

Three Truths to Releasing Authority to Young Adults

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Young adult leaders often encounter individuals who have a strong drive as an aspiring leader. Among other reasons, this is often a result of people affirming their future leadership, informing them they need to be a leader, and now that they are adults, it's time to lead!

And this is great news for ministry leaders looking for warm bodies to assist in carrying the leadership load. But discovering the right person, the right time, and the right assignment can be overwhelming for any young adult ministry leader.

This is where these three basic insights relating to delegating authority to young adults will be helpful.

Truth 1: Confidence Brings Competence. Many ministry leaders want to release authority to someone who has a proven track record of success. It reduces the risk of embarrassment and having to clean up messes, and increases the probability the ministry will grow. But the truth is, for many young adults *competence follows confidence*. When you, as the ministry leader, communicate your confidence, they will succeed, and you increase the likelihood that they will invest the time needed to become competent.

This doesn't mean you give them 100 percent control over the assignment from day one. Your confidence needs to scale with their competence, but don't expect them to gain the skill if they sense you don't believe they have what it takes. Speak life over them—encouraging them—and give them responsibilities that stretch them. Then watch them excel!

Truth 2: Trust Builds through Inspection. Good leaders periodically inspect the work they have delegated; avoiding this level of accountability is a recipe for disaster. However, some emerging leaders want full control and view any kind of inquiry as a lack of trust.

Whenever delegating authority to an emerging leader, set appropriate inspection rhythms or boundaries. These are regular checkpoints where both parties communicate and verify that things are still on course. What is essential is making this process clear at the very beginning of the assignment. Communicate your level of trust, but also share that trust grows as you inspect their work, especially as they demonstrate their ability and meet or exceed your expectations. The more successful the inspections are, the more freedom and autonomy will follow.

Truth 3: Affirm Generously and Correct Strategically. The pace of ministry can be compared to a treadmill that never stops. The cycle never slows down, and the rhythm never changes. Because of this pace and the often-true reality of not enough workers for what needs to be done, affirmation and correction can be overlooked. But effectively empowering young adult leaders requires both.

Make it a habit to publicly affirm your leaders. Speak about their strengths when they are around to hear your kind words. Affirm emerging leaders even when they are not around, as many times others will carry these messages to them. Be generous in your sincere affirmations. When you affirm what is being done right, you send a signal to everyone who hears the kind of behaviors you find valuable which increases the potential it will be repeated.

Affirmation is the easy one. Where most leaders struggle is in providing correction. Often, correction is viewed as painful or embarrassing which results in avoidance. However, when a leader strategically corrects a young leader, the leader is providing guard rails to help the young leader developmentally move into the future.

Correction doesn't have to be emotionally charged and can come in a variety of forms. Here are some ideas to help make the next strategic correction more impactful with less risk of pain:

1. **Self-evaluation:** Ask the individual for a verbal response of what went well and what needs improvement. Affirm the areas you agree with and strategically add in something else.
2. **Make a request:** Let the emerging leader know you appreciate their efforts and then follow up with a request for what you want them do differently next time.
3. **Set a new goal:** At the conclusion of the project, ask them to set a new stretch goal that will help them see a new perspective and identify areas of growth.

Delegating authority is not for the faint of heart. Your reputation is on the line, and sometimes you have to clean up a mess resulting from a young leader's lack of experience or dedication. But empowering and releasing young adults is essential, so why not try it out today!