



EMPOWER

The 4 Keys to Leading a Volunteer Movement

JEFF MARTIN

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J E F F M A R T I N

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To Julie, you will always have my heart.
Without your encouragement, this book
would have never gotten outside of my thoughts.

AJ, Ashleigh, and Alexis,
you make me the most blessed dad on earth.

Mom and Dad, your Godly example has provided
a light unto my path. Thank you.

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Preface

Movements that unify millions of people around a common cause and have ongoing national impact over the course of two decades are rare. They're also incredibly hard to plan and predict. This is especially true if the core of the movement is based on volunteers as the primary pillars on which everything stands.

Add to that scenario minimal funding, no centralized infrastructure, no facilities, no marketing or advertising department, no social media teams or technology department support, and the birthing of that movement appears laughable if not impossible.

But that is exactly what we saw happen . . .

I was inspired in 2002 to start pursuing a vision of gathering students, churches, businesses, and entire communities at their local athletic field on one night. I called it “Fields of Faith.” The goal was for students to be the primary speakers and for the message to be the same at every event. The message would be a personal challenge from the students to engage the Bible on a daily basis and come to faith in Christ. Giving students the

microphone in that setting was countercultural, but it was the main part of the program.

God did something astounding. The first year we had seventeen participating stadiums, small and large, in three states. Our motto was “One Day. One Message. One Stand.” More than six thousand people attended, and many lives were changed. In the following decade the movement continued to spread to the point that currently more than five hundred stadiums and a quarter of a million people gather together every year to hear the students share in their communities.

Over the course of sixteen years, more than two million people have been impacted by Fields of Faith, and that number continues to grow each year.

This book is not about Fields of Faith. It is about the four keys of starting and growing a movement—principles I discovered from Fields of Faith. These four keys are value, simplicity, commonality, and ownership. My desire is not to provide statistical analysis, expert consultation, or a reproducible template on how to start and expand a movement in your organization or business. All I know is what I saw. This book is my attempt to peel back the layers and take people on a journey of what happened, which may help spark other movements in a new way.

Welcome to the journey.

PART 1

**CONNECTING
THE DOTS**

CHAPTER 1

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Ordinary

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13 NIV)

Everyone has a deep desire to make a difference with their lives. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

Many people volunteer with organizations in an attempt to satisfy this desire. They get involved only to be relegated or relegate themselves to being spectators. They believe real impact and power are reserved for the elite, gifted leaders, with

celebrity-like status, who have been put on a pedestal of influence seemingly unreachable to the ordinary person.

These involved spectators believe they could never be like those celebrities. They are ordinary, yet each volunteer senses that inside of them resides something epic. The truth is that every volunteer is sitting on a powder keg of influence, but they just don't know how to ignite it.

Every volunteer is sitting on a powder keg of influence, but they just don't know how to ignite it.

A recent *Forbes* online article by Mallory (Blumer) Walsh titled “The Real Problem with Influencer Marketing: You’re Focusing on the Wrong ‘Influencers’” reveals how this truth is being realized in

the hyper-competitive world of business marketing, causing a massive strategic shift in long-established tactics: “Only 23% of people believe content from celebrities and influencers is influential. Alternatively, 60% say content from friends or family influences their purchasing decisions.”¹

The business world understands the rising influence that ordinary people have on the product decisions of their peers, and they are adapting their strategies with lightning speed to seize this opportunity. Can the same be said of the ministry

¹ Mallory (Blumer) Walsh, “The Real Problem with Influencer Marketing: You’re Focusing on the Wrong ‘Influencers,’” *Forbes*, October 5, 2018, accessed February 8, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2018/10/05/the-real-problem-with-influencer-marketing-youre-focusing-on-the-wrong-influencers/#26ca760a42d7>.

world when it comes to their message of abundant and eternal life through Jesus Christ?

In a rapidly deteriorating modern culture, ministries are starting to scrutinize their strategies and tactics in a desperate attempt to curb the tide of secularism engulfing everything in its path. In this pivotal moment there has been a gradual awakening of untapped power that can change a culture—the untrained, ordinary volunteer.

There are millions of them, and they sense they are being overrun and overlooked in every aspect of their lives.

What would it look like if volunteers realized the power of the “untrained, ordinary,” collectively owning and celebrating their influence in a great movement of God? Is this what Satan fears most and has hidden best?

I recently heard a pastor put it this way when speaking at a youth leader conference about ordinary students: “Students today have the passion. They are simply waiting for permission to pursue a mission!”

God has always used the ordinary to stun the world. He hasn’t changed. He’s simply waiting for us, His ordinary people, to step into the influence each of us already has and win our world for Christ.

This is not mere theory or ancient history. I have had a front-row seat to watch it happen in our time since I started Fields of Faith.

Clean the Trucks

“Can I have your blessing to ask your daughter to marry me?” I nervously asked Julie’s father. I had practiced this question in my head many times, and I actually delivered it with only a slight crack in my voice.

“Yes, you can,” he responded. “On one condition. You must have a job before you do it.”

I had just been accepted into Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and was planning to move there from Oklahoma City. I hadn’t had a chance to finalize all the details about the move, but I now had a razor-sharp focus on my first priority: *get a job as fast as possible*.

This was before the time of scouring the Internet for job postings. I had to physically make the four-hour drive to the campus. A job postings board in the administration building had a few cards pinned to the board which featured a “help wanted” section. As I scanned through the various cards, one of them jumped out as something I could do that would fit my class and study schedule.

The seminary had a facilities maintenance department that was responsible for all the maintenance and operations necessary to support the large campus. The department employed many of the students who came to the seminary from a variety of trade professions, which allowed them to go to seminary and work for the school using their skill sets as plumbers, electricians, auto mechanics, and many more.

The Physical Plant Facility was advertising positions for those professional trade skills of which I had none. There was

one part-time position, however, that I might possibly qualify for despite my limited work experience and zero technical skills. The position called for someone who could take care of the fleet of work trucks used by the professionals during the day. The trucks needed to be washed, cleaned, and fueled at the end of each day.

I copied down the address and drove the short distance to the physical plant located on the edge of the seminary property. The auto shop section featured four work bays equipped with enough lifts and tools to keep the fleet of fifteen to twenty work trucks, as well as every other construction vehicle up and running around the clock.

After I had a short interview with the automotive repair department boss, he surprisingly offered me the job on the spot. I still remember how I felt walking away from that building after securing that part-time job. I didn't care what the job was. All I knew was that I had met the requirements set by the father of the woman I wanted to marry. I wasn't walking on concrete as I left; I was walking on clouds!

When fall arrived, I had moved into the dormitory and begun my four-year pursuit of a master of divinity degree. It was invigorating. Our wedding date was set for the following summer in May. I rolled up my sleeves and went to work. I would attend classes during the day and work in the evenings. All the students who worked for the physical plant and possessed a professional, technical skill set would go to class during the day and put in their work hours around their class schedule until 5:00 p.m. Once the day was over, they would return their work

trucks to the physical plant and drive home to their families and evening studies.

I would pass the students leaving the plant as I drove in to work at 5:00 p.m. I would then work hard until 9:00 p.m. each evening. I would follow that up with a one-hour workout at the gym, then head to my dorm room to study. The physical plant had a truck wash bay as well as its own gas pumps. I would run each of the trucks that had been used that day through the wash bay, using the high-pressure wand to clean off all the dirt that had accumulated on the vehicles that day. Next, it was time to throw away any trash in the vehicles, which usually included some fast-food bags, cups, and wrappers. I would then use a rag and Armor All to wipe down and protect all of the inside surfaces. To finish up, I would shine the tires and fill the gas tank before returning the now-glistening trucks to their preassigned parking spot ready for use the next morning.

This routine went on for the entire scholastic year. I didn't think anything of it. It was providing me with some needed income, but most importantly, it was one of the main reasons for the upcoming wedding. I was as happy as a pig in mud.

Eventually the wedding day came, followed by a romantic honeymoon with my beautiful bride. Then it was time to return to my work and study routine.

During my first year of seminary, I began to look for a church that might need an aspiring minister with zero experience but ready and willing to serve. It seemed like all the seminary students were serving in some capacity in churches in and around the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Many of the students worked part-time for rural churches that dotted the Texas and Oklahoma

countryside hundreds of miles away. The churches would often provide a parsonage for the seminary students serving as pastors, youth pastors, education directors, children's coordinators, and worship leaders. They would stay and faithfully serve on the weekends before heading back to school for studies during the week.

I thought that with all the churches in North Texas, I could surely find some position that would allow me to serve, get some much-needed experience, and make a little stipend on the side (which I desperately needed). Besides, I started to notice everyone sharing their weekend ministry stories on Monday mornings. Lives were being changed for Jesus Christ every weekend. Marriages were being saved, youth were making professions of faith, revivals were being held, worship leaders were taking people to the throne of God, the sick and dying were being visited and prayed for by the church. God was on the move!

But I wasn't there to see it. I had no ministry stories. It became harder and harder to hear about what God was doing through everyone around me. I felt like God had purposely put me on the sidelines and wouldn't let me into the game.

Being a lifelong competitive athlete, this did not set well with me. It was like choosing kickball teams at recess in grade school. Two captains—normally the bigger, faster, stronger kids—make alternating picks from the pool of their classmates who want to play. The number of prospective players dwindles quickly until only a few to choose from remain. The worst is to be chosen last. That kid feels of little value, and no kid wants that. This was how I was beginning to feel.

Maybe God didn't see value in me. The other students actually were more talented and gifted in their ability to lead, speak, connect, and serve. Had I made a wrong choice to go to seminary? Had I really heard the call of God on my life into ministry? Doubt started to creep into my head and heart. In no time the creep broke out into a full-on sprint.

In my current mental condition, I was not prepared for what God was about to reveal to me.

It was another sweltering Texas day in August. I remember seeing the heat waves rising off the blistering asphalt as I drove to work each afternoon. You could crack an egg on concrete and serve it over easy in moments. It was absolutely miserable.

When I first started my job a year earlier, I arrived ready to do it with excellence. My blue industrial work shirt with my name stitched into the white label above the left pocket would be crisp and clean. I always had it tucked in so I wouldn't appear sloppy. I had a pep in my step and a readiness to work hard, just like my dad had taught me and modeled with his own actions my whole life.

With each passing day that I couldn't find a ministry position like everyone else, my gratefulness and desire to work hard at my job began to wane. I gave myself a new job title: truck janitor. Dragging myself to work became increasingly difficult. At the end of the evening, my clothes would be saturated with sweat. The heat had a way of sucking out a little bit of your soul with each passing hour. I got to the point where I didn't care if my shirt was tucked in or if I looked sharp. I still got my job done every day, but I was the only one there in the evenings, so why should I care how I looked?

My talks with God began to change. All I had anymore were questions. *Why wouldn't He put me in the game? Had I done something wrong? What was His plan for me? Why had He placed me on the corner of a dusty shelf, hidden away from all the action?*

I felt surrounded by an army of gifted and talented ministers of the gospel actively making a massive difference in the world, and then there was me, the sweaty, blue-collar, truck janitor “changing the world” one clean truck at a time.

That soon changed.

It was another sweltering Texas day in August. I had dragged myself to the physical plant for another round of work. I looked nothing like a motivated employee. I was moping around. My jeans were dirty; my wrinkled shirt was untucked and smelled of yesterday's sweat. My face looked ragged and worn out.

As I got out of my car, I walked over to a cinder-block wall, climbed on top of it, and just looked at the sky. I had been reading about David in the Old Testament. I just finished the classic story of David and Goliath. I had read the story many times, always focusing on the great combat scene and how David showed incredible courage, overcoming all odds and rallying all the men to unite in an overwhelming defeat of the Philistines. But a slight nuance in the story had emerged for me. The narrative leading up to the great battle caught my attention.

With the powerful Philistine army threatening the people of Israel, a call went out for all the young warriors of Israel to rise up and meet them in battle. An old man named Jesse, from Bethlehem in Judah, had eight sons. The three eldest joined the army of Israel. David was the youngest. While everyone around him was out fighting a great battle for Yahweh, David, the

youngest of the brothers, was given the exciting job of herding sheep.

But he also had a part-time gig as basically an Uber Eats driver delivering food for his brothers on the front line. He was then told to return to his isolated job of caring for his father's herd of sheep. He did it faithfully, making sure they had green pastures in which to feed, clean water from bubbling streams in the hills, and protection as they slept at night against predators like lions and bears.

As I was sitting on that wall and pondering the story of David, a realization slowly descended on me. I had been sitting with my back to the truck parking lot. (I literally had a hard time looking at the trucks when I arrived each evening.) I turned my sweaty head around and stared at the trucks. David had been given an assignment from God that was different from all the others who were fighting battles in the army of God. His main assignment was to take care of sheep far away from the fight. The sheep had white wool and black hooves. As I gazed intently at the trucks sitting motionless in the parking lot, a burst of clarity overcame me. I clearly saw a group of all white trucks that had all black tires, the same color scheme as a herd of sheep.

This was a watershed moment for me. It was as if I suddenly woke up, rubbed my eyes, and saw my surroundings clearly. This wasn't just about a menial job cleaning a group of trucks. This was my herd of sheep that God had assigned to me! I needed to clean them, feed them gasoline, and put them to bed in the evening before locking up the complex to protect them from being vandalized or taken in the night.

I remember tears forming in my eyes as I realized how I had become so disenchanted and ungrateful with God's assignment for me. He was shaping me into what He wanted me to be in His timing. I had been continually comparing myself with everyone out there on the front lines of ministry, which had led me to a severe lack of value in myself as well as the assignment God had given to me.

My immediate response was to ask God to forgive me for being so selfish. My next response was to tuck my shirt in. This was a simple move, but it was symbolic for me, similar to rolling up your sleeves to get to work. I only had short sleeves, so tucking my shirt in was the next best thing.

The change in perspective immediately affected everything for me inside and out. Outwardly, my clothes, posture, facial expression, and pace changed. Inwardly, my joy, confidence, thankfulness, anticipation, and faith were all buoyed in an instant when I saw those trucks through a heavenly lens. They were my herd of sheep, and that was good enough, which meant I was good enough. A sense of freedom and calm descended on me.

I remember attacking my job that evening with a new zeal fueled by appreciation. This was my opportunity to express my thankfulness to the Lord by doing my job with excellence. Those trucks didn't belong to the seminary; they belonged to God—no different from the small herd of sheep assigned to David thousands of years earlier.

My problem was that I had been focusing on my conditions instead of my convictions. If I truly believed God valued me and had an assignment for me each day, my only option would be joy in what He had given me and entrusted to me to do each

day. Whether it was winning souls or washing trucks, the conditions made no difference. Only faithfulness mattered.

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That intersection with God on that hot Texas afternoon changed me. I've needed to be continually reminded of that truth time and time again, but God has always been patient and persistent with me. He valued me, and this awareness inspired me to give my best and own the part He had given me.

This lesson would serve me well in the years to come, allowing me to see opportunities I otherwise would have missed.

RECAP

Great influence resides in the untrained, ordinary volunteer. This must be realized before it can be revealed.

Our conditions often blind us to the conviction that we each have great value. When we remember this, it changes our outlook, affects our actions, and impacts those around us regardless of the conditions.

HOW DO YOU LEAD A MOVEMENT?

Movements that unify millions and sustain national relevance over the course of decades are hard to come by. They're even harder to plan and predict. But that is exactly what happened and is captured with stunning detail in this book.

In *Empower*, Jeff Martin drills in to four key principles that can unlock a volunteer-led movement. They were unearthed from an event he founded in 2004 called "Fields of Faith" that focused on giving ordinary people the microphone. It has impacted and united millions of people, thousands of volunteers, and countless community organizations.

How was he able to lead this movement? How can you lead a movement? *Empower* will give you the four keys—value, simplicity, commonality, and ownership—to lead a movement of your own.



JEFF MARTIN is an FCA Executive Director and founder of Fields of Faith. Martin received his Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Kansas City, Missouri, with his wife Julie and has three grown children: AJ, Ashleigh, and Alexis.

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