

Whoops! Avoid These Seven Mistakes in Young Adult Ministry

On the playground, my friends and I would often call for a do-over. Do-overs were when we didn't like what just happened and wanted another chance. In golf, they are called mulligans. Most of the time, you don't get a chance at do-overs in ministry. Mistakes can be costly. At the same time, mistakes can be valuable. You can learn a lot from your mistakes. John Maxwell wrote a book called *Failing Forward*. In it, he gives ways to maximize failure and turn the mistakes into launching pads for learning and growth. At the same time, if you are like me, you want to head off mistakes before they happen. So, here's some mistakes to avoid (and a good way to learn from mine)!

Mistake 1: Not doing your research. Before you launch a young adult ministry, it's important to do your research and understand the needs of young adults in your area. What are their interests? What are their challenges? What are they looking for in a church ministry? Once you have a good understanding of their needs, you can start to develop a ministry that will be relevant and engaging. Learn where they are right now. Learn what they are doing together. Several years ago, we had a word from God to start small discipleship groups on our college campus. We did all the right steps—we built a team, we prayed, and we planned. We launched our group and it failed. We learned afterwards that the night and time we had chosen conflicted with major events on campus. If we had just done a little more research, we'd have saved ourselves a mistake.

Mistake 2: Not knowing your assignment or goal. What do you hope to achieve with your ministry? What are your goals? Having a clear vision will help you stay focused and on track. It will also help you attract and retain college students who are looking for a ministry that is aligned with their values and goals. Don't skip past this one. It's easy to think, "No problem, I have a goal—reaching young adults!" But it's more nuanced than that. What is your vision? What is your pastor's vision? Are you supposed to be evangelistic? Are you supposed to connect young adults to the main church service? Are you supposed to start your own service? Make sure you know exactly what your goals and outcomes are.

Mistake 3: Not involving young adults in the planning process. Young adult ministry should be done *with* young adults, not just *to* young adults. Young adults are the ones who will be participating in your ministry, so it's vital to get their input from the start. Ask them what they're interested in, what they're looking for in a ministry, and what they think would be most helpful to them. By involving them in the planning process, you'll be more likely to create a ministry that they'll be excited about and want to be involved in. You need their buy-in. You need their engagement.

Mistake 4: Trying to do it on your own. You're going to need a team. You're going to need a good support system to achieve everything that must be done. You'll need your church leadership to guide and support you. You'll need other volunteers to carry out events. You can't be a one-man or one-woman show doing all the preaching and

teaching. You can't be a one-man show, making all the events happen. That will stop the growth of the ministry no matter how good a leader you are.

Mistake 5: Not being patient. It takes time to build a successful ministry. Don't expect to see results overnight. Be patient and persistent, and eventually you'll start to see a community of college students who are passionate about the ministry. Start small and be flexible. Do the hard work of building relationships. My first month as a young adult pastor at FirstNLR, everyone said to me, "You need Sara on your team." Sara was an influential young adult who was a hard worker. I met with her, and she said, "I'm glad you're here, but I don't ever want to go to Young Adults. I work in kids ministry and youth ministry." It was tough. For over a year, Sara rarely engaged with what we were doing. But I hung in with her. I treated her with respect. And, a couple of years later, she became one of the most important young adult leaders I've had in ministry. She needed time—and, I needed to be patient.

Mistake 6: Don't judge yourself by the success of others. It's easy in our social media world to compare yourself to others. One week I preached a message I was very proud of. A few days later I watched another pastor preach a message on the very same passage. His sermon was way better! He had five times as many people in the crowd listening. I was very discouraged. Don't do what I did. Don't get distracted by other people's assignments. Don't compare yourself to other ministries. You will stand before the Lord for your faithfulness with your assignment, not with how you lived out someone else's.

Mistake 7: Not having fun. Ministry should be enjoyable for both you and the young adults. There will always be hard seasons, but keep having fun. Make sure you balance deeply spiritual and outrageously fun. Enjoy the calling God has given you and your part in the Kingdom.