

When Seasoned Lay Leaders Start a Young Adults Group

By Lynette Hawkins

Do you know what CYE or BTW mean? It may be time to learn new ways to communicate. People in their 20's and 30's are more likely to text you about their upcoming meeting versus send you a postcard. Connecting young adults to Christ through a young adult ministry provides a chance for you to grow in new ways too.

With many Protestant mainline congregations experiencing a graying effect, many more seasoned ministry leaders are being asked to start a young adult group. If you're assigned this task, be open to the opportunity. You may discover more about you than you do about the young adults. Being asked to help create a young adult ministry or work with young adults is a blessing. Prepare yourself for this role. Start with prayer and allow your actions to be guided through your relationship with God.

Today, research and experience indicate young adults' desire mentoring relationships with people older than them. Depending on how you personally relate to young adults, the connection can integrate a cross-generation moment that opens doors and friendships for you and the young adults.

The keys to being effective as a leader or advisor require a spiritual connection, open mindedness, patience and a willingness to be a follower as well as a leader. If you are a person that has to be in charge, this role may not be for you. As young adult leader you may need to sit on the side, hear and follow a younger person's lead and be open to taking new approaches to addressing issues.

How can you become an effective leader of young adults? Set goals and measure your personal accomplishments as well as those of the ministry. Here are a few tips for leading a new young adult ministry.

1. **Understand their needs.** Take the time to get to know them. Build a new young adult group by helping to address the needs of young adults. Get to know your particular group. Ask questions and hear the way they express themselves. Know what's on their hearts and minds. Be open to what makes them who they are. Respect their view points. Be open to listening to them. Become one of the persons they can communicate with and trust to listen deeply to them.
2. **Be open to a two-way conversation.** Learn new ways to reach young adults. Familiarize yourself with social media, texting and even the language used there. These newer mediums encourage a dialogue that

- is two-way. Allow your ears to listen before you open your mouth. Be willing to allow God to use you to build new relationships with the younger families in and outside of your church.
3. **Learn to give your undivided attention.** Stop what you're doing and seek a true communication with the younger adults at your church. There is a reason we have two ears and one mouth. Be sure to patiently hear what is being said verbally as well as in actions. Take the time during meetings or outside of worship for you and young adults to share their personal stories of how God is working in your lives.
 4. **Be a cheer leader of their gifts.** Discover the gifts of leadership, compassion, teaching, etc. Encourage them to use what God has deposited in them. When people are able to operate within their spiritual gifts the opportunity for greater commitment grows.
 5. **Learn when to be quiet.** As a facilitator of the young adult ministry, you may need to schedule the meeting and then sit as a quiet bystander. Sometimes you may have to allow them to learn on their own without always steering the plans for a meeting or even the agenda. When sharing the leadership with young adults, stumbles may happen. Learn how to share the load of the stumble without always being the one to steer the ship. Your goal is to work yourself out of an active role and move young adults to take complete ownership of their ministry. Simply, share leadership until they feel confident and comfortable to go it alone.

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