

How a Simple Organizational Leadership Equation Can Change the Way You Lead

On September 27, 1905 an obscure clerk in the Swiss Patent Office published an article that changed the world. Although few of us can explain the premise of the article we all recognize the clerk's revolutionary equation, $E = mc^2$. The amazing thing about Albert [Einstein's theory of relativity](#) is both its elegant simplicity and its massive implications.

Einstein's ability to take the complex and turn it into something simple has always intrigued me. Anyone can find complex solutions to complex situations, but finding simple (not easy) solutions to complex problems is rare. If the solution is simple enough it applies across multiple environments and bring significant change. $E = mc^2$ changed the world.

What if we could find a simple but elegant theory of organizational leadership? There are thousands of leadership books with tens of thousands of leadership principles, and every day hundreds of blog posts adding to the cacophony. It is easy to get lost in the weeds. I wonder if there we can take basic concepts woven through the literature and create a simple but robust model? Something like Einstein's theory of relativity or Newton's laws of physics applied to organizational leadership.

I am certainly no Einstein, everything I know about physics I learned on [Beakman's World](#), but I'd like to take a stab at a simple organizational leadership equation. I'm not trying to create new leadership principles, but to synthesize what we know into a simple, replicable equation. I'd love to get your feedback and suggestions. We may not change the world, but we might end up with something useful.

Here is my first draft of an organizational leadership equation:

$$\text{Mission} = \frac{\text{Results}/(\text{Goals} + \text{Accountability})}{\text{Values}}$$

Terms

Mission: What are we trying to accomplish?

I have heard mission and vision defined a hundred different ways and I always wind up confused. Most of the mission statements I've seen are long and don't really say anything. I agree with [Guy Kawasaki](#) who prefers mantra over mission. Here is his definition of mantra:

Forget mission statements; they're long, boring, and irrelevant. No one can ever remember them—much less implement them. Instead, take your meaning and make a mantra out of it. This will set your entire team on the right course. ([The Art of the Start](#))

Some of my favorite church mission statements/mantras:

- *Willow Creek (back in the day) We turn unchurched people into fully devoted followers of Christ*
- *Community Christian Church (Naperville, Illinois) We help people find their way back to God*
- *Southeast Christian Church (Parker, Colorado) We make daily disciples*

Success always begins with a compelling mission.

Values: What is important in our culture?

Core values are often another leadership cul-de-sac. One extreme is making everything a core value; a church sent me a list of 21 core values, that seems a tad too many. The other extreme is using universal catchphrases for core values. I think every church in America has authenticity on their value plaque. At the risk of contradicting what I just said here are my top five values for staff culture.

- *God-centered*
- *Fun*
- *Collaborative*
- *Candid*
- *Safe*

A truly successful mission is executed within the values of the culture.

Results: How do we know we are accomplishing our mission?

A mission without measurements is a mirage. Measurements, however, have to go beyond the easily quantifiable. One of the biggest mistakes of the Vietnam War was confusing the daily body count with winning the war. Churches make this same mistake when they rely solely on hard counts like attendance, giving or small group participation.

The hard work of accomplishing the mission begins with learning to measure the right results.

Goals: What part of the mission does each team member own?

Dividing the mission into individual goals is where the magic happens. Great leaders help every team member see how their goals connect directly to the mission. The questions leaders continually must ask is, "If a task, activity or job isn't tied directly to the mission then why are doing it?"

Individual goals are where the mission is accomplished.

Accountability: How do team members know they are accomplishing their part of the mission?

Every team member, from the leader to the part-time custodian, needs to know how they are doing. Consistent, honest feedback is a major key to high performance as well as healthy morale. There is nothing more demoralizing as feeling like no one in the organization cares about what you are doing.

Accountability is why the mission is accomplished.

Putting it all together

So my simple organizational leadership equation can be abbreviated like this:

$$M = \frac{R/(G+A)}{V}$$

The MISSION of an organization is accomplished when measurable RESULTS, divided into individual GOALS for which each team member is ACCOUNTABLE, are achieved in a culture faithful to organizational VALUES.

Does any of this make sense? What would you change? Could it be helpful in leading in an organization?

>> [Read more from Geoff.](#)