

HOW PASTORS CAN KEEP YOUTH WORKERS

*by Mike Yaconelli founder of Youth Specialties and writer of numerous books

I have a solution for the long-held belief that youth workers average about 18 months in a church before they move on or are moved out. I guarantee if pastors implement my suggestions, the average stay of a youth worker could triple or even quadruple. We're talking miracle here.

1. Believe that your primary job as pastor is to care for the spiritual life of your youth worker. Support the youth worker at any cost, because it will cost you.
2. Explain to the church that you expect the youth worker to be "out of the office" most of the time because a youth worker's office is his car, McDonald's, football stands, band hall, and surfboard.
3. Remind the church that when your youth worker's at camp, she's working.
4. When your youth worker makes a mistake, come to his defense. Help the church understand that mistakes are part of the job and that you couldn't be more pleased that you have a youth worker who's taking risks and pushing the envelope.
5. Keep pushing to increase the youth worker's salary and the youth budget.
6. Once a year, encourage church members with means to provide a weekend getaway at a cabin or beach house or condo for the youth worker and her family. Stock the refrigerator with food, arrange baby sitting, and tell her to take the weekend off—she deserves it.
7. Support his family. Encourage the youth worker to divide the day into three parts and work only two of them. Check on his marriage, and give him plenty of slack when the new baby arrives.
8. Before the job even starts, meet with the youth worker and then the board to make sure everyone's on the same page when it comes to expectations and results. Whatever you do, make sure that numbers and attendance are not the sole or primary success markers.

9. Don't expect that, now that you've hired a youth worker, she'll do all the youth work. Expect the congregation to volunteer to help the youth worker, and if there's no response, go with the youth worker to personally invite others to help. Believe that, for every five kids in the junior high or high school youth group, there should be one volunteer adult meeting with those kids on a regular basis.
10. Include the young people in the total life of the church, not just youth night. In fact, don't have youth night. Put them on boards, have them participate in the services and as greeters, and encourage the senior citizens to adopt someone in the youth group so each kid has an older mentor, friend, pen pal, and wise sage. Encourage both the kids and the seniors to exchange letters, tiny gifts for birthdays and special moments, and have the students put on a dinner once a year for their pen pals.
11. Spend a lot of your time working with parents, providing them resources and seminars to help families sift through what's important at this critical stage.
12. Part of the youth worker's job description should be the expectation that she takes one day a week on silent retreat, three days every three months, and one week a year just for working on her soul. Also give her a restricted budget for books that are just about our souls.
13. Meet with the young people on a regular basis, and have open question-and-answer sessions so they can get to know you as a person. Let them know your struggles, your flaws and your passion for them.
14. Ask the wisest elder in your church to attend the youth meetings and report back each month what he saw.
15. Plan service projects for both youth and adults.
16. Continually affirm and encourage your youth worker.

There you have it. A happy youth worker is a long-term youth worker. Woo hoo!

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Call us with questions, bounce ideas off us or let us know how we can partner with your and/or serve you as you pour yourselves out for our younger generation!

