

the leader's reflection

One of the most important elements in discipling young people is often one of the most overlooked or undervalued areas for many leaders. Realising that the leader is a significant role model in a young person's life is vital for ministry to be life-changing and significant.

The reality is that no matter how packed the programme, how challenging the teaching or how experiential the worship is, young people will look primarily at their leaders to judge for themselves whether this God-stuff makes any difference and is worth pursuing. If we pause and think about this for a moment it is obvious why. We are in the business of changing lives, and therefore lifestyles, so those we minister to will naturally look to see if our life is worth copying. We can't teach about life without living it too. After all, our purpose isn't to give young people lots of theoretical teaching and knowledge, but to build relationships amongst us so we can be God's community of believers and live life together for the benefit of his kingdom.

Now this may inspire you as you lead, or it may fill you with complete dread. Either way there are a few things we can work on to make sure we excel in this area.

Be yourself

One of the myths of youth ministry is that you have to be young, cool and trendy to be able to relate to young people. This myth needs exploding immediately. In fact, these things

can even be a hindrance to young people fully coming to faith. Young people are not looking for more friends, they are looking for people who genuinely care about them and love them for who they are. The best we can do is to be ourselves. That is, after all, how God made us and is what we spend a lot of our time teaching young people to appreciate so we need to model this reality.

The wonderful truth is that as we learn to be ourselves and embrace how God has made us, quirks and all, we open ourselves up to be used by God more simply because we are living the life that He intended for us to lead in the first place. So throw off the false pressure to be someone you are

not and be the person you were designed to be.

Young people are not fools. They can see straight through the leader who is trying to be trendy. Likewise, leaders don't need to be extravert and the 'life and soul' of every gathering. In fact, this can have an adverse effect on the group in the long term as there is a danger that the youth ministry is built around the youth leader rather than around God. We need to live lives of authenticity and honesty, embracing who we are. We need to ensure our lives reflect who we are, what we believe and that they demonstrate, appropriately, what the joys and challenges are of being a follower of Jesus.



Leaders shouldn't try to be someone they are not.

Watch yourself

It is unlikely that young people in years to come will remember particular teaching sessions which a leader led. But the likelihood is that they will remember the leader and how they led. When we think back to our own school days, it is likely we remember teachers and their individual styles before we can remember any of the individual lessons.

If this is true, it is vital that we hold the mirror up to ourselves regularly to see the reflection that those we lead see. To help enable this to happen, download the *Leader's MOT*, from the [CPAS website](#). This is a tool which provides a series of questions around three basic areas of our lives:

- Our relationship with God.
- Our relationships with our family and friends.
- Our relationships with young people and those we lead with.

The *Leader's MOT* could be used as a focus for a retreat day, at a mentor meeting, or as a guide for the next leader's meeting, which has the potential for deepening relationships amongst those you lead with. (Although obviously it has the potential for fireworks too so make sure that everyone is in agreement and there is a shared confidentiality and an attitude of building each other up.)

Often, it is only when we intentionally stop and look in the mirror that we discover areas of our life which still need to be moulded into the image of Christ. When a leader discovers these areas, it is vital that they are not ignored as they can have a habit of growing and will hinder the leader's ministry and relationships. Take courage, and put realistic measures in place which will enable you to change. It is important to remember that we follow a grace-fuelled God who wants the best for us. It is he who empowers the transformations in our lives and not something we need to do (or can do) under our own strength and determination.



We need to hold the mirror up to ourselves regularly.

Grow yourself

Not only should we watch ourselves for areas in our life that need fixing or healing, but all leaders need to be actively committed to developing themselves and allowing themselves to become all that Christ intended for them to be. This is a life-long journey as we discover more about ourselves and develop the strengths and gifts that we have been given.

Once a youth leader has been leading for a couple of years, there is a real danger that they stop learning and rely on what they have experienced. Let's hold the mirror up on this. What does it

communicate to the young people? Is there a danger that it shows that it is possible to know all you need to know about an area of ministry, and that there comes a time when relying on our strength is acceptable? There are plenty of resources available to better equip leaders for youth ministry, whether through books, online articles, podcasts or training events.

It is important for churches to take the development of its leaders seriously, and so make sure that within the church's budget for youth ministry there is money available specifically for developing the youth leaders.

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Our overall aim is to be 'transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.' (2 Corinthians 3:18 TNIV). As we become more the leaders we were designed to be, we become safe people for others to follow as they can imitate us as we imitate Christ.

The great news here is that as leaders become more reflective, they experience more freedom and joy in their ministry as their constant desires to achieve and 'be successful' are replaced with a stronger desire to lead people to Jesus and a Jesus-centred lifestyle that is honouring, sustaining and life-giving.



Use the *leader's M.O.T.* tool to aid reflection.