

Developing Discipleship Leaders

(Written by Andy Harrison for Leading Student Ministry Magazine, LifeWay, Spring 2004)

Many youth ministers have a multiplicity of ongoing ministries, events, and programs within their church's youth ministry. Discipleship is just one of them. Studies are selected, meeting times are designated, leaders are found and the ball starts rolling. Unless a big problem develops or a complaint is lodged, the youth minister assumes discipleship is taking place. He checks in once in a while to encourage everyone and then starts looking for a new set of studies for the next semester and begins praying that his current leaders will all sign on for one more go around. He then begins planning and plotting the other aspects of his ministry.

If faithful, maturing discipleship is to take place in your youth group, there must be a commitment on behalf of the youth leader to be involved beyond setting things in motion. And since it is true that there are other demands to his ministry and his time might be limited, the most strategic commitment a youth minister can make is to develop quality leaders for this vital task.

Selecting Leaders

Most often when the search begins for leaders, we look for people who are known for being good teachers, who have an outgoing personality, or possess natural leadership qualities. We look for people who won't bore students, yet have some depth to them. However, the word "disciple" means "learner." Perhaps when looking for youth discipleship leaders we should look and see who really seems to enjoy learning and growing in their faith. The best discipleship leaders will be those who know the joy of growing spiritually and who recognize there is still much for them to know. Pray that God would give you eyes to see these people in your church and that God might move them to desire sharing their heart for discipleship with students.

Investing in Leaders

Whatever you ask your leaders to do for students, do this for them. If you want your leaders to meet with students, then meet with your leaders. Meet with them formally for training or communication. Meet with them informally for a coke and a chat. If you want your leaders to write notes to their students, then write notes to your leaders. Try this: Watch them for a week and pay close attention to their interaction with students. Once you notice a few positive characteristics, send them a note. "Jim, I was watching you last week and noticed you laughing with Trevor. It is so good to see how real you can be with students. You know how to be serious and you know how to laugh. I'm sure Trevor and the other guys you meet with appreciate this about you. I just wanted you to know that I do as well." Once your leaders receive these notes they will be encouraged and begin to capture the heart of their importance. When you then ask them to send notes, they will know why and they will do it.

Whatever you ask your leaders to be, make sure you are actively the same. Do you want your leaders to be people of prayer? Pray with them. Do you want your leaders to love

God's word and memorize it? Hand them your verse pack and ask them to review you on your memory verses. Do you want your leaders to be initiators? Initiate things with them. Call them. Seek their advice about issues. Take them on ministry visits. Ask them to go on an errand with you. We've all heard it before: more is caught than taught. Your leaders will sometimes ask, "What am I supposed to be doing?" You can say to them, what my discipleship leader once said to me, "Andy, what do I do for you? What are those things you respect about me? Do those things." It's hard to say that, if you're not doing them.