

**10**  
**(and a half)**  
**Essentials**  
**of**  
**Youth**  
**Ministry**

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## Introduction

One of the first questions new youth ministers commonly ask is, “where do I start?” This is not an easy question to answer. Every youth group is different, because every church and every community has its unique dynamics.

I put this little booklet together several years ago as I was leaving a position. It was to be a guide for the inexperienced Student Intern taking on the Youth Ministry.

These 10 steps are not a magic formula that will make youth ministry easy. These are simply some basic steps to help carry out youth ministry related functions. They are the things that I’ve discovered to be the essentials.

A seminary professor once said that all we do should be done with passion, humor, and excitement. In other words, love what you do, have fun doing it, and spread your excitement to those you work with and for.

## **Step 1**

### **Relationships With Youth/Students**

Simply put, the key to building relationships with students is being REAL. If you want to build REAL relationships with students you must have a REAL interest in their lives and be REAL yourself. You must let students see your heart. This takes time and energy, and more than that it takes an investment of your emotions, mind, and your soul.

Time is very important in building these relationships. The old saying, "it's quality, not quantity" is not completely true with students. Too often today youth ministers and leaders are only in one place of service for a couple of years or even less. Students see this as a reason not to get attached, and some students won't even bother to come to church at all after they've been through two or three youth ministers in a three-year period. Spend time with them outside of the church walls. This will help them see a REAL you, who cares about the REAL them.

This is not an easy task. A very prominent veteran youth minister once spoke of his visits to school campuses. He would anxiously sit in his car dreading the moment that he stepped inside that school building. Of all the things to be done in youth ministry, building relationships is the hardest. You get close to students. As they grow older, you watch some of them rebel, some simply disappear, and only a few remain faithful to God and the church. It may break your heart to see so many leave, but be encouraged by those who prevail.


## Step 1.5 Discipline

Originally this was a part of the first Step, but then I realized it's an issue all itself. Thus, Step 1.5 and the title of this booklet, *10 (and a half) Essentials of Youth Ministry*.

A problem that you may run into is discipline. Unfortunately, you cannot just snap your fingers and make the "bad kids" suddenly well behaved. The best tool for a misbehaving student is a policy for results of misbehavior. This policy is a sort of rule list that should be posted for all students and visitors to see. It should not be exhaustive, as no one would give any attention to it. A simple sign with some rules should suffice. Consequences of misbehavior may be outlined in a more comprehensive manual that would stay at your desk or some other location in your youth room. On occasion, especially if you have some trouble students, remind students that there are penalties for misbehaving (this makes a great illustration for a lesson on sin).

Be careful though. I once entered a new position where we had a lot of unruly kids. I introduced the "Code," our code of conduct (aka rules). Within my first two months in that position, our youth group was cut in half. Those unruly, misbehaved youth didn't want anything to do with the new guy who had rules. So they simply stopped coming. It was good for the core students who remained and were able focus on growing, but we lost all those students who really needed to grow. So, use caution when instituting new rules.

**Rules for Behavior**



1. Do not curse
2. Do not hurt anyone
3. Obey your Leaders
4. Have fun!

\*If any of these rules is broken  
you will face the consequences.

## **Step 2**

### **Relationships With Lay Leadership**

Lay leadership in the church is very helpful to any youth ministry. Your lay leadership in youth ministry may consist of a Youth Committee, Youth Leadership/Ministry Team, Parents, Sunday School Teachers, and/or anyone else who provides any kind of resources (time, money, ideas, etc.) for the ministry. This may be a large or small group of people. Both sizes of groups hold their own pros and cons, and that may be based more on the personalities of those people than the size of the group.

It is important to remember something when building relationships with lay leadership- they are there voluntarily. If you offend them, they can leave (or worse, create trouble for you or even cost you your job). If you treat them well and show appreciation for their help, they will be more eager to help and support your ministry.

One helpful hint in working with your leadership is to use their ideas. They are often more likely to support their own ideas. This is sometimes an easy task, as they have some good ideas. However, sometimes their ideas are simply not that great (but honestly, sometimes our ideas are not that great either). Be wise in how you reject ideas. It will sometimes be beneficial to make your ideas look like their ideas. You can coach people with pieces of your ideas and it will look like the ideas came from them. This is basically manipulation, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

### **Step 3**

## **Relationships With Staff**

A positive relationship with the staff of your church can make your ministry dynamic. If your pastor and you share common goals, interests and some time together outside of the office, you will be a happier person. If you are happy and content with your place of ministry, and those you share it with, your ministry will be the better for it.

The pastor is not your only friend on the staff. Become good friends with the secretary/administrator. This person usually knows everything there is to know about the church and its people. She/he can be an incredible asset for you to have.

A healthy relationship with other ministers is a great tool as well. If your church has a Children's Minister, be sure to be on good terms with that person as you will be getting his/her kids in your youth group. Work as a team of friends with all the ministers. Help each other out and be a part of a healthy body.

Building staff relationships takes time and energy, just like any relationship. It is well worth the effort to have allies and buddies to turn to when you need them. These positive relationships make the office atmosphere a much more pleasant place to work.

## **Step 4**

### **Calendar Planning For Major Events**

These next three steps may seem like to all be the same. But they really are individual needs to be addressed in your ministry.

Among the most difficult things to get started in a new position is calendar planning. However, once you get it started it is rather easy to maintain a calendar. There are some major events that are common in youth ministry. They are Disciple Now, Summer Camp, Mission Trip, Conferences, Retreats and others. Major events are things that require some detailed, advanced planning.

It is a good idea to have only one major event per quarter. The exception to this would be summer. When the students are out of school, they may need more things to do to keep them involved. You might want to begin the year with a student conference in early spring. Follow that with a Disciple Now in mid spring, perhaps April. Summer Camp may come early in the summer and a mission trip could be done in mid to late summer. Then you might plan for a fall retreat. It may also be appropriate to put an annual ski trip on the calendar for either winter or spring. This is just a sample. The recent trend for Disciple Now is to do it in the fall rather than the spring.

When planning a calendar, it is helpful to break down each event into several different tasks to be accomplished. You would then want to think ahead to when that task would need to be completed. For instance, the following diagram may be helpful in planning a mission trip. Notice the "To Do Date" column. For some of the tasks, this may be the time you begin that task, for others, when you finish it.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Remaining Time</b>	<b>To Do Date</b>
Choose date & location	48 weeks	08/04/09
Find lodging	45 weeks	08/25/09
Promote the trip	27 weeks	12/29/09
Arrange transportation for	20 weeks	02/23/10
Training	15 weeks	03/29/10
Release forms due	4 weeks	06/14/10
Money due	3 weeks	06/21/10

This obviously isn't a perfect or magical formula, but it provides a basic "to do list" for you to see everyday. Combine all of your activities into a single spreadsheet and print it out. This allows you to see everyday what needs to be done.

In some cases, you may want to delegate some of these tasks to your leadership team, but make sure you are on the same page. You wouldn't want to end up with two separate, halfway planned events.

## **Step 5**

### **Calendar Planning For Irregular Activities**

Irregular activities, also known as the fun stuff, are quite easier to plan for. They do not require as much preparation time. Things such as laser tag, ice-skating, movie nights and others, can be planned as little as a month before the event. You still want enough time to promote the activity and gather some release forms.

Basically, when planning an irregular fellowship type of activity, you can simply call the company (i.e. the ice skating rink), find out the cost, if and when you need a reservation, let them know you are planning to come, and begin to promote the activity among the students. Usually, businesses will be very helpful in accommodating you and your group; they want your business.

It is generally a good idea to provide an event away from the church every six weeks or so. Again, these may be more frequent in the summer, a high season for youth ministry. During the summer, you might try to have something nearly every week, scheduled of course around your Major Events.

So, how do you find these types of activities? It's easy; just watch your community for fun events. You can also ask your students what they would like to do. Again, be careful in how you reject bad ideas.

Keep in mind also that these kinds of activities may add up quickly as money-takers. If you're in a church with a limited budget and/or you work with kids from a low economic area, be aware of the costly activities and don't overdo them. Step 10 will address budget in more detail.

## **Step 6**

### **Calendar Planning For Regularly Scheduled Activities**

Regularly scheduled activities such as weekly services, monthly fellowships, even quarterly fellowships are the easiest to plan for. This kind of stuff pretty much takes care of itself once you get it started.

Sunday School is a great program. Here are a few key ideas to remember when looking at your Sunday School:

1. Classes are often best when boys and girls can be separated. They are together during nearly all other events and activities.
2. It is best to separate students of different ages. If at all possible there should be no more than two grades represented in any one classroom. Teens are going through changes in nearly every aspect of their life, physical, mental, emotional, social, etc. The world of a seventh grader is completely different from that of a tenth grader. As students get older, this is less important, but should not be neglected.
3. Use a structured curriculum. One of the worst things a Sunday School teacher can do is walk into a room on Sunday morning and choose a random passage to study. There are dozens of good, quality curriculums out there that provide a sort of flow from one week to the next in Sunday School. Take advantage of these resources. Remember, though, that these are only guides to teaching a class. The teacher should have some liberty to expound or delete different parts of the lesson.

(Sunday night services are disappearing from churches all across the U.S. Take advantage of the time you may have on Sunday night for a more in-depth, more applicable study. More than likely, the students you can get on a Sunday night are more dedicated, and want something deeper. Use Sunday School as a simple Bible Study time, with clear application.)

Wednesday night services, or midweek services, as they are sometimes called are a great time to draw a crowd. It is almost universal that the Wednesday night service is a more “fun” time for youth. There are a few key elements to an effective midweek service. They are, worship, study, and just hanging out (oh, and don’t forget about those announcements). Steps 7 & 8 deal with the Bible Study and Step 9 will address worship.

Be sure to provide a time for your students to just hang out. This can be before or after the “service,” but should be very informal. If you have some resources such as a pool table, video games, ping-pong, or anything like this it is a great asset.

You should always have some announcements. If your church has the luxury of using PowerPoint or another media projection software and equipment, you should count yourself blessed. Preparing a few slides that can loop while the students are hanging out can be very helpful. However, make sure you actually go over the important, soon to come items. Teens of today have a shorter attention span than teens just ten years ago.

You’ll want some regular fellowship activities scheduled as well. Plan a movie night at one of your volunteers’ house or a swim party at a student’s house. The idea is that students (all of us really) need to be with other believers outside of the inhibiting church walls. I’m not saying that all events inside the church facilities are restricting, but seeing each other in a different setting allows for better development of relationships and trust among the students and the adults... plus, it’s just fun.

## Step 7

### How to Write a Bible Study

Sometimes referred to as a "Sermonette," or the lesson, a Bible study may be the most intimidating item on the agenda for new youth ministers/leaders. 2 Timothy 2:15 urges you to be one who "correctly handles the word of truth." This is an honor, but a scary one. So how do you go about writing a Bible study?

First, ask God what it is that the students need to hear. Pray and think until an issue comes to you. Ask a question; find a "problem." Are they faltering in evangelism? Do they need to be reminded to honor their parents? Once you've got your problem, you need to look at some passages.



Consult a concordance, or another mature believer to find a passage related to that topic. Your local church library, Christian bookstore, and even secular bookstore, have numerous resources available. The internet is a great tool here, but be aware of Scriptural teachings and don't be swayed by something just because you found it on the internet. I once had a student say to me, "I won't believe it until Google tells me it's true."

Be careful not to read what you want to say into a passage of scripture. Instead, you find a passage related to the topic, then simply elaborate on what it says. For instance, say you chose for your topic "what real worship is," then you found in your resources John 4, where Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman. You want to say that traditional worship is not the right way to worship, you'd be wrong. Jesus didn't say that. He did say in essence that the kind of worship her ancestors had been practicing was not what God was seeking.

Once you've got the right passage, draw out a few points. This doesn't have to be like the preacher's sermon, with three

points and a poem. But the whole reason you've done this is to say something, "what does the Bible say?" So outline a few things and expound or explain them. Write it out, at least some major words to remind you.

It's rather simple really. You start with *Prayer*. Then find a *Problem*, search for a *Passage*, and outline the *Points*.

## Step 8 How to Lead a Bible Study

Leading the Bible Study is just as difficult as having prepared it, maybe harder. Getting started is sometimes the hardest part.



Illustrations are great tools for this situation. Pray and seek the Lord's help in finding an applicable story from your own life or from another source to illustrate the principles found in scripture. If you are not a natural storyteller, this may be something you're not comfortable with. Practice it. Find a friend, or a spouse who will listen and respond to your stories.

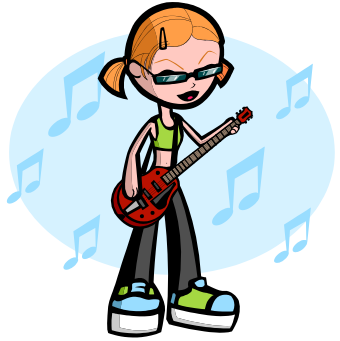
Another good idea is to find or develop a game or group activity that also relates to a part of your lesson. This is especially true with the younger, junior high crowd. They are concrete thinkers and understand concepts better when they can "practice" them.

Finally, teach the lesson. Trust the Lord to use His word through you. You will get better as you do it. Remember this though; there will be nights when you just aren't "on." Evaluate what was good and bad on a regular basis. If possible, find a trusted adult who can critique you without criticizing you.

Also, don't worry about the students' response. Obviously, we want them to be moved by the Word, and by our words, but it doesn't always happen immediately with teenagers. One seasoned youth minister said that students are like the ball hoppers at a bingo game. All these lessons and messages, like the balls, go into this hopper (their heart and mind) over a period of time. Once in a while you get to see something pop up and it blesses you. It's definitely worth the effort to keep the good lessons going in.

## Step 9 Worship Ideas

Worship time can be a wonderful experience not only for the youth, but for you and the leadership as well. If your group has some talented teens that are willing to lead in this area, USE THEM! Or if you are talented, you can lead. If not, there are a few places to find help- your congregation, local or nearby college/seminary campuses, local music stores, or you can simply use a CD and have the students sing along (my personal opinion is that this should be your last resort – since it seems a little fake). Try to provide some lyrics for the students to follow along with. This can be done with overhead transparencies, PowerPoint, or any of a plethora of softwares.



Regardless of how you are able to provide this opportunity, you really must do it. Students need to learn to express themselves in healthy corporate worship settings. It's good practice for heaven, right?

## Step 10 Budget Ideas

Budgeting sounds like a hard thing to do for youth ministry. Well, it can be, but it doesn't have to be. In most cases, a budget for youth ministry exists from the previous year. If it has been outlined well, you can simply take into account some small percentage for inflation and increase your budget accordingly.



If you are lucky enough to be in that situation, be glad.

If you do not have a previous budget to look at, your job is much tougher. But there is hope. The best resources in this case are another experienced youth minister in the area or your local association or denominational offices. Call around and see how others budget. Your association should be able to help you find some resources that will help.

Finally, if you are in a smaller church where there is no youth budget except what the students can raise, that's okay. The first church I served (as a college student) was one such church... and we had just as much fun and spiritual growth as anywhere else I've been. Car washes, bake sales, spaghetti dinners are all opportunities for youth to raise some funds. These can be great times of fellowship for the students. In fact, it helps teach them a good work ethic, and even though they're working for "money" during fundraisers, I've seen it develop a servant's heart among some students.

## **Conclusion**

I hope what you've found in the pages of this little booklet helps you in your ministry. As I said before, it's not magic system that'll make everything run smoothly. But these are the essentials of how to "do" youth ministry. Good luck and God bless!!!