



Every Number *Tells a Story*

The Importance of Analytics in
Growing Disciples and Funding
Transformational Ministry

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Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Engagement Strategies Is the Clearest Path Forward to Growing Disciples

I expect this next season of ministry to be one of constant disruption. If I am right, to thrive we will all need to adopt new tools and adapt the frameworks which guide and measure the effectiveness of our ministries.

One of the most visible shifts is already present in local church ministry – how our members and regular attendees engage with us. Some will choose to experience ministry exclusively online. Others will engage with us exclusively on campus as has been the norm for years.

We have entered a season where someone can be active in a church without actually ever having to step foot on campus. By active, I mean participates in worship, spiritual formation, community, serving, and giving. These activities are commonly referred to as a discipleship pathway.

“ The great upside to members/regular attenders who engage using both in-person and online options is the potential for higher levels of engagement.

Rather than exclusively using just one channel of participation, the most rapidly growing category of church members is choosing a hybrid approach where some of their activity will happen online and some will happen on-campus. Convenience and personal preference will drive their choices.

The great upside to members/regular attenders who engage using both in-person and online options is the potential for higher levels of engagement.

If they can't attend in person, they can still be present online.



This shift toward a hybrid (on-campus and online participation) ministry environment introduces a whole new dimension of opportunities and challenges for the local church. To succeed requires a shift in thinking, practices, and habits. Identifying what is shifting and how to respond is the big challenge.

Most growing churches I am working with are making very intentional investments in engagement strategies to increase participation and movement along their discipleship pathways. These engagement strategies occur on-campus, online, and through on-demand channels. With this investment of resources, comes the need to understand whether the outcomes are worthy of the investment.

“ *Behind every number is a person and their story of the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and significance.* ”

The most important marker of ministry success is the effectiveness of your discipleship engagement strategy.

In the past, too many of us have been satisfied with an increasing number of worship attendees and participation in activities offered by the church. It has become clear that

attending an event is no guarantee that personal transformation is actually occurring.

Personal transformation is the ultimate goal of your discipleship pathway. But, this work of the Holy Spirit is difficult to measure directly, so we measure markers of transformation (called proxy variables) instead.

In the church, common proxy variables used to measure steps along the discipleship pathway are changes in:



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- worship participation,
- spiritual development participation,
- serving opportunities,
- giving,
- participation in leadership roles,
- And higher satisfaction levels in survey responses.

Knowing you are making an impact has never been more measurable. And now that it is measurable, knowing you are moving closer to your vision through your ministry plan on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis will offer a level of confidence that will keep you moving forward while operating in an environment of intense and rapid change. It also provides you with the evidence of the return on investment of time and financial resources your donors are increasingly requiring.

Behind every number is a person and their story of the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and significance. The more effective you become, the more likely your people will be able to uncover their divine design and live into their full potential.



Core Concept One

You Don't Have to Be a Numbers Person to Benefit From Analytics

“Volunteers and donors are increasingly requiring measurable evidence of the connection between investing their time, talents and financial resources and ministry impact.”

If it feels like ministry has changed dramatically, you're not alone.

Most leaders entered ministry or volunteer leadership with a clear set of expectations in front of them. How a local church was managed was fairly predictable, and

operational processes and procedures were well established.

The same can't be said today. The variety of expectations and demands placed upon church leaders, especially senior staff, has never been more complex.

Senior staff are still expected to preach, teach and pastor, grow disciples, and fund ministry. Expectations have expanded to also having an online worship and ministry presence, being active on social media, understanding how to use a church management system to organize relationships, connections, conversations, and tasks.

Volunteers and donors are increasingly requiring measurable evidence of the connection between investing their time, talents, and financial resources with ministry impact.

Any one of those expectations can be complex, but when you add them all together, they can be overwhelming and leave you feeling like you'll never live up to the rapidly changing expectations.

The truth is, you don't have to be a numbers person to benefit from analytics. No one wants you



to become a quantitative analyst. Of course, if you are, that's certainly a unique advantage, but it's definitely not a requirement.

The point of using analytic tools is to organize the complex into something that can be easily understood and acted upon with confidence.

Making the complex understandable can help you make decisions that lead to doing less but have a greater impact.

What's most important is that you appreciate how reporting and analytics can complement and inform your thinking and next actions. Sometimes data will surface nuances you wouldn't have necessarily considered otherwise. Those insights will lead you to ask questions of your staff, leadership, and even yourself that will identify areas for improvement and help you find ministry wins to celebrate.

“ The point of using analytic tools is to organize the complex into something that can be easily understood and acted upon with confidence. ”

Analytics isn't something to be afraid of, and it's OK if it takes a little while to get used to it. All you need is the humility to consider whether or not the numbers on the page challenge or validate what you think to be true.

When it comes to discipleship, data analytics will help you affirm what you know, reveal what you don't know, and know what you didn't think you'd ever know. This will benefit you, your staff, and your leadership by boosting your confidence that the results you want—discipleship and life change—are, indeed, taking place.



Core Concept Two

The Difference Between Data and Insights Is Leadership

So much of church leadership has been about optimizing what already exists. From church programs, to worship planning, to service projects, local church ministry has largely been well-defined. Sure, there might be a few people experimenting with new ways to do familiar things, but it's been largely a world of incremental improvements over a long period of time.

There is nothing wrong with incremental improvement. It works beautifully—until it doesn't. The pandemic revealed gaps that likely already existed, but suddenly desperately needed to be addressed. As a result, change is accelerating faster than most leaders are able to process and assimilate into their leadership and ministry strategies.

“ In seasons of change, leaders must lean into their experience, perspective, and wisdom to create meaning and context to information.”

Local church ministry is undergoing massive shifts in just about every area. The enormity and intensity of this level of change hasn't been felt, seen, or experienced by church leaders in decades—if not generations. That's why your leadership, confidence, and conviction in a better tomorrow are critical.

In seasons of change, leaders must lean into their experience, perspective, and wisdom to create meaning and context to information.

Sometimes, information comes from conversations, emails, and phone calls. This is **qualitative feedback**. It's grounded in one person's perception and evaluated through one lens. It's important because this is how one individual or a group experiences something you are trying to measure.



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Qualitative information helps you form context and meaning, and the information produced by analytic tools, without context, can lead to misguided direction and conclusions.

Then there is **quantitative feedback**. This is your heart rate, blood pressure, weight, and height. You may like or not like the numbers associated with these measures, but there is a reason why your doctor captures them at just about every office visit. They provide key indicators of other changes which might need to be explored further through additional conversation or testing.

Without your doctor's experience, perspective, and wisdom, numbers sit flat on a page; but, combined with what they've seen and know, numbers become meaningful insights that can lead to prevention or intervention.

When you combine your capacity to see and understand the numbers on the page, you unlock a level of wisdom, insight, and perspective that will boost your ministry effectiveness.

Data, without a human element, can be easily dismissed as meaningless; but data and analytics, coupled with an experienced and seasoned human perspective, can create meaning that will move you to take action.



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Core Concept Three

A Commitment to Life Change Shapes Resource Allocation

The toughest part of ministry is not choosing between right and wrong. Those are usually the easy decisions.

“ The most complex part of local church ministry is making a decision between better and best.

The most complex part of local church ministry is making a decision between better and best.

And if you're like most leaders, you'd rather run yourself ragged trying to cover all the bases and balance all the spinning plates than make a decision between what to start, stop, and change. Inertia is a powerful concept in physics, and it is often very descriptive of how many ministry leaders feel about their commitments, schedules, and programming.

When you don't know what's working and what isn't, it is difficult to say yes or no especially when resources are limited. That means you're stuck trying to get it all done rather than determining what needs to be done and what can be set aside.

Continuous improvement is a concept that emerged from the manufacturing industry. The goal is to constantly monitor systems and outputs and determine where there are deficiencies and inefficiencies that might lead to a loss of productivity and profit. Those who do this well see incredible success. Without a focus on continuous improvement, a manufacturer might remain busy but won't continue to grow in the right ways.



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While you're not a manufacturer of goods and your motivation isn't profit, you do have the goal of changing lives. In pursuit of this goal of transformation, you can still benefit from the principles of continuous improvement. It is a critical management approach that becomes incredibly relevant during times of rapid change. As new information is available, new decisions can be made.

You have to be open to doing new things in new ways constantly. Change forces leaders, teams, and ministries to become agile and flexible. Life change is where analytics and meaning intersect. When your goals are discipleship, impact, and spiritual transformation, a willingness to embrace change as new information is available is critical to maximizing ministry effectiveness.

There will always be a limitation of time, money, and people to do the work at hand. Using analytics will give you a greater level of confidence that your use of budget dollars, staff, and resources is actually making the kind of impact you pray for every day. That's how the practice of continuous improvement helps you do more ministry and grow more disciples.



Core Concept Four

Relationships Are Dynamic and Require Responsive Decision Making

Analytics is not a golden thread that leads to perfection. Rather, it is a new set of measures that will contribute to a greater awareness and understanding of your current reality. As a result, you'll have the opportunity to make the next best decision because you will be better informed.

Analytics doesn't replace your experience, wisdom, and perspective. It never supplants your prayers, hopes, dreams, or desires. Instead, it augments those things in a way that leads to a new level of clarity around your best next steps.

When you have good data contextualized with meaning, perspective, and your goals, you will discover a way to lead that is grounded in better decisions leading you to better outcomes. It would be great to start with a plan, execute that plan, and achieve the result you intended at the very beginning; but life and ministry don't always work like that.

People are dynamic and unpredictable. Since people create the systems and structures that define how we do local church ministry, it is reasonable to conclude that our approach, strategies, and systems must become flexible and responsive, too.

When you are able to bring together multi-dimensional data sets, you will create a listening platform that will help you move forward with confidence, evaluate programs with clarity, and

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lead with conviction. It's not about being perfect. Instead, it's about progress.

The heart of discipleship and ministry effectiveness is people. Just like you adapt to the personalities, tendencies, and idiosyncrasies of the people in your life, so do your programs, strategies, and systems need to adapt over time. Doing so will ensure you continue to connect, engage, grow, and equip disciples to serve and grow for a lifetime of impact.



Conclusion

A Hybrid Discipleship Model Is Connected By a Measurement Framework

Discipleship engagement strategies must shift to account for multi-dimensional, multi-channel, and multi-functional realities of ministry today. This requires new thinking, tools, and models such as analytics.

The possibilities to measure, influence, shape, and grow disciples on campus and online are critical to delivering an immersive experience that leads to authentic life change.

First-time parents are given growth markers by their pediatricians to measure their children's progress. Growth markers are used to determine the healthiness of children over their lifetimes. At each doctor visit, parents can expect to learn how their child aligns with growth expectations.

“ Every number tells a story of life change, impact, and personal transformation.”

Those growth markers were determined by measuring millions of children and include decades of research. So, the data set is large and generally trustworthy. While every child develops differently,

understanding where your child's growth is consistent with norms and where he or she varies from norms is part of managing the health of your child.

This is what discipleship is going to look like moving forward; and with an analytical framework, you will be able to establish norms based on a variety of factors. Using that framework, you will be able to customize growth plans while also recognizing there are certain characteristics and behaviors that result from spiritual development that should be present, apparent, and demonstrable.



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Analytics, then, becomes the pivot point, or fulcrum, in the balance between individual spiritual formation, community and worship participation, and discipleship. Analytics is the instrument used to gauge effectiveness and impact to ensure the resources, time, and people invested in a discipleship strategy result in life change and community transformation.

You don't need to understand the formulas behind analytics. Instead, think of analytics as a series of gauges that help you make real-time decisions that lead to better evangelism, outreach, missions, and discipleship.

Every number tells a story of life change, impact, and personal transformation.

To know you are making a difference—in your mind, your spirit, and your ministry—will replenish your soul and push you to keep moving forward in the journey to live into the full expression of your divine design.



How to Measure Your Effectiveness

The following is a simplified example of basic steps in measuring the effectiveness of your discipleship pathway.

Start with the balcony view: The starting point is to determine what you will measure and develop a strategy to collect the information. One of the great challenges in measuring is collecting the data you need, especially when it comes to individual participation.

Once you have the data, start your analysis by looking at the summary data. What major shifts are you seeing in connection, participation, and movement along your discipleship path? The goal is to connect cause and effect.

The steps in the process are illustrated using an example of one fictitious individual, Emma Jones. Doing so is helpful in demonstrating the process, but remember to begin with the balcony view of looking at the summary data first. Once you have identified the major trends, you can drill down to the individual level as part of your analysis of cause and effect.

Step One: Tracking Connection. The first step in beginning to measure the effectiveness of your discipleship engagement strategies is to track where and how often each person is connecting with activities along your discipleship path, such as worship attendance, small group participation, serving and giving. In short, how many times did a person connect (participate) and in what ways.

Example: Emma Jones registered her participation in worship three times on-campus, four times online and two times on-demand (recorded worship) during the second quarter. In other words, Emma participated in worship nine times or at a rate of 75% in the most recent quarter.

Step Two: Measure Movement. While tracking connection is a great start, a better practice is to also measure the movement or changes in participation from one period to the next.



Example: Emma Jones participated in worship three times on-campus and 1 time online for a total of four times in the previous quarter and then increased her participation to nine times in the most recent quarter, we could measure worship participation movement from 25% to 75%.

Step Three: Discovering the Story Behind the Numbers. Tracking movement gives you great information about where movement (growth or decline) is occurring, but it does not fully explain what factors motivated Emma to attend worship more frequently. It is the “why” or the story behind the numbers that best inform our decision making.

To most reliably understand what motivated the change in Emma’s behavior, we must use both **quantitative and qualitative analysis**. Our goal is to discover what we did, if anything, to inspire this change in engagement.

Analytics is looking at data through different lenses to develop an understanding of cause and effect, so that we might make the best informed decision to improve effectiveness.

Examples:

- 1. Learn from the quantitative data collected:** Because we collected attendance information from all three forms of worship offered (in-person, online and on-demand) we can measure these changes in participation.

Quarter 1 Worship Participation:	In-person	3	Online	1	On-demand	0	Total	4
Quarter 2 Worship Participation:	In-person	3	Online	4	On-demand	2	Total	9
Change/Movement:	In-person	0	Online	+3	On-demand	+2	Total	+5

- 2. Learn from other measures of Emma’s connection with our church:** Because our example church measures connection to and movement in all steps along the discipleship path, we can also observe that Emma:



- Began to volunteer weekly at the church's food pantry during the previous quarter.
- Does not participate in any small group or spiritual formation activities.
- Increased her giving by \$250 or 39% in the current quarter.

When we look at what else changed in Emma's activities, we begin to uncover clues as to what may have motivated her increase in worship participation. Specifically, Emma became an active volunteer in a church ministry and increased her giving by about the same percentage as her increase in worship participation.

These insights suggest that Emma's decision to get involved in serving in a life-changing ministry of the church may have contributed to her commitment to worship and giving.

A study by one of the largest mainline churches found that persons who actively volunteer or who actively participate in a small group/Sunday School give around 3.5% of their income compared to 1% from those who only attend worship once a month.

3. Learn from changes in church's discipleship engagement strategy: Our example church also keeps track of significant changes in their strategies. Changes made in the measured periods were:

- The worship team adjusted the online worship experience to better engage the online worshipping community. These changes included a curated chatbox and recorded elements directed only to the online participant during the welcome time, announcements, and the offering talk. This created a much more inclusive, participatory, and meaningful experience for those participating online.
- A registration box was added to the on-demand worship.

These insights suggest that the changes in the online worship format may have led to



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Emma's higher worship participation. The church's beginning an on-demand worship registration may have been a contributing factor as well.

- 4. Learn by asking Emma what motivated her:** One of the best ways to collect qualitative data is simply to ask questions. Technology has enabled us to survey participants and to examine the results with ease. Some churches purchase a subscription to a survey service such as [Survey Monkey](#).

The highest number of responses occur when the survey is limited to a few simple questions and an optional opportunity to explain or provide additional details.

Learning what motivated Emma can be as simple as a short survey to participants of online and on-demand worship asking how they rate each of the changes made, and what impact these changes had on their personal worship experience.

One of the most effective and insightful questions is: How likely are you to invite or recommend a friend to try our worship, small group, serving opportunity, etc.



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Next Action

Putting It All Together

STEP ONE: SHARE

Share this resource with your staff, volunteer leaders, and financial leaders.

STEP TWO: REVIEW

Review what data is available to you today through your church management system, who is using it, and how it's contributing to more informed ministry leadership.

STEP THREE: EVALUATE

Evaluate your current discipleship strategy and determine what measures might help you to be more effective in a hybrid ministry environment.

STEP FOUR: LEARN

Visit NextLevelGenerosity.com today to learn more about how analytics can help you bring the unknown into the known, so you have the power to shape your current and future ministry impact.



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About the Author Joe Park, CEO



In 2002, after a career that saw him rise to be the CEO of a rapidly growing bank holding company, Joe followed God's leading into full time ministry by joining Horizons where God has used his keen financial and leadership skills with his heart for the Gospel to help Horizons guide congregations to invest billions of dollars into ministry.

Joe is committed to the belief that biblical generosity is a result of prayer, a grateful heart and effective discipleship practices and he leads the Horizons team that develops and implements campaign and ministry strategies following these guiding principles.

In addition to capital campaigns, Joe actively assists churches in the implementation of best practices in developing generous congregations, vision discernment, discipleship, managing change and systems development.

Joe earned a bachelor's degree in Banking and Finance from the University of Arkansas and a master's degree in Business Administration from Boston University. Joe and his wife, Reverend Lisa Greenwood, share seven children.



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About Horizons

Horizons Stewardship helps church and faith-based nonprofit leaders grow disciples and fund ministry through a collaborative framework that is tailored to the unique culture of the church, aligned with leadership's vision, and implemented through coaching, planning, technology, and analytics to ensure the church lives into its full ministry potential and impact.

After more than two decades of working with thousands of churches to raise billions of dollars for ministry projects, Horizons has refined a deeply integrated, spiritually-focused approach that consistently results in more ministry funding and more effective disciple-making strategies.

Horizon's ministry team of International Coaching Federation (ICF) trained coaches are ready to help you discover a proven, effective process that will empower you to move forward with clarity and confidence. On average, churches that partner with Horizons experience a 16 percent increase in giving within the first twelve months.

