

Say Goodbye to the 'Armor Bearer' Mentality

To train a new generation for ministry we must get rid of pride and pretension

My friend Charles wanted a mentor. He was eager to learn the ropes of ministry, so he asked an older pastor for training. The pastor agreed—but Charles soon realized the man wanted a valet, not an apprentice. Charles became the man's "armor bearer."

The man never took Charles on hospital visits, involved him in ministry assignments or prayed with him. Instead, Charles was expected to carry the pastor's briefcase, fetch coffee and take suits to the cleaners—with no salary offered. In this case, "armor bearer" was a spiritualized term for "slave."

This bizarre trend became popular in churches 20 years ago, but it still thrives. It appeals to insecure leaders who need an entourage to make them feel important. Some pastors have even assigned trainees to serve as bodyguards—complete with dark glasses and concealed weapons. These young men are instructed to keep people away from the pastor so he doesn't have to talk to anyone after a church service (because, after all, the poor preacher might be "drained of his anointing" if he fraternizes with common folks).

Excuse me while I barf!

I'm not sure what is more nauseating: That some pastors think they are discipling young leaders by exploiting them, or that church members tolerate such pompous behavior from a so-called man of God. And we wonder why many young people have stopped going to church?

When I turned 50, I decided to spend most of my energy

investing in the next generation. This became my passionate priority because I met so many gifted men and women in their 20s and 30s who craved mentors. Many of them, like Charles, were looking for authentic role models but could only find self-absorbed narcissists who were building their own kingdoms.

If you want to make a genuine impact on the next generation, please make sure you are not infected with the armor bearer virus. Take these steps to adjust your attitude:

1. Get over yourself. As soon as Jesus began his earthly ministry the devil tried to strike a deal with Him. Satan offered the celebrity spotlight by showing Jesus the world's glory and saying, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). But Jesus didn't buy it. He chose the path of servanthood even though He knew it would lead to the cross.

Today's insecure leaders don't realize it's the devil tempting them to become rock-star preachers. Fame is too alluring. Before they realize it, their heads have swelled and ministry becomes a means to prove their imagined greatness. A leader with an inflated ego will have zero interest in investing in others. You must tell yourself daily: "It's not about me!"

2. Stay accessible. Earlier this year I led a retreat for young Ugandans who are training for ministry. We prayed together, shared meals and swam at a local pool in the afternoons. When we finished three days of teaching sessions I asked them what they enjoyed the most about the retreat. One guy summarized everyone's sentiment: "We loved that you were *with us*."

Young people today don't just want our sermons. They want to sit down for coffee after the sermon. They want to ask questions. They can listen to a hundred preachers on You Tube, but when you invite them to dinner, offer to pray with them or

take them on a mission trip, you mark them forever.

3. Keep it real. Older Christian leaders have picked up some bad habits that turn off young people. Some ministers preach with affected voices, wear weird hairstyles and insist on dressing like funeral parlor directors—even on their days off. Please talk in a normal voice when you preach so young people won't dismiss you as a fake. Be transparent, admit your faults and let everyone know you've had struggles. Young people don't want to follow someone who pretends to be perfect.

4. Pour on the encouragement. Many young people today struggle to stay disciplined. Some have addictions. And many of them have attitudes! But you will never reach them if all you do is point out their faults. You have to win their hearts before you address problems. If you saturate them with the love of a caring father or mother, their spiritual growth will amaze you.

5. Don't cling to power. Jesus was the Son of God, yet He willingly handed His authority over to His disciples and told them to finish the job. Likewise, Paul invested his life in Timothy, Titus, Silvanus, Phoebe and others—and he expected them to go farther than He did. Every good leader is already thinking of his succession plan. If you have a tendency to control, dominate or manipulate people, you must wrestle with God until your pride is crushed.

Young leaders today don't want to be your butler or your valet. And they won't follow people who strut and swagger. They are looking for mentors who walk with the limp of humility.

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