

MICHAEL McQUEEN

# MOMENTUM

HOW TO BUILD IT  
KEEP IT OR  
GET IT BACK

WILEY



This book provides great insight and a roadmap for creating the energy that is needed to fuel organisations that don't want to fall behind.

– **Steve Vamos**, former Vice President, Microsoft Australia & New Zealand

Michael explores the depth and breadth of any leader's greatest asset—momentum. This book will inspire the new entrant and challenge even the most seasoned leader.

– **Daniel Flynn**, Co-founder & Managing Director, Thankyou



**MOMENTUM**

First published in 2016 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd  
42 McDougall St, Milton Qld 4064  
Office also in Melbourne

Typeset in 9.5/12.5 pt Rajdhani

© Michael McQueen t/a The Nexgen Group Pty Ltd 2016

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

---

Creator: McQueen, Michael, author.  
Title: Momentum: how to build it, keep it or get it back/Michael McQueen.  
ISBN: 9780730331933 (pbk.)  
9780730331940 (ebook)  
Notes: Includes index.  
Subjects: Success.  
Success in business.  
Leadership.  
Dewey Number: 650.1

---

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Cover and internal design: Jennifer El-Chah, Loved.Locked.Loaded.

Cover image: © pogonici/Shutterstock

Author Image: © Toby Zerna

'Introducing Momentum' chapter opener image: © canbedone/Shutterstock

'Enemies of Momentum' chapter opener image: © Anna Omelchenko/Shutterstock

'Activity' chapter opener image: © jack-sooksan/Shutterstock

'Focus' chapter opener image: © Vladimir Arndt/Shutterstock

'Consistency' chapter opener image: © Rena Schild/Shutterstock

Printed in Singapore by C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

### **Disclaimer**

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

# MOMENTUM

HOW TO BUILD IT, KEEP IT OR GET IT BACK

MICHAEL McQUEEN

WILEY

---

# About the author

Michael McQueen understands what it takes to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Widely recognised for having his finger on the pulse of business and culture, he has helped some of the world's best-known brands navigate disruption and maintain relevance.

As a leading specialist in social shifts, change management and future trends, Michael features

regularly as a commentator on TV and radio and has written four bestselling books.

Michael is a familiar face on the international conference circuit having shared the stage with the likes of Bill Gates, Whoopi Goldberg and Larry King. He has spoken to hundreds of thousands of people across 5 continents since 2004 and is known for his high-impact,

research-rich and entertaining conference presentations.

In 2015, Michael was named Australia's Keynote Speaker of the Year and was inducted into the Professional Speakers Halls of Fame.

Michael and his family live in Sydney, Australia.

[www.michaelmcqueen.net](http://www.michaelmcqueen.net)



---

# Acknowledgements

Quite fittingly, the writing of this book had an air of effortless about it. Despite the fact that so little serious research has been done into the topic, the process of identifying the principles for building and re-building momentum was much less taxing than I imagined it would be.

I have always loved the challenge of making the complex both simple and accessible – and this book was certainly such an exercise. This is not a lofty academic text but rather an attempt to distill what many of my clients have found to be true but

have struggled to quantify and put into words.

Despite the fact that writing this book was somewhat effortless, it was by no means an easy feat. I couldn't have written it without the support of my amazing wife Hailey who tolerated the long hours of research and writing while we juggled the delights and demands of a newborn baby. Thanks too to my amazing parents and parents-in-law from whom Hailey and I have inherited a rich legacy of intergenerational momentum.

Thanks to the Lucy, Chris and the team at Wiley Australia. I'm so grateful for your encouragement, support and willingness to take some creative risks with this project. Thanks also the crew at Ode Management who consistently sharpen and spur me on. It is an honour to work with such a phenomenal team of world-changers.

Finally, thanks to the many thousands of clients and audience members whose stories and experiences have informed both my thinking and the content of this book. I am ever in your debt.

# CONTENTS

## 01 02

Preface: Going  
with the flow  
#x

Introducing  
Momentum  
#2

Momentum is Generative #4

Momentum is Attractive #6

Momentum is Protective #8

Enemies of  
Momentum  
#22

The Intoxication of Success #28

The Tyranny of Tradition #36

The Baggage of Bureaucracy #44

The Fatigue of Monotony #54

The Seduction of Immediacy #58

# 03

## Activity

#66

Inspiring #68

Intentional #82

Innovative #90

Integrating #102

Intelligent #110

## Focus

#116

Zooming in #120

Saying no #130

Pruning back #136

## Consistency

#152

Don't wait for emotion #160

Count the cost #168

Celebrate progress #172

Pick a sustainable pace #176

Aim for autopilot #180

## Conclusion:

Defying gravity

#192

Notes #196

Index #204

## PREFACE

# GOING WITH THE FLOW

In late 2015 my wife and I were on a holiday with our six-week-old son when we crossed paths in a small country town with a fascinating guy named Craig Holmwood. Wearing a faded leather hat, dirty, torn clothes, and sporting a well-worn leather whip tucked into his belt, Craig certainly stood out. In fact, he looked like someone who would've been more comfortable in the late eighteenth century than the early twenty-first.

Despite his unusual appearance, it was Craig's profession that

I found most fascinating. As we got chatting, he shared that he is one of Australia's last remaining true bullock drivers (or 'bullwhackers', as they are sometimes known) – a profession that today ranks as one of the world's rarest trades.

However, this was not always the case. In the days before machinery or trucks, bullock teams were the key mode of transportation for goods the world over. In Australia's early colonial years, bullocks were among the most important animals

on the land. They hauled wool, passengers and timber for many kilometres, opening up vast tracts of new countryside and fuelling the growth of the fledgling country's economy. But today they are little more than relics of a bygone era – sideshows for tourists like my wife, son and me.

Craig told us that, pound for pound, bullocks are the strongest animals alive; teams of them are capable of hauling 35 tonnes through rough and rocky terrain.

'But with loads that heavy, getting off go is always the hardest part,' Craig explained, describing the immense effort it takes to make the first step, each bullock needing to pull at exactly the right time and in the right order – how it's a team effort through and through. The first few paces are tough, with the bullocks straining forward under the weight.

'But just when it looks like they're not up to the task,' Craig said, a smile spreading across his face,

'something magical happens. They lift their heads and relax into a steady pace. It's a beautiful moment when momentum takes over.'

Craig didn't appear to be a scientifically minded soul. But his description of getting a bullock team moving was as good as any explanation I've ever heard of Newton's First Law of Motion. Also known as the Law of Inertia, this scientific maxim I first learned in high school roughly states that objects at rest tend to stay at rest

and objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Put more simply: once you're moving, it's easy to keep moving. But if you're stopped still, getting started requires much more effort.

This principle is as true for bullocks as it is for Boeing jets, basketball players and business leaders. The reality is that everything we see around us is governed by and subject to the natural laws of science. Sure, we can ignore them or try to fight against them, but in the end we will find life a whole

lot harder than it needs to be. Like constantly swimming against the tide or going against the grain.



## **Objects at rest tend to stay at rest and objects in motion tend to stay in motion.**

On the other hand, if we recognise and leverage the natural rhythms of life, things become a whole lot easier – even effortless.

The bulk of my research in recent years has centred on understanding the patterns, cycles and dynamics at play in organisational life – especially those behind the rise and fall of businesses and institutions.

Back in 2011 I embarked on a research project tracking 500 of the

world's biggest brands in an attempt to answer this question: What is the difference between the enduring and the endangered?

Sadly, examples of endangered brands abound. Recent years have seen scores of iconic businesses and organisations fall from greatness in spectacular fashion. So endemic is this pattern that McKinsey & Company consultant Patrick Viguerie invented a term for measuring it called the 'Topple rate'. This metric gauges the rate at which firms lose their leadership positions, and one thing is for certain – it is speeding up. According to Professor Richard Foster of Yale University, the average lifespan of a major listed company has shrunk from 67 years in the 1920s to just 15 years today.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously there is massive value in understanding the dynamics that cause organisations and institutions to fall prey to the natural laws of decline and entropy – after all, a wise person learns from their own mistakes; a much wiser person learns

from someone else's. However, I believe the far more interesting story is that of the brands and institutions that have learned to master and even harness the very laws that could otherwise have taken them out of the game. For every organisation or brand that has fallen on hard times, you will find another business offering similar products or services, to similar markets, that is flourishing. Compare, for example, the fortunes of Kodak with Fuji, Meccano with Lego, Saab with Hyundai, Pan Am with Delta Airlines and Atari with Nintendo.

Interestingly, the dynamics of long-term success at play in organisations and institutions are much the same at an individual level too.

If you're like me, I bet you've wondered why it is that some people seem to live a charmed existence. You know the ones. Perhaps they are a sibling, a competitor or even a close friend. They seem to have the Midas touch, never putting a foot wrong.

While it is tempting to assume that uncommonly successful individuals are perhaps smarter, luckier or harder working than the rest of us, that is rarely the case. Nor is it because they knew the right people, had a better strategy, or read *The Secret* all those years ago and constructed a magnificent dream board.



**A wise person learns from their own mistakes; a much wiser person learns from someone else's.**

Rather, the common denominator among all uncommonly successful people comes down to one thing: just like enduring organisations, these individuals have figured out how to master the art of

momentum. They have knowingly or unknowingly learned how to harness the natural rhythms of life and get them working on their side.

What can we learn from these success stories? What is their secret to maintaining growth, vitality and momentum over the long haul?

That is the focus of this book.

In part 01, we will look at the very nature of momentum – how you know when you've got it and why it makes all the difference to lasting success for any organisation or individual. In part 02, we will look at five enemies of momentum – common traps and pitfalls that can cause any organisation or individual to lose vitality without realising it until it's almost too late. In part 03, we will explore the art and science of momentum, unpacking an equation for building, keeping or getting momentum back.

**By the end of our time together, my goal is that you too will have a clear sense of what it takes to build unstoppable momentum in every area of life. There may not be a shortcut or silver bullet, but there is a surefire formula – and it works.**







01



INTRODUCING  
**MOMENTUM**

Momentum is a funny thing. While the physical phenomenon may be simple to scientifically measure, in everyday life it is often relegated to little more than a subjective and fleeting sensation. Much like the wind, momentum can't be seen – but you can certainly feel its presence.

“

**Much like the wind, momentum can't be seen – but you can certainly feel its presence.**

Leaders will describe the sense of momentum they feel when their organisation is kicking goals month on month. Runners describe the flow-state of momentum at the halfway mark of a marathon when

their body begins to run the race with a rhythm of its own. And we all know that thrill of work days when it feels like the tailwind of momentum is our best friend and everything we set out to do happens with ease and effortlessness.

However, while momentum feels great, it can also seem as elusive as the fickle flashes of inspiration – here one minute and gone the next. Although it can be hard to pin down where momentum comes from, we certainly know how to describe the sensation when it hits us.

Here are just a few of the sentiments I routinely hear from clients as they describe the feeling of having momentum:

- 'I feel like I'm in a groove or in my element – just holding on for the ride!'
- 'Everything and everyone seems to be in sync. Such a great feeling of harmony and synergy.'

- 'I was on a roll and everything just seemed to come together at exactly the right time.'
- 'I felt as if I was in a sweet spot where it wasn't even hard work anymore.'
- 'The business is firing on all cylinders and I can hardly keep up with the pace – it's an exciting time to be at the helm.'
- 'We were riding high and felt almost invincible or unstoppable. The growth was exponential and when people asked what the secret was, I honestly didn't know.'
- 'After a while it was like I was going with the flow – no longer trying so hard but getting better results than ever!'

Now, while momentum certainly feels great and can lead to some incredible results, here are three tangible reasons to pursue and preserve it at any cost.

---

REASON

01

Momentum is  
generative

Put simply, the more momentum you have, the more you get. In the same way that success breeds success, the energy of momentum always feeds on itself. While it may be slow at first, in no time momentum grows exponentially till you reach a critical mass.

In his excellent book *The Compound Effect*, legendary business thinker Darren Hardy likens the process of building momentum to that of picking up speed on a merry-go-round when we were children:

*The first step was always the hardest – getting it to move from a standstill. You had to push and pull, grimace and groan, throw your entire body into the effort ... finally you were able to get up a little bit of speed and run alongside*

*it...you had to keep running faster and faster, pulling it behind you as you ran with all your might. Finally, success! Once the merry-go-round was spinning at a good clip, momentum took over, making it easy to keep it going.<sup>2</sup>*

The key is this. Get moving – regardless of how hard it can be at first. Gain traction and get the tailwind of momentum working for you early on, then all you need to do is set your sails and go with the flow.

Perhaps the generative power of momentum is most clearly seen in the sporting arena. More often than not, the team that scores the first goal starts a chain reaction. As they get into a groove, confidence builds and the next goal becomes almost inevitable, then the next, then the

next. Conversely, the winning team's opponents can easily fall prey to the negative effects of momentum – the further they fall behind, the harder it is to turn things around and fight back. The reality is that momentum is equally potent when it is working against you (something we will explore in the pages ahead).

We all know that if you want something done, give it to a busy person. Why? Because the gravity of inertia has a tremendous pull that can be hard to break. Busy people are already in motion, so getting things done is no big deal.

Remember, energy is built from energy – speeding up that which is already moving is far easier than getting an inert object (or person, or organisation) off go.

---

# REASON 02

Momentum is  
attractive

Everyone wants to be on a bus that's going somewhere. There are few things more appealing than being part of an organisation, a movement or even a personal relationship that is on an upward trajectory.



**Momentum truly gives you an unfair advantage when it's working on your side.**

By the same token, the first hint of stalling or waning can cause even the most steadfast and loyal

devotees to start considering their options.

Better still, like attracts like. Happening places attract happening people. Inspiring places attract inspired people. Even great opportunities seem to be attracted to places of great opportunity. Momentum truly gives you an unfair advantage when it's working on your side.

I was reminded of this recently when lining up for breakfast at a happening café in the rural outskirts of Sydney one Sunday morning. When my wife and I arrived, having driven 40 minutes to get there, the line was out the door and a staff member at the head of the queue informed us that there'd be a 50-minute wait to be seated. We'd heard from a few friends

how good this café's food was, so we decided to stick it out. When we finally sat down to breakfast almost an hour later, the queue was twice as long as when we'd arrived. While the breakfast was good, in reality there would have been five cafés within a five-minute drive of it that would have been as good – and likely had no wait for a table. But regardless, we, plus hundreds of others, fell for the hype and lined up anyway because this café was the hot place to be – it was a business with momentum.

When you've got momentum on your side, you don't need to develop clever strategies for recruiting staff or persuading customers – both will be attracted to you because you are going somewhere and they want to be a part of it.

---

# REASON 03

Momentum is  
protective