CREATE SUSTAINABLE MARGIN IN LIFE & MINISTRY

8 STRATEGIES HIGH-ACHIEVING PASTORS ARE USING TO CREATE HEALTHY MARGIN FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS

Leaders.Church
Do you have the right margin in your life and ministry to remain healthy and effective for the long-haul?

We asked a number of high-achieving pastors and leaders what they do to create the margin in their life and work necessary for it to be sustainable. People like John Ashcroft, John Lindell, Larry Osborne, Mark Driscoll, Beth Grant, Sam Rodriguez and more share ideas and principles which have guided their lives, work and ministry.

*The Result?*

A lot of common themes developed from these leaders. We counted eight of them in all, and we’re convinced these principles are part of what makes these leaders all very effective in work and ministry ... and in life. As you look to create healthy, sustainable margin in your own life, it’s worth examining how these best practices can help you have margin to go the distance.
1. BE INTENTIONAL WITH YOUR SCHEDULE.

One of the first things we noticed about these leaders is that they were extremely intentional about their schedule.

Bethel College president, **Mark Wootton** told us, “Everyone knows we should take vacations and days off. I also divide my days in thirds; mornings, afternoons and evenings. The ministry gets two segments. My family gets the other.”

**Rick DuBose** (Assemblies of God leadership) takes intentional time for “personal devotions and a consistent Sabbath.” No rocket science – just creating non-negotiable time for the fundamentals.
“Beyond my day off, I leave two half days open/unscheduled in each week.”

- JOHN LINDELL, JAMES RIVER CHURCH
2. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.

One thing is for sure. In ministry, you need to expect the unexpected.

Steve Gladen, Saddleback Church pastor, and one of the leading authorities on small group ministry, told us this is what he does. “I don’t pack my schedule. I leave room for the unexpected. I run my schedule that impacts my family by my wife first, before I commit. I learn to say “No” to the things that de-focus my plan.”

Lenexa Baptist Church’s Chad McDonald told us, “Ministry comes with so many unexpected activities – an unexpected hospital visit, an unexpected death in the church, an unexpected need for counseling. This demands some level of margin. I do my best to create margin by blocking off portions of time (an hour or two) in my day throughout the week and by working ahead in my sermon preparation. I am not always the best at adhering to these ideals but whenever I can it sure helps with the unexpected.”
3. PRIORITIZE WHAT MATTERS MOST.

You can say all you want about focusing on margin. However, if you don’t take the time to consider that which is most important (i.e. to prioritize), you’ll never be able to set the margins necessary to succeed in life and ministry.

The simplicity with which Mondo Davis (Campus Pastor at Gateway Church in Dallas/Ft. Worth) spoke sums it up perfectly, “The most important thing is to keep the most important thing, the most important thing.” Now, how are you going to beat this?

Leaders.Church co-founder, Dick Hardy said, “I have to tell you that years ago I set a goal to raise my children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I remember the day I set that goal. God answered it beyond my wildest imagination. I believe He saw that I wanted the most important young lives entrusted to me to live for God. That goal was front-of-mind every time I had to make a decision with family and church.”
4. VIEW MINISTRY AS A LIFESTYLE.

One of the most common questions we hear from ministry leaders is, “How do I balance my church work and my family life.” Check out what these high-level leaders had to say...

Scott Obremski (Lead Pastor of Summit Park Church) said, “We don’t do family and ministry, we do ministry as a family. Doing ministry together really has been the key for us. Both of us are in it heart and soul and we have found that to be incredibly helpful to the ministry and our relationship. Another thing that has helped us is always prioritizing family functions. I started looking at my family as “my team” instead of the staff being “my team.” My family is the team I will have forever.”

Looking for resources to help you be a better pastor? Get 30 days of on-demand access to personal growth video teaching inside Leaders.Church. Try it for only $1 when you use this special link.
“Ministry is not a job; it’s a lifestyle. Ministry begins at home and God takes care of your family through you. I can’t outsource being my kids’ dad.”

- MARK DRISCOLL, THE TRINITY CHURCH
The former General Superintendent of the U.S. Assemblies of God, **George Wood** noted, “I believe ministry and family are not at odds with each other. In our family, they have always been intimately intertwined for the good of our family and the good of the church.”

**Ryan Visconti** (Lead Pastor of Generation Church) said, “We constantly emphasize that ministry happens in seasons. This helps us to avoid panic when a busy season comes, but also to enjoy the slowness of a resting season with no guilt. No organic healthy being grows constantly, nor does it remain dormant indefinitely. A healthy lifestyle will oscillate between pushing and pulling, resting and working, or increased family-focus and increased ministry-focus. We enjoy the seasons of nature, and we enjoy the seasons of ministry!”

Former U.S. Attorney General, John Ashcroft is a friend of Leaders.Church. He told us, “The implicit idea of balancing life and family suggest they are antithetical to each other. The integration of life and work is optimal. To the extent, as much as possible, my children were integrated into our life in working to get the right leadership in office so the shared goals of the family were achieved.”
“My children were integrated into our life in working to get the right leadership in office so the shared goals of the family were achieved.”

- John Ashcroft, Former U.S. Attorney General
5. FIGHT FOR MARGIN.

Things of importance sometimes require putting an effort into them, even if you have to fight for them. Here’s how these pastors put that into practice.

New Jersey lead pastor, **Spencer Click** reflects on a lesson he learned. “Years ago, I listened to a great lesson – “The Art of Saying No.” Saying “No” to the right things frees you to focus on those items which have the most significant return for your efforts. But, you as the leader have to permit yourself to say no... go for it! It’s very liberating!”

**Chris Mavity** (Church Leader Coach and Author of *Your Volunteers*) said, “If you don’t fight for healthy margin, the cares of life and ministry will squeeze the life out of you. The margin of our life is most often where the seeds of creativity take root.”
“The only way to build margin is to learn the art of saying, “No.” But be forewarned, few people will support your quest for margin. Especially those who wanted you to say, “Yes.” Without margin in time and money we will never be able to handle a genuine crisis or seize a great opportunity.”

- LARRY OSBORNE, NORTH COAST CHURCH & AUTHOR OF STICKY CHURCH
6. CONSIDER THE INTANGIBLE BENEFITS OF MARGIN.

Spiritually intuitive pastors consider the broad intangibles when looking to create sustainable margin.

**Dr. Kent Ingle** (President of Southeastern University in Lakeland, FL) said, “Remember, you are the sum total of the choices you make each day. Don’t allow circumstances or limitations to make choices for you. Take control of your life and choose. That’s the only way you can create the right margins. It will ensure you have the endurance necessary to bring about a significant change in the world around you. Always remember, success is not necessarily being the strongest, smartest or fastest. It is often about having the capacity stay to in the game longer than anyone else.”

**Lacey Hartman** (Executive Pastor of Rock Hills Church) said, “My dad always described life like a teeter totter. The fun is in the movement! The healthiest rhythm for margin in my leadership has been taking an extra day off every six weeks. I schedule my regular vacations throughout the year along with these days and it gives our family an extra day to relax and have fun!”
“Balance and bandwidth; these two pillars serve as the facilitative platform for a holy and healed life.”

- SAM RODRIGUEZ, NATIONAL HISPANIC CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Looking for resources to help you be a better pastor? Get 30 days of on-demand access to personal growth video teaching inside Leaders.Church. Try it for only $1 when you use this special link.
7. COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SPOUSE.

One thing any leader learns is that if you do all the right things in the right way and yet don’t consult your spouse, things will not go well for you.

Mark Johnson (Lead Pastor at Calvary Temple) gives very practical, boot-on-the-ground advice. “My wife and I sit down once each quarter and plan the next three months of all calendars. Every week we put ourselves on the calendar.”

Chris Railey is the Director of the Church Multiplication Network. He said, “I review the calendar regularly with my wife. We always have a vacation scheduled and use ALL vacation days every year.”

Steve Thompson is a campus pastor at Gateway Church in Dallas/Ft. Worth. He told us, “My wife gets final approval of the calendar... 2-3 nights a week out for ministry tops, with rare exceptions (conference, missions trips, etc.). Otherwise, it is characterized by being consistently home in the evenings.”
8. LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD.

It’s amazing how we spend such time trying to schedule our work and schedule our families. But what about leaving room for God?

**Beth Grant** (co-founder of Project Rescue) showed great transparency when she said, “Margins? In the past several years, I’ve felt so convicted with the feverish pace of ministry I’ve kept for years. God convicted me that my life was so full of scheduled ministry and responsibilities that there wasn’t even room for Him to do the unexpected. We think of margins for our own well-being. What about margins in my life for God – space and holding-my-schedule-lightly? What about flex in my days that welcome Him to interrupt with who He is, what He does, who He loves, and how He leads? Margins for miracles because we actually believe!”

Lead Pastor of Sheffield Family Life Center, **George Westlake III** had this to say. “Give yourself permission to survive and thrive, as an individual. Allow yourself the necessary space (create it, when you need to), to be a quasi-normal functioning person. Don’t allow guilt and the “have to’s” to completely control your life. Living your life with no separation WILL catch you!”
It is clear that margin is possible in life and ministry. You can also see these leaders clearly believe deeply that family and church can move in conjunction together without conflict.

A lot goes into creating and maintaining sustainable margin. These things differ from leader to leader. After all, we all have different talents, aspirations and circumstances that make our churches unique microcosms of God’s Church on earth.

These insights and practices from leaders and pastors show us eight of the best practices we can all follow to create the margin necessary for our lives and ministries to flourish.
You’ve talked about how you don’t have the margin you want. At church, you’ve tried to juggle it all. At home, the family is understanding but desirous of your time and attention.

Would you like to see ministry advanced and people come to know Jesus at church while your family flourishes at home?

What about catching the kids ball games, concerts, school and church events without church suffering?

That spouse the Lord gave you is worth a date once a week, don’t you think?

Would you like the peace of mind knowing you’ve done all you can to be the ministry leader He’s called you to be... AND the spouse, parent and friend He’s called you to be?

It can happen...
IF YOU WANT TO LEARN THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO CREATE MARGIN IN YOUR LIFE AND MINISTRY, THEN CONSIDER INVESTING IN THE 9-PART VIDEO SERIES CALLED:

Access this video series and 30+ more when you try Leaders.Church. Get a 30-day trial today for just $1. Click here to Get Started.