



The Leadership Model

*Who leads the youth and young adult ministry in your church? How old is that person?
How old are the others who assist?*

The Leadership Model empowers youth and young adults by developing them as ministry leaders. Inherent in this model is the expectation that young people can indeed lead, and can do so now.

Sometimes young children lead others, by their enthusiasm, cuteness, or the vested interest others have in them. "A little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6) relates to more than just the new earth. Even authoritarian parents find themselves led by their children on occasion.

At what point do young people lead in ministry? That may depend on whether or not others in leadership cling to that role or share it or even recruit those younger into it. Attempts to withhold leadership as a carrot for future involvement misses the potential that current involvement increases future involvement and responsibility. It also intensifies current experiences.

Biblical Basis

The Old Testament describes leaders in various stages of life, whether it was reluctant

Moses called to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery at the age of 80 (Deuteronomy 34:7), or Joash who became king at the age of seven (2 Kings 11:21) or Josiah who became king at the age of eight (2 Kings 22:1). Spiritual leaders such as the high priest seemed to be relatively mature (Deuteronomy 10:6; 1 Samuel 4:18), yet Samuel began to receive direct messages from God while he was only a child (1 Samuel 3:7-9).

Age seems to matter very little to God, even though it may mean a lot to humans. According to Paul, Timothy's faith began in childhood when he received wisdom from Scripture at an early age (2 Timothy 3:15). God equips his followers with spiritual gifts, regardless of their age (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11). This doesn't dismiss the reality that additional training, experience, and education would be helpful. But neither does it deny that young people are able to lead while they are young.

The disciples began to follow Jesus when they were considered "young people." Jesus gave them responsibilities and tasks well

beyond their capabilities (Matthew 10:5-23). These examples should serve as an encouragement for us to place more young people in leadership for God.

What It Looks Like

Instead of voting young people into figure-head posts on meaningless church committees, give them opportunities to do ministry and recruit others to join them. Organically, they will become leaders. This doesn't mean a large group must follow, but it provides functions a leader can fill in order to serve.

Existing leaders should perpetually recruit others to join them in leading, and lead others to do as well. No official mentoring labels must be assigned in order for mentoring to take place. Make it a two-way street with young people following and leading interchangeably, as needed and as the Spirit moves.

Simple progression moves from I lead and you follow, to I lead and you assist, to you lead and I assist, and finally you lead and I follow. The steps might not flow seamlessly, but the progression offers a natural development.

At other times young people simply pick up the mantle and run with it. Leadership should not be presented or understood as popularity, but function and service. It carries rewards and exacts a toll. The Godly pattern of leadership emphasizes service rather than status.

Keys To Make It Work

Either of two starting points could make this work. One features a young person who responds to the need to lead. The other happens when an older person invites and equips a young person to lead.

The situation in which leadership takes place depends on at least one person following the leader. This happens all the time in unofficial ways, whether it's something as passive as participating or not participating in a given ministry, attending church or not attending, moving towards God or retreating from Him. A person's influence makes that person a leader. Official titles or positions may help or actually hinder leadership. Servant leadership means much more than titled leadership or strong-arming another person.

Obstacles

When young people lack vision, they fail to lead. Established leaders who feel irreplaceable prevent young people from leading. Bureaucracy quenches leadership, at least meaningful leadership. Lack of purpose or direction wastes potential leadership. Postponing opportunities loses leadership. Maintaining the status quo stymies leadership.

Opportunities

Wherever and whenever a need for action arises you have an opportunity for leadership. Whenever and wherever you want enthusiasm, energy, optimism, and passion, recruit young people to lead or assist in leading. You might need to paint a vision for those unable to see it. Mentor leaders and learn from one another.

Church organizations, whether at the local church or in geographical areas hosting special events have multiple opportunities to enlist, train, empower, and benefit from young leaders.

Often funding prevents ministry opportunities from developing or continuing. Investing funds in young people and empowering them to choose where, why, and how to spend it provides tangible evidence of trust and enables them to test their skills. Poor

choices on how to spend money occur all the time with adults. Why not give young people a chance? Could they really do any worse?! This might give those who are older a greater incentive to pray for the young people. If you want to try this to an extreme, hand over your entire church budget to young people to operate for a year. Now that would be an opportunity!

