

Reverse Mentoring: A New Learning Curve

"The church needs young blood in its veins. Our strength for holding the faith may lie in experienced saints but our zeal for propagating it must be found in the young." Charles Spurgeon

These words by British preacher Charles Spurgeon were written over 150 years ago but communicate a clear vision for young and old working together in building God's kingdom. This vision can be realized through the effective use of "reverse mentoring".

Here at DMC, we've promoted the use of a deacon mentoring plan for the raising up of younger or more inexperienced leaders. But mentoring does not just work in one direction. We can benefit in amazing ways from younger leaders who are more conversant with culture, technology and social context.

"Reverse mentoring" was pioneered a decade ago by General Electric CEO Jack Welch in order to bring GE up to speed on the latest in technology. Welch required more than 500 of his top executives to find a younger, tech-savvy mentor to teach them how to use the web and understand e-business.

Of the organizations using reverse mentoring, 41 percent of respondents used the method to share technical expertise, while 26 percent said their executives gained youthful perspective. (The poll was conducted by The Center for Coaching and Mentoring as reported in American Way magazine in January 2004.)

What if church leaders followed this example and used reverse mentoring to gain understanding of our rapidly changing emergent and post-modern culture? How could technology platforms and ministry come together (blog posts, Facebook, Twitter)? Could this build bridges between generations – closing the knowledge gap and empowering younger leaders?

Reverse mentoring can take place within existing church programs and structures. It doesn't require a lot in the way of new processes, just the ability to match up people of different generations and encouraging them to exchange ideas and challenge each other.

Getting started:

1. **Create a "focus group"** of high school or college students and invite their feedback on social justice issues, politics, current social movements and community ministry. What are their passions and interests? What do they feel is God's place for them in the church, in ministry? What draws them closer to their faith? Welcome their analysis and criticism. Take notes, and take their comments to heart and prayerfully consider the implications for ministry.
2. **Meet monthly** with a younger person to learn more about the emerging generations. Ask about ways to involve them in church life and leadership. Become a willing and intentional student; a humble protégé, instead of the mentor.

3. **Ask teachers or professors** what their students are talking about these days. What are the hottest bands, TV shows, movies, and political issues?

If everyone involved approaches the relationship with a soft heart, we can learn things that will help us bring the gospel to all of our worlds while enjoying a kind of fellowship that is available in no other way. A great blessing will come when we recognize the Holy Spirit is working powerfully in the young and the old – let's close the generation gap.

For further reading:

“Reverse Mentoring: How Young Leaders Can Transform the Church and Why We Should Let Them” by Earl Creps



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