

10 Ways the Church Turns Off the Next Generation

Most pastors and churches I know are trying hard to reach the next generation. Some are doing a good job, while some are barely moving the needle.

The difference is related to their methods and how they convey the message. I have been mentoring young leaders since the late 1970s and have discovered keys to reaching them. I have also found that it doesn't matter how young or old the pastor is—it has to do with their approach and attitude in ministry and culture.

The following are 10 ways the church turns off the next generation:

1. They preach down to people.

In the old days, before there was internet, there were only a few respected voices in the church—those who could afford to broadcast their sermons via television and radio. Nowadays, because of social media, everyone has access to great teachers and perspectives from all over the world.

Furthermore, every believer can Google and investigate any topic they want (in the past, only church leaders and pastors had robust libraries) which gives people instant access to millions of books and resources. Hence, the new normal is a flat earth where the playing field is level, and everyone now thinks they are an expert (the church is now filled with wannabe theologians, psychologists, nutritionists, scientists and so on).

In light of all this, pastors and preachers need to have a humbler approach in presenting the word and avoid dogmatic attitudes and statements that cannot be easily proved with

Scripture. When pastors speak down to people as if they are uneducated or uninformed, they will lose the attention and respect of the next generation.

2. The church is title driven.

Pastors and churches obsessed with titles, pecking orders and a hierarchical culture will appeal only to Baby Boomers and beyond but will lose Generation Z and Millennials.

I think this is a good thing and closer to the way of Christ and the apostles. If you want to know what Jesus thinks about this subject, just read Matthew 23. Paul and the other apostles used the word “apostle” in a way that was an adjective—not a title. For example, the New Testament says, “Paul, an apostle” rather than “apostle Paul.”

3. The church is obsessed with formal attire.

Whether religious clerical garbs or suit and ties—a church that has a culture replete with formalities in dress and attire can be a turn off to many in the youth culture. It used to only be a West Coast thing, but now I have noticed even in the East Coast, young people are attracted and feel comfortable in casual attire when attending church.

4. They use religious language and hype with no substance.

Excessive use of religious words like “amen,” “hallelujah” and the like when preaching or conversing is a turnoff to young people. The next generation respects those grounded in their humanity and who do not hide behind all the unnecessary religious accoutrements. And hearing preachers shout out sermons with no theological or cultural substance is also a turn-off.

5. They give general prophecies.

When I read in Christian magazines or see people get up and give prophecies containing generalities with no real specific

focus or application—it is a turnoff to educated, discerning young people. (It seems to them as though people are trying to grab attention or be important, which is a turnoff to the next generation, who can easily see through their lack of substance to their true motivation.)

6. They use old-wineskin worship styles.

When churches are still employing old worship styles of dance, banners, blowing shofars and music, they are marginalizing their potential to reach the lost and the next generation (unless it is choreographed).

Also, when a preponderance of the Baby Boomers is shaking and screaming in the service week after week, young people will view that as inauthentic, religious hype and be turned off.

7. They employ authoritarian leadership.

When the pastor and leaders of a church talk down to people, blab out orders to followers and employ a top-down leadership style, they turn off the members of the next generation, who read in their Bibles how Jesus modeled servant leadership and told the disciples not to lord it over people (Mark 10:42-45).

8. Many in the church have a judgmental spirit.

When pastors and leaders categorize and dehumanize people because they disagree with their religion, politics or lifestyle, it is a turnoff to young people, who are tired of the judgmental, fundamentalist approach of many in the church.

9. The church micromanages and exercises excessive control.

When a church leader is a micromanager and doesn't nurture critical thinking and empowerment in the congregation, young people view that as stifling and will run to a more liberating environment.

10. The church lacks creativity and innovation.

Finally, this generation longs for churches that enable them to flourish in their gifts, abilities and creativity. They respect innovative leaders and thinkers who challenge the status quo and motivate believers to be cultural creatives who can change the world.

Young people of any past, present and future generation are pregnant with ideas and dreams and they just need older people to guide, coach and mentor them so they can fulfill the divine assignment before them.