

Men's Ministry Requires Goal of Making Disciples

Note: This article is excerpted from No Man Left Behind, Moody Publishers, 2006

A church was having its annual men's retreat. A few of the men from the leadership team became a subcommittee to organize it. They set some goals:

- Reach out to men who didn't traditionally attend their church's events
- Help men get to know each other on the retreat
- Develop a follow-up strategy that kept men involved after the retreat

Eighty guys registered for the event, including twelve who were not very involved in the church and had never been on a retreat before. A businessman spoke on a very practical level about how being a Christian affects your everyday life. The talks were short and had plenty of discussion time afterward. In order to make the new men feel comfortable, they allowed the men to sit wherever they wanted during the sessions and discussions.

They had lots of fun and competitive activities. And they offered a follow-up activity for guys to get involved in smaller groups of men who would meet for six weeks to go deeper into the issues raised by the event.

During the retreat, it seemed as though guys were really getting to know each other. The discussion times were robust. The activities were fun and a lot of laughing and joking occurred throughout the weekend. At the end of the retreat, sixty men signed up for the follow-up, including eight of the twelve "fringe" men.

A Successful Retreat, or Not?

A week or two later, the entire men's ministry leadership team met, including the retreat planning team. The men's ministry team leader opened the meeting with a time to debrief the retreat. The retreat team was excited to talk about their success and frankly eager for a few pats on the back. What they heard next blew them away.

"Well," said one of the leaders, shifting uncomfortably, "I have to say I was really disappointed in the retreat this year. I just feel like we wasted an opportunity. For instance, the speaker hardly taught from the Bible; he mostly spoke about his own experiences."

"And the discussion times..." another man began. "Every time we were with different guys. We should have assigned guys to groups of four and stuck with those guys for the whole weekend and hopefully gotten into some deep issues."

There were other comments about having more worship, guided private devotionals, and other "missed opportunities" from the retreat. The planning team was stunned. They had met every goal they'd set for the weekend, yet the leadership team was ripping it apart. What went wrong?

The Wide-Deep Continuum

Making disciples is all about taking men who don't know Christ and helping them become mature, passionate followers of Jesus. This journey can be represented by a continuum:

Men Who Need Christ—Mature Disciples

Your ministry to men will need to help men at every stage of this journey. We call this concept the wide-deep continuum.

Wide—Deep

Every man in your church can be placed somewhere on the

continuum, and that determines the offerings that will appeal to him. As a man matures in his faith, he will move farther down the continuum.

How could knowledge of this continuum have helped the leadership team from the retreat example above? First of all, the planning team could have shared their goals with the rest of the leadership team and received their support and “buy-in” to the approach. All disappointment is the result of unmet expectations. The leadership team had one set of expectations about the target audience for the retreat; the planning team had another.

Notice that the suggestions from the other members of the leadership team were all good. But there was also nothing wrong with the type of retreat the team actually planned. It all depends on where you are aiming on the continuum.

Applying the Wide-Deep Continuum

You will interact with men at all points along this wide-deep continuum. On the left, or “wide,” side are men who are not all that interested in spiritual things. To reach guys on the wide side, you need activities that reach them at their point of interest. These are activities that require little or no preparation and low commitment. Typical activities at the wide end are softball teams, barbecues, a Super Bowl party, golf, hunting, or fishing.

To reach men on the “deep” side, you need activities that meet their spiritual needs more deliberately. These activities probably have a connection from week to week; they require preparation; they’ll go deeper into biblical concepts; they will offer accountability and transparency; and their focus will be on more mature Christians. Typical activities might include small groups, Bible studies, leadership training, service projects, or spiritual retreats.

No activity you plan can meet the needs of every man in your

church. In our illustration of the retreat above, the retreat planning team was focused on reaching guys more to the left of this continuum, while the rest of the leadership team were hoping for something reaching guys on the right of the continuum.

As you plan, make sure you are offering different types of activities to reach the different types of men in your church. Build a seamless process to move men across the wide-deep continuum.

Also, be sure your leaders are clear about your target audience. Left to their own devices, your leaders will naturally tailor events to their passion and calling. Help them understand the purpose of the event so they can support the agreed upon agenda of the team.

Leadership Teams and the Continuum

Different leaders will be passionate about reaching different types of men. As an example, consider this hypothetical situation at your church one Sunday morning: An usher approaches members of your leadership team and tells them that two men are in the lobby asking for help.

One man has wandered in off the street. He's not sure why he is there, but he seems a little down and said that he is looking for answers. He wants to know what this Christianity thing is all about. The second man has been involved in the church for a while. Due to personal circumstances in his work and marriage, he really wants to take his relationship with Christ to the next step. He wants someone to talk with him about how to study the Bible and pray.

Quick! You have to choose only one. Which man would you rather talk with? Some of you reading this have a heart for evangelism. Your desire is to reach out to lost souls and point them toward the cross. Others are more drawn toward helping Christian men build the kingdom of God.

You like to help men understand what it means to study God's Word and pray. When we present this scenario to men at our Leadership Training Center (LTC), about half of the leaders want to talk to the man who is seeking Christ for the first time, while the other half feel drawn to talk to the man who is seeking a deeper relationship with Christ.

Most leaders are wired to work with men at a certain point on the continuum. When you grasp this concept, it can help save a lot of trouble and misunderstanding.

After sharing this during one LTC course, a pastor and the men's ministry leader from his church came up and said, "You may have just saved our relationship."

The pastor explained that he would go out into the community and meet new men and convince them to give the church a try. But every time a new man walked in, his men's ministry leader would talk to them, invite them to join a small group, and explain the importance of accountability.

"As fast as I could get new guys in the front door," the pastor said, "they were running out the back." Understanding the continuum helped them realize that their hearts were for men at different places.

The layman learned that every man has to go through a process. They're not always ready for accountability and transparency. He and the pastor agreed to develop an appropriate process to move men along the continuum.

What about your men? Is someone thinking how to build a seamless process to help men who don't know Christ become passionate, mature disciples?

Applying the Continuum

- Consider the ministry to men at your church. Where on the continuum would you say men are most effectively

being reached?

- Which type of man are you most passionate about reaching? How can you have more of an impact with these men?