

# growing young people as leaders

Whether it's Daniel, Esther, David or Timothy, the Bible is full of stories of young people being used by God to lead his people. Nothing has changed. God continues to call young people to lead his people today. Our role as youth leaders is to make sure that we do all we can to allow them to flourish.

## Be proactive

We are well used, by now, to all the statistics which highlight the reality of young people leaving churches. One of the main reasons they leave is that they feel they have no role to play in church life. The sad reality is that if God does give a young person the gift of leadership, it is more often in the school environment rather than the local church where this gift is nurtured and grown. So they choose to leave the church, recognising that their development is more effective elsewhere.

We need to put a stop to this and start taking leadership development amongst young people seriously. The reality is that it doesn't just happen, so leaders need to be proactive in thinking through a strategy for it to be an essential component of the youth ministry we lead.

## Identify

If you were to list your top five essential characteristics of a leader, the likelihood is that we would all have a different top five. This is because so much of what we expect a leader to be is connected with our own

experience of leaders. The important principle to understand is that there is no one type of leader – leadership comes in all shapes and sizes.

The important questions to ask ourselves when identifying possible leaders are:

- Who is God calling to leadership?
- Do they have a good reputation amongst their peers and community?
- Are they growing in faith and wisdom?
- Are they growing in Christ-likeness?
- Do they have the right abilities to lead?

Consider the young people you are currently working with. Do any of them meet some of these needs? A word of warning is needed here as often we can see young people who exhibit wonderful signs of leadership but are not growing in faith. If we are to see young people develop as Christian leaders, and therefore see God's kingdom grow as a result, the most important requirement is that they are journeying in their own walk with God. If they are not, then perhaps this is where our nurturing of them should focus before developing them in leadership. As we seek to identify those who God is calling, it is essential that we spend time asking God as well



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as asking other people who they think may make good leaders so we are not limited by our own expectations and judgement. Often God picks the unlikely as leaders.

### Invest

Having identified those who have leadership ability, and recognising that we can only work with a limited number of individuals at a time, we need to consider how we develop them well. The reality of this is that it takes intention and time.

### Growing Leaders – Youth Edition

This course from CPAS may be a useful tool to use to develop your young people as leaders. It runs over eight months, meeting once per month, and is designed to prepare the young leader for a lifetime of leadership, and help them realise that leadership development is a lifelong commitment. The course not only looks at key skills of leadership, but also considers:

- The essential ingredients of the leader's own relationship with God.
- The need to be growing more like Christ.
- To understand the specific role that God is calling the leader to serve in.

### One-to-one

People grow best when there is someone personally investing in them. Each young leader should have someone more experienced in leadership to meet up with, to discuss the challenges they face, to keep accountable in their own spiritual journey and to encourage them to take risks to grow them in their leadership gifting.

Setting up a mentoring scheme in the local church may be a great way of meeting this need, as well as having additional benefits such as bringing generations together and seeing young people as part of the overall church leadership, not sidelined to simply the youth and children's work.

### Cheer them on

If we look at Timothy in the New



**Leadership is learnt by actually doing it.**

Testament, we see a young man who seems to struggle with a naturally timid character and a sensitivity to his youthfulness. Unfortunately, many who share these character traits are quickly written off as too great a risk to deserve much responsibility, but Paul saw great potential. Paul demonstrated this by entrusting Timothy with important responsibilities. For example in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 Paul sends Timothy to Corinth as his personal representative during a particularly tense time. By doing so, Paul is publicly affirming Timothy. Affirmation and encouragement are

essential ingredients for a healthy leader to flourish. Paul's letters to Timothy show a desire to cheer Timothy on to be all that God has made him to be and this must have been a great encouragement to the youthful leader.

### Entrust

Finally, we have to think through ways of entrusting young people with specific leadership responsibilities. We only learn to swim by getting into the swimming pool, we can't learn it simply by reading a book. The same is true for leadership. So the challenge is to think through what leadership opportunities are appropriate for each person as we consider their age and the stage they are at in leadership development. This is often the hardest part as real leadership development may mean not limiting the opportunities to what's available amongst the youth and children's work but rather enabling young people to be involved in leading the wider adult church.

As a result, it is essential that our strategy for growing young people as leaders is incorporated into a wider church strategy for leadership development which may lead to seeing more young people staying in the local church as they feel valued and able to contribute to the life of the church, to the glory of God.



**Growing Leaders – Youth Edition is one way to invest in leaders.**