

**Seven Steps to Turning Youth into Leaders  
and Keeping Students Connected to the Church:  
Bridging the Graduation Gap!**

**Primary Objective**

Teaching students to be leaders

**Secondary Objective**

Helping churches bridge the gap and keep high school graduates involved in the local church through building mentoring relationships within the church.

God is calling students to be leaders in His church. How do we, as youth leaders, grow students into those leaders, especially when so many of our students drop out after high school graduation?

Below are seven steps that will help you develop leaders, and if applied to your junior and senior classes, will contribute to reducing the graduation drop-out rate. When we pair students with ministry minded adults who will help train those students in ministry and build relationships with the young person, the young person will stay connected to the church.

**1. Identify**

Identify ministry tasks and young leaders. What tasks are you doing that a student could learn to do effectively? Which student in your group might be interested in learning to accomplish that task? The potential leader may be a student that hangs around or shows some interest in helping with youth ministry. Sometimes, the young leader is someone who the Lord has just placed on your heart. Other times, it is a student with obvious leadership potential.

**2. Invite**

Invite an identified student to watch you work and help you accomplish a ministry task. Briefly, help them understand what you are trying to achieve. You might say, “I want guests to feel welcome and comfortable, so I arrange these chairs with a center and side row so that students who come in late can easily find a place to sit without awkwardly stepping over people.”

Doug Fields says, “Never underestimate the power of a well-timed and prophetic verbal challenge... Your words can become a visual portrait of a teenager to hang onto and strive toward.”<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Follow Up & Give Feedback**

Did they finish setting up the chairs with a good attitude or did they easily get off task? Did they, in the course of setting up the chairs, see other ways to improve the room? Did they invite friends to help? Prepare the student to be successful by giving honest feedback, so he or she can grow in that area and become the best “chair setter upper” of all time.

### **4. Recruit**

Ask the student to assume this roll for an agreed-upon time. You might say, “Hey John, this may or not be a lifetime calling, but will you come early next week (or for the next month) and set up the chairs again?”

“Students need a chance to lead. I don’t mean only sitting around and talking about leading, but to actually release ministry to them.” – Nick Steinloski

### **5. Develop**

Once you’ve settled that student into regular responsibilities and see that the student is more than willing and able to accept those responsibilities, it’s time to move your relationship with that student beyond that of supervisor and volunteer. This requires you to invest additional time with this student, and in that time begin actually mentoring this student on a personal level. This will help the student to see the meaning in their church involvement. As you transition your relationship to a deeper mentoring opportunity, you can help this student see how their role is helping the church to advance the Gospel. (See development questions below.)

### **6. Grow**

Allow the chair guy or girl to grow into other roles: guest relations, program coordinator, outreach leader. As you walk the student through these other roles, help them see the greater vision for that role.

### **7. Enlist Other Mentors to Join in the Process**

Once the student has taken ownership for a specific area within your youth ministry, it’s time to recruit adult leaders outside of the youth ministry to incorporate that student into leadership in other ministries of the church. How can the Men’s Ministry leader include that student in preparing for the men’s retreat, with specific responsibilities? How can the head of the greeting team use that student on a regular basis, with specific responsibilities? How can the children’s ministry leader incorporate that student in a weekly role for children’s worship or children’s Sunday School, with specific responsibilities?

Once you start identifying the areas where you can, and should, involve students in the ministry process, you will naturally build a leadership team with ownership for the ministry. Students who take ownership of the youth ministry naturally want it to grow and reach their friends. Once these students have committed to their roles, you can then begin to use them in greater and greater ways to cast the vision for your youth group and allow them to be a part of the planning process.

As you transition students to ministries outside the youth group, you may be tempted to feel like you are losing a vital member of your own ministry. Remember that the goal is not really to raise up youth, but to raise up young adult leaders in your church who came from your youth group.

Once these young adult leaders feel ownership for ministry in your church, that ownership will help bridge the gap between being in the youth ministry, to leading in their church.

People of all ages crave relationships and students are no exception. This generation desires to be a part of something bigger than themselves, despite what we may believe. Helping your church to begin cultivating relationships and ministry opportunities with high school juniors and seniors well before they leave the youth group, will be an important factor in whether that student becomes a church dropout after graduation or not.

“I believe teenagers are waiting to be asked to participate! They want to be involved in making a difference. I’m not suggesting you stress them out but only that you believe they are capable and invite them to taste different elements of ministry.”<sup>ii</sup> – Doug Fields

## **Additional Helps**

### **Helpful Questions to Build Ownership**

Does that student setting up chairs understand he is benefiting you by allowing you to connect with parents who are dropping off kids?

Does that student see how setting up chairs for Wednesday night youth group sets the student up to meet new kids who might arrive early, and need someone waiting to meet them?

Does that student see how being there early to meet that new kid will make the new kid feel welcome right away and more likely to come back?

Does that student see how making that kid feel welcome increases the likelihood that you, or even that student, will have the opportunity to share the Gospel with the new kid?

### **A Real Life Example**

The Brotherhood Director in my church made an effort to reach out to two brothers in our youth group. The two brothers took greater interest in the men’s ministry of our church as they entered their senior years. To be honest, I was a little jealous that they were helping over there when I needed them over here. But seeing where they are now, and that they still want to be a part of our church when they come home, I can see how critical that connection with other men in our church was to establishing that post-graduation connection.

Remember, when you have a student connecting in leadership with another adult in ministry in your church, you aren't losing a worker to another ministry, you are preparing the student to bridge the gap between being in the youth ministry and staying involved in church beyond graduation.

### **Extra Mile Suggestions**

Send your student leaders to Impact, which is a discipleship camp that encourages leadership and servanthood.

Buy your servant leaders a "staff t-shirt" for events.

Invite your leaders away for a weekend of leadership themed events, but make sure you are taking workers and leaders and not talkers.

Have an "under control day" in which only students are leading.

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<sup>i</sup> Fields, Doug "How to Develop Student Leaders" [Churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-how-tos/150092-how-to-develop-student-leaders.html](http://Churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-how-tos/150092-how-to-develop-student-leaders.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Fields, Doug "10 "I Can Do That" Steps Toward Developing Student Leaders" June 25, 2014