



## Motivate People to Greatness

*To build a great team, leverage the power of a movement*

Tim Stevenson

**GREAT ORGANIZATIONS RESEMBLE** a movement rather than its shiny-but-anemic cousin, the common program. Movements increase in power over time as intrinsically-motivated people join them in pursuit of a meaningful vision, accomplishment, or ideal.

People by and large do not understand the difference between a movement and a program (*see side-by-side chart on Page 2*). As a result, programs continue to multiply like rabbits in organizations, even though they typically produce mediocre and diminishing results.

If you want to lead your organization or team to excellent performance, unleash the power of a movement.

### Movements on the world stage

World-changing individuals have been visionaries who led movements: William Wilberforce working to end the slave trade in the British Empire; Mahatma Gandhi leading his people to non-violently win India's independence; Martin Luther King, Jr. contending for civil rights for African-Americans in the United States.

Each of these worked for *years* toward their vision, beginning with few followers but eventually winning thousands of sold-out partners. They changed the world.

Each of these leaders maintained a sharp, unwavering focus on their goal. Each also possessed a profound understanding of human nature, human needs, and human motivation. Once their movements gained traction, they became irresistible forces.

### Understanding programs

Programs are campaigns to achieve short-term, measurable goals. They have a clear beginning and a definite end, and they depend on extrinsic rewards to motivate people.



Tim Stevenson • Certified Executive Coach  
E-mail: [csc.tstevenson@yahoo.com](mailto:csc.tstevenson@yahoo.com) • Phone: (469) 585-3982

[www.StevensonCoaching.com](http://www.StevensonCoaching.com)

Twitter: @StevensonCoach

Executive Coaching • Leadership Development

**PROGRAM**

Management is key,  
requires formal authority

People participate in a program

To achieve measurable goals

Starts big and ends small

Built by promotion & incentives

Uses extrinsic motivation

Participation burns a  
finite supply of energy

**MOVEMENT**

Leadership is key,  
does *not* require formal authority

People own a movement

To pursue remote goals or ideals

Starts small and grows large

Built through persuasion & conversion

Draws upon intrinsic motivation

Involvement energizes  
& multiplies energy

Some examples of program goals: To reach a monthly sales number; to attain a customer service score; to hit a fund-raising target.

For programs, management is key, because leaders require formal authority to initiate one. Rank and file employees of a company, for example, cannot just announce a program. They are imposed from the top-down.

Since people normally aren't interested in joining a program, they must be extrinsically motivated to participate in them. Those extrinsic motivations might be a financial bonus, possession of the department trophy, or recognition at the annual banquet. Programs are built by promotion and incentives. And, since people's motivation is extrinsic, participation burns a finite supply of energy. That's why programs tend to lose momentum the longer they go. They start big and end small. They go up like a rocket and come down like a rock.

Because people have drawn from their finite supply of energy and enthusiasm, they have less available for the next program. When program follows program, extrinsic rewards have a diminishing effect, and team performance assumes a downward arc. Leaders then raise the ante, with more persuasion, more incentives, and louder hype, but people lose their inclination to listen. Programs can become like an organizational addiction with less and less bang for the buck. I am convinced that a

reliance on programs to motivate reveals a serious lack of understanding of human nature.

Evaluating the success of a program is difficult. Technically, it is successful if it achieves the measurable goals outlined. However, leaders more often measure a program's success by subjective standards like "excitement" or "improved morale." Programs thus can be considered successful *because they were done at all*. They become ends in themselves, furnishing an illusion of progress.

If this sounds like I am entirely opposed to all programs, that is not true. They can be useful to meet short-term, measurable goals. In moderation, programs can also be used simply to break monotony. But if you use them, use them sparingly, and with clear understanding of their serious limitations.

### **Understanding movements**

Movements are different from programs in almost every way. A movement is usually a long-term pursuit of remote goals or ideals. They run on the intrinsic motivation of people, who join because *they believe in the cause*. People don't just "participate" in a movement. They *own* it, just as much as the leader whose vision and persuasion initiated it.

Unlike the downward arc of the typical program, movements start small and grow

large. Drawing on the intrinsic motivation of dedicated people, a movement can become an irresistible force. Rather than exhausting people, involvement in a meaningful movement energizes and multiplies energy.

Finally, unlike a program, leaders of a movement may or may not possess formal authority. Neither Gandhi nor King possessed significant formal authority in their time. They earned enormous *moral authority* which enabled them to command vast volunteer armies through their example and persuasion.

### **The principle of Challenge: “To be part of something greater than myself”**

Effective leaders of movements understand human nature. They know that in every human heart are certain deep desires, especially the desire “to be part of something greater than myself.” It doesn’t have to be on a national scale like the leaders I’ve mentioned. Any organization that has a *meaningful* mission, vision, and values has the potential to raise its employees or members beyond the level of “selling widgets to make bucks.” The mission can be something *great*.

In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras refer to great companies that have a **BHAG** (pronounced “BEE-hag”), a “**big hairy audacious goal**.” They explain:

**A BHAG engages people — it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused. People “get it” right away; it takes little or no explanation.**

Effective leaders of movements can always articulate their vision:

**Henry Ford:** “To build a motor car for the great multitude ... so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one.”

**John F. Kennedy:** “This Nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this

decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.”

**Martin Luther King:** “I have a dream ...”

**The Salvation Army:** “An international *movement* [notice!] ... to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.”

**The Red Cross:** “To provide compassionate care to those in need ... preventing and relieving suffering, here at home and around the world.”

Where to start? First, look within yourself. What energizes you? What kind of change or achievement makes your heart beat and sets your hair on fire?

Second, begin to talk about it, not being afraid to start small. Most movements are small in the beginning. Focus on the “Why?”, that is, the *reason* or *benefits* of the change. Simon Sinek’s writings and talks may be helpful, particularly his *Start with Why*. I believe his study of motivating communication is right on the mark.

Third, focus on the long haul. Building a movement is a marathon, not a sprint. But like the tortoise in the old tale, you can win.

### **The human search for meaning**

In the 1970s Studs Terkel interviewed people from all walks of life about their work, published in his best-seller, *Working*. He quotes an editor who commented, “Most of us ... have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people.”

This is what the principle of Challenge is all about: tapping into the human yearning to find something of true value to pour one’s energies and time into. If you can lead your team to connect their daily activities to a vision worth pursuing in a growing movement, motivating them will not present a major challenge. **L**