

## RAISING YOUNG LEADERS AROUND YOU

BY LUKE SMITH

Always be doing yourself out of a job.

This simple but radical concept has shaped my leadership for the last ten years. If as church leaders we are always replacing ourselves with someone else, we are never out of a job because we are growing the church.

Ten years ago a group of us planted G2 in York. Over the years we have seen over 600 people come and go as members of this fresh expression of church, many of them students who have graduated and moved on to other locations. 72% of our membership is 18-30. Here are some things we've learnt along the way.

### BUILDING NOT ATTENDING

Simply put, young adults want to build a church community, they don't want to attend one. They are participators and contributors not attenders wanting to be entertained.

Whilst in the past the local church may have been the best thing going on a Sunday, that is no longer the case. Young adults generally have little inclination to attend, unless... the church of today is a phenomenal force for fantastic social change. Cancellation of third world debt, CAP centres and Foodbanks are just a few examples of this.

Adults in their 18-30s want to be part of building a better world. They think change is normal. They assume that social structures, economic contexts and cultural institutions will change during their life-time, because that has been the norm over the last 50 years. They assume that great things come from small beginnings because that is the story of their cultural heroes like Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson and U2.

In the same way, they want to be part of building church – but they might not want to attend one. When you refer to your church, speak of journey and discovery. Ask young adults if they will join you in figuring out how to create a church community that will transform the community around it with the gospel.



## COMMUNITY

The extended family has broken down in the most part. The structures that held families together have disintegrated with social mobility and marital breakdown. As a result, young adults crave an extended group to which they can belong, where they can receive love and contribute towards the well-being of others. Students look for a home away from home, young professionals seek a meaningful community where they can explore what it means to 'do life together'. By community, they don't mean tea and biscuits after a service; they mean living in each other's houses, eating together, grieving and celebrating together.

Do our churches have this kind of community? Is there anyone who is good at building it naturally? If so, it helps to name that gift in them. I never fail to be surprised at how honouring a gift of hospitality helps that gift to flourish within the person.

## INSIDE OUT NOT OUTSIDE IN

I regularly meet up with students and young adults in our church. When I do I am less interested in finding out how they could contribute to the central church vision and I am more interested in finding out what God is doing in their lives and how we as a church could help them explore that more. It brings people alive. We want people to innovate and have a go. Let's have the courage to say, 'if your idea fails, I will take the flack and if you succeed, I will stand back and applaud.'

One of the best examples of this type of leadership is Pete Hughes who leads [Kings Cross Church](#). He and his wife Bee

planted the church in 2010 and they have grown the church to hundreds of people who are mainly 18-30. He encourages what Richard Branson calls 'intrapreneurs' within his church. These are pioneers who are given the scope to start and grow an initiative within the church. It has its own identity but is part of the kingdom work that the church is doing. Someone started a community space called TENT in the church building where start-up businesses can network, hot-desk and get going. Another person created a prayer room for office workers. Someone else has installed a cinema for the homeless community with equipment that was being thrown out. This is messy and always a little out of control. It is a beautiful picture of 21st century disciples of Jesus Christ in the urban context.

All along the way, Pete has told these people they have to do the work, but he has backed them and believed in them.

What visions, dreams and leadership has God put in the young adults in our churches? Who could we release into a new venture?

## WHAT ABOUT SUNDAY?

There are plenty of ways to raise leaders at a Sunday service. I am amazed at how busy many church leaders are on Sundays. There are lots of opportunities to release others within a service, but it takes courage and security on the part of the leader.

For the last seven years we have been running Ignition Sundays at our church. These happen once a term and instead



of one main preacher, we have four five-minute preachers. Each one is delivered by a person who has never spoken at our church before. They have to speak from the Bible and they can ask the church one question which we discuss for two minutes after their talk. Those of us who preach regularly meet with them all during the week before and they practise the talk. We give constructive criticism and they adapt if necessary. On the Sunday, we publicly back them and get the congregation to do the same. The next week we meet with each speaker and give them feedback.

People have first spoken on Ignition Sunday and gone on to speak at various Christian conferences. Others have had no ambition to speak again but valued the opportunity to speak to the church about what they felt God had laid on their heart.

Could we let others speak, lead worship, host meetings or lead other sections of our Sunday gathering?

### PERCEPTION OF AGE

Every generation perceives the youth of today to be less mature than when they were that age. The young seem to get younger and younger. Think of a 21 year old. You weren't that naive when you were 21, were you?

In order to raise young leaders around you, it is imperative to get over this hurdle. Giving someone leadership responsibility will bring maturity. Call out of them what you want to see in them, even if you only see it in part. Be as encouraging and forgiving to a young leader as your good Father in heaven is to you.

### RISKS

If you want to raise young leaders, it will involve taking risks, potentially failing, and it will cost you. So the safer option is to do it all yourself. But the reality is, there is no success without prior failure. It is how we learn. And we all have to speculate to accumulate. From the parable of the talents to Alan Sugar, it is understood that you don't grow by sticking with what you've got. In order to grow, our churches need to take risks on young leaders who will dream of new ways of church and new projects that will revolutionise our culture for the Kingdom. There will be some remarkable success stories along the way, there already are, but let's not be afraid of risking a little failure as we get there.

So if we are to engage young adults in our churches we need to have systems that allow them to lead. Whether it be small groups, missional communities, social outreach projects, mission teams websites or rebranding exercises.



#### FOR REFLECTION

- What would 'doing yourself out of a job' look like and feel like for you?
- In your context, who might be the younger leaders to invest in?
- What systems can we put in place within our churches that enable young people to lead ?