

Developing a Vision and Strategy for your Youth Work

Topic: Leadership and Vision

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Date: October 2016

Biography:

Laura currently works for YFC as the head of the church resources department, she is married to Andy who is the youth pastor in their church where Laura volunteers. Before YFC Laura worked as an outreach worker with vulnerable young people and before that as a youth pastor in London.

INTRODUCTION

One of the key dangers that can entrap a churches youth ministry is a lack of vision and an overly reactive response to the climate and behavior's that are taking place in our youth work. So often we can notice that our youth group seems to be jumping into relationships and kissing each other and we as the youth team respond with a solid six week teaching series at the earliest possible opportunity on who we should date and why.

I believe that we as youth workers are called to more than firefighting. We are called to be directors of vision and strategy in the communities around us, creating culture and setting the atmosphere so that young people might come to know Jesus and be able to tell their friends about him in a thought through but creative way. However, often very little of our time goes into thinking through this process or the self-reflection necessary to make this a success.

Vision and strategy must be set in both the micro and the macro and this is what we will be processing here. In the micro the content of what we teach our young people must be thoroughly thought through and prioritised. A best case scenario would be that we have a young person in our care from years 7-13, 7 years, what are we wanting to teach them in this time and what are the skills that they need to be a young adult creating disciples in todays world? With the statistics being better for surviving on the Titanic than remaining a Christian at university we need to be thinking about how we prepare our young people for being adults that are passionate followers of Jesus.

We also need to be strategically considering our youth work in the macro. What is the purpose of your youth work? Does everything point towards that? Do you consider yourself the youth pastor for those in your church or those in your community? Are you seeing more and more young people coming to know Jesus for the first time? Where do you expect to see those young people access your youth provision and which activities are easily accessible? Which are growing and discipleship spaces? If someone who was totally unchurch walked into your youth work program how easy would it be for them to integrate and understand what was happening?

There is a brilliant American church leader who challenges us to be 'married to the mission but dating the model', what are the uncompromising and unchanging values that you as a church and

a youth ministry up hold and what is up for grabs as young people know less and less about the church and youth culture around us shifts and changes.

THEOLOGY

Throughout the gospels we clearly see the intentionality of Jesus. We read as he approaches those that he will teach and train, but also as he takes them into specific environments where they will learn for themselves, so that when he is no longer present in body their faith will not only survive, but that they might do the same and greater than he has done. In Philippians 4:9 we read 'Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you learned from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you'. As we teach and disciple young people we must have an intentionality about what we are equipping them with so that they are ready and equipped to live a life following Jesus beyond our churches walls.

We also see in Luke 10:1 that Jesus again goes out and equips 72 disciples with clear instruction around towns he himself planned to visit. Here we see not only the planning of Jesus but planning in order to equip others that they might succeed when he is not with them. This is a vital component of his ministry and legacy.

Jesus is also very intentional about how he spends his time, not just with those who already know him, but making himself readily accessible to those on the fringes who needed him most. Jesus made every effort to create time and space for those who were spiritually hungry and broken, often seeking them out. How often do we position our youth ministries to be easily accessible for the broken and the hungry? How intentional are we about how those relationships and grown and developed and how does this show itself in what we deliver?

PRACTICALITIES

Reviewing your vision and strategy can often seem like a big task and knowing where to begin can often feel tricky, especially when you are putting your ministry under scrutiny, and knowing what this looks like practically can be challenging.

One way of refocusing the strategy and vision of the micro in your youth work would be to ask yourself what character traits you would like to be displayed by your young people when they are young adults. By having a vision for where you are taking your young people to, you can then begin to map out a journey, not a reactive and unplanned journey but an intentional journey that equips young people to follow Jesus for the rest of their lives. One example of this journey could be to decide upon key teaching principles that you might teach into on an annual basis. These might be 6 or 7 key principles that the young people are taught every year, but taught in fresh and creative ways each time so that the young people regularly explore the depth and breadth of these topics. Examples might include evangelism, the spiritual disciplines or giving and serving. A plan could be then drawn up for the academic year helping to structure and focus your teaching, that the young people might be fully equipped to follow Jesus.

In terms of the macro, larger journey and purpose of your youth ministry it is helpful to know what the overall purpose and aim of youth work is, for many this might be discipling young people and introducing other young people in the community to Jesus. It is then helpful to look at your current

youth program and access the purpose of each of the groups that you run and look at where that fits into the big picture. If some groups are more focused towards outreach then where are you expecting unchurched young people to access that provision and then what bridges are in place to ensure that they then access an opportunity to hear about Jesus and be discipled? This may also mean changing the location, or the language used in some of your groups so that it is accessible as possible for the unchurched young people that you are trying to engage with. Each element of our youth ministry should be pointing towards our wider vision and serving it's purpose.

REFLECTION & LEARNING

These are two practical ideas that may be a good starting point when reviewing the vision and strategy of both the micro and macro elements of your work.

Reviewing your teaching

Spend some time thinking through where you would like young people to be after spending 7 years under your care. From this point begin to consider the key topics that you would want to teach your youth group on an annual basis to ensure that they become a young adult who is not only a disciple but also making disciples in the community around them. How might you then structure your terms to accommodate the key teaching points that you want to communicate?

Structuring your youth work

Create a current map of your youth ministry and take note of the journey that you would expect a young person to take, from point of entry to a disciple making disciples. Ask yourself the following questions:

- i) What are the 'wins' or aims of each of the groups that I currently run and are they clearly meeting those objectives? If not what needs to be done to correct this?
- ii) What could be changed or improved in each of your groups to make it more accessible for those who don't know Jesus and to encourage those who do know Jesus to step out and step up in their faith?

DEVELOPING PRACTICE

One of the ongoing tensions to be managed in youth ministry is balancing your vision and strategy for the youth work with the vision for the wider church family. When you are looking at developing the are of vision and strategy within this context the following question must be asked and debated with the wider church team:

- How does this reflect in the wider church outside of your ministry, if young people were to attend a Sunday morning service how accessible is it? Is your church truly accessible for those who don't know Jesus?

A further development within the youth department might be to look at wider events outside of the key teaching points which make it as easy as possible for your young people to invite their friends

to engage with the church and followers of Jesus. Often young people are open to inviting their friends to church but are nervous about what it is that they will be bringing them too.

- Schedule into your youth calendar hugely accessible events where your young people can invite their friends

If you are positioning your youth ministry to be serious about doing outreach then it is really important that you as the youth leader spend some time reflecting on the culture and atmosphere that you want your youth ministry to hold, particularly in relation to those who may not have attended your group before. Once you have a clear culture in mind that you would like to set then prepare to implement this by casting this vision of culture for your young people and encouraging them to carry it. This again might be a question to be asked of the wider church.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Sticky faith, the youth worker addition- Dr Kara E Powell, Brad M. Griffin and Dr Cheryl A Crawford
The Seven Checkpoints for student leaders - Andy Stanley

Gen Z – Vivek Pandit

Deep and wide – Andy Stanley