was beginning to gain attention from the local government because many street children were turning their lives around through the multiplying of restorative discovery groups over a large urban area. The government then gave a financial gift so the leaders of this movement could build a building and have a place to conduct their activities. The leaders received the funds from the government and then got together for a meeting to decide how to proceed. They were in a dilemma. They asked, “If we build a building, does that send the wrong message to all the young people we serve? We are about building lives and not buildings. We must give the money back to the government.” They returned the funds back to the local government who was shocked and said, “This has never happened before! No one ever gives back money we give to them. These funds are from last year’s budget so it’s too late to return them to us.” The movement leaders asked, “Could we use the funds to build a medical clinic for the poor instead?” The government officials thought about the request and finally agreed. A medical clinic serving 200 people every day is now functioning



because of appropriate funding and many people are finding faith through these medical services.

LACK OF LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

In a healthy movement, leaders are being created at all levels all the time. However, when some experienced and gifted leaders stay in positions for too long then movements will stall. We've actually started creating time limits for leaders and an age limit in our youth movement. Leaders can't be over 25 years old!

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For the past number of years, we've been seeing a youth movement happen in the region where I live and work. Some people say movements have to be based on the nuclear family in homes, and ideally that is true. That's why in rural areas where movements are recorded, the Good News about Jesus travels through the

relationships of family members. But the reality in urban areas around the world is different. When people migrate to urban cities their families come under lots of pressure. Urban lifestyle pulls husbands and wives apart and it also pulls parents from children. In these urban centers, young people look for community among their peers instead of their nuclear family so the Good News travels through these peer communities. We have many different types of movements: hip-hop movements, punk movements, sports movements, motorcycle gang movements and more and they all produce their own leaders.

Recently, when I was speaking in a church in South Korea, I noticed that the number of young people in attendance was very low. I offered the advice to the leaders to start a hip-hop ministry with young people, but they did not receive my advice very well. They responded, "You can't gyrate your body and spin on your head like that in church!" I replied, "If you don't then you will lose a whole generation." I went on to explain how South Korea was number one in the hip-hop world and that would have more influence on young people than anything else in their country.



A year ago I gathered with 20 of my top leaders from our youth movement, both guys and gals age 17 to 25. All were highly involved in hip-hop, rap and DJ lifestyles. I asked them, “How many of you when you were still a child growing up at home had both parents with you? Raise your hand.” No one raised their hand. Then I asked, “How many of you had one parent around when you were younger?” Seven of them raised their hands. Finally I asked, “How many of you had neither a mom nor a dad at home when you were growing up?” 13 raised their hands. This is normal today for this generation. They are finding their way to a new way of doing church and seeing movement happen among them and a key is always reproducing leaders. It was at this meeting that they told me the current leaders must “pension” at 25 years of age to make room for the next generation of leaders.

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