



10 Things to Know About Leading Young Adults

by Sam Rainer on December 03, 2009

One of the key attributes of leaders is that they go out in front and show others the way. Leading in the church means maintaining a balance: be above reproach but also remain among the people. Leading young adults is no exception. However, leading the next generation requires an attitude of indebtedness to the followers—leaders don't exist without followers. So let me share with you a few critical issues from the perspective of these young adult followers.

1. **They desire integrity among leaders.** Our research has shown that young adults don't drop out of church because of large-scale moral failures of leadership. These failures haven't turned them off to the church, but it's clearly not what they're looking for in a leader. They've seen enough duplicity—they're attracted to leaders who stand firm and are people of principle.
2. **They look for transparency in leaders.** A lack of transparency at the top is frustrating to anyone who follows. The younger generation tends to follow transparent leaders over distant, detached leaders. And they want to know that they're not alone in their struggles. They want to hear a leader's story and value personal impact more than "steps-to-success" in a message.
3. **They want leaders to be mentors.** Mentoring to the younger generation comes in a more informal relationship. It's not about a program or process; it's about a relationship. When leaders have these relationships, they not only build credibility but also lead by example in real time.
4. **They crave opportunities from leaders.** Most young adults don't want to sit on the sidelines. In fact, a growing front door to the church is missions. A church without opportunities to serve is boring at best, disobedient at worst. Give young adults an opportunity to serve and watch them succeed with the mission.
5. **They need leaders to shoot straight.** With life. With biblical depth. Young adults don't come to church to wade in the shallows. They don't follow leaders that soft peddle. They desire leaders to shepherd them through the depths of Scripture and the valleys of life.

6. **They are attracted to team leadership.** The younger generation deplores autocratic leaders. Leaders that attract the young adults show everyone how their role in the ministry is a critical one. These leaders reveal the big picture to everyone rather than keeping the vision black box locked. They equip the saints and empower the laity to join God on His mission.
7. **They want to be corrected by leaders.** One way to confuse young adults is to set expectations and then hold no one accountable. Much of the younger generation has a desire for strong spiritual guidance and corresponding discipline when they stray.
8. **They seek examples in leadership.** Missional churches have missional pastors. Evangelistic churches have evangelistic church leaders. Churches that meet the needs of the community have leaders that champion the cause. Young adults follow leaders that model behavior. They want to see you live your message before they join your cause.
9. **They need to hear a message of forgiveness from leaders.** Many younger adults carry a burden of guilt. Many of them have no concept of true forgiveness. They need to hear leaders tell them plainly what the atonement of Christ means. They need to hear how the debt of their sin has been cancelled.
10. **They look for joyful leaders.** Don't dismiss the celebration! Young adults gravitate toward a worship experience that represents the joy of Christ. They want to hear from leaders who live Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" They quickly recognize manufactured joy, but they value leaders with true joy.

Leading the next generation means understanding their perspective. You can't go out in front and show the next generation the way without listening, learning, and loving. This generation looks to leaders who are above reproach, but they follow leaders who come alongside them.

About the Author

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