

‘How To Keep Next Gen Leaders at Your Church’

By Shane Pruitt - May 2, 2022



ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) – Everyone has seen or heard the stats about the short tenures of pastors to children, youth and college students. The common narrative is that they spend two to three years on average at any given church. There also currently seems to be a shortage of these **next gen leaders** across the nation. I’m personally getting three to five calls a week from churches and ministries looking to hire someone to lead these ministries in their churches.

Sadly, when this issue is brought up, many focus on the deficiencies of next gen leaders who are leaving, citing their lack of long-term commitment, seeing the ministry as a “stepping-stone,” an inability to work under a senior pastor’s authority or just being flat out restless.

Don’t get me wrong, there are certainly times when these criticisms are warranted, but what if there’s more to it? Is it possible that the tenure of these younger leaders might be strengthened and extended if senior leaders, personnel teams and churches take some proactive steps that could help change this narrative?

I believe there are some things that we can all do to help change the narrative surrounding next gen leaders. If a church has a great next gen pastor, then that congregation should do everything within their power to cultivate a favorable environment for the pastor to have a long, fruitful ministry in the church.

Here are five practices that will help a church begin to cultivate that kind of environment.

1. Value their family.

Whether married or single, there are also others in a next gen leader's life who need time, attention and love. Value the people they value. Make important the things they make important. Honor their "family time." Honor their "down time." Honor their "vacation time." It's nearly impossible for leaders to lead a healthy ministry if they have an unhealthy home or lifestyle.

2. Treat them like a pastor or minister, not like a babysitter.

With 77 percent of Christians becoming followers of Jesus before the age of 18 and 95 percent before the age of 30, now is the time to reach the next generation with the Gospel. Next gen pastors are primarily evangelists and **disciple makers** – not entertainers, hirelings, or glorified babysitters who keep young people distracted so parents can attend "big church." These servants are vital to the health of our churches and ministries, they should be treated and respected as such.

3. Pay them like adults, not teenagers.

Inflation and the rising cost of living are affecting everyone, including next gen leaders. They are adults with adult responsibilities like mortgages, cars and doctor visits. Most churches are doing the best they can with what they have, squeezing the budget in order to have full-time or even part-time positions available for this all-important calling of reaching young people. We must also recognize there is no such thing as part-time ministry – it's a 24-hour-a-day calling.

We should, however, also have realistic expectations on those leaders. If you tabulated the hours that many of them are putting in against their compensation, then you'd discover many of them are making significantly less than minimum wage. This would mean that fast-food restaurants are compensating our teenagers better than we are compensating our next gen ministers.

This isn't about money. It is about recognizing the value of these important roles. If our desire is to reach young people, then are our resources appropriately going toward that desire?

4. Protect them from the wolves.

Satan targets all leaders. If he can destroy a leader, it impacts a lot of people. Don't forget these next gen leaders are **missionaries** going after a harvest of young people. Based on the stats I mentioned earlier, if we don't reach young people with the Gospel, then we'll risk losing a whole generation. The enemy knows this, too. So he is going to try to disrupt, divide and distract. One of the most strategic ways he'll do this is by sending wolves. Sometimes, these wolves may look like critical parents, deacons or other church members.

Of course, there will be times when all next gen leaders need to be corrected or even rebuked. We may also wisely discern moments that they're just being flat-out attacked in a way that's harmful to them, the ministry and the Kingdom. One of the most loving and morale-boosting things a lead pastor, elder or deacon can do for their next gen pastor is to defend against unfair critiques. Protect them when it's apparent that they're being inappropriately targeted. Disciple and train them anytime they need correction. Next gen leaders are hungry for both.

5. Celebrate them leaving if God is leading them.

Sometimes, God does call a leader to move from one role, local church or ministry into another. No matter how healthy the church culture is, or how hard you've worked to keep them – God still moves them. He is allowed to do that.

So, here is an honest question about when that happens in your context: does your church or ministry honor and celebrate them, or are they portrayed as guilty traitors? Others take notice of how your church or ministry responds in those moments, and your response either boosts or kills morale. That reputation of how a pastor or church handles transitions spreads like wildfire. Next gen leaders from other churches will always take that into consideration when they pray about joining your team. Have they heard positive or negative reviews about how your church or ministry handles transitions?

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