

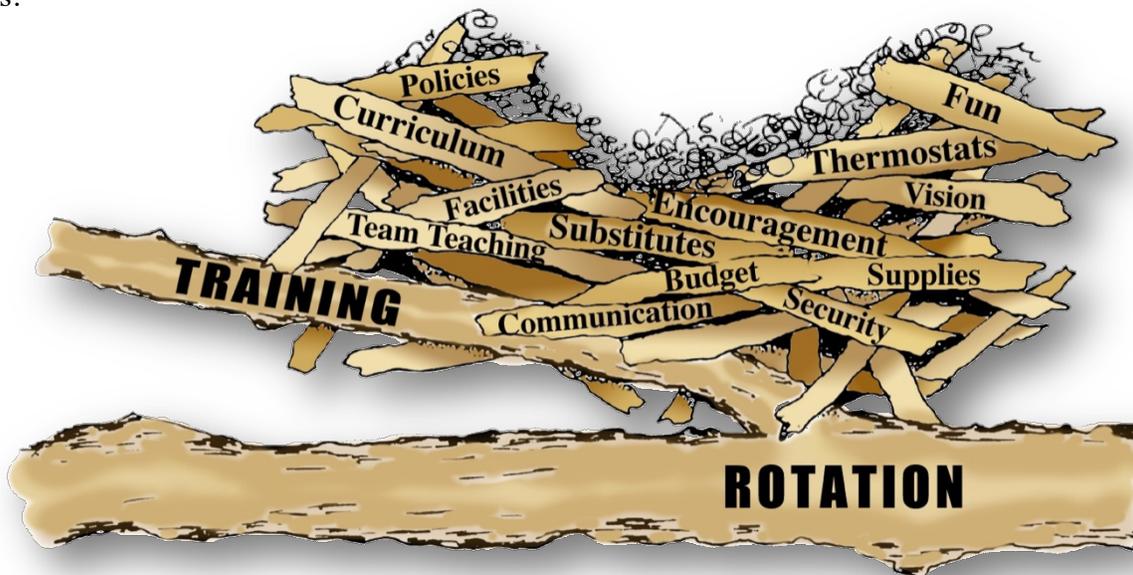
Recruiting Lessons From Cinnabon

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You may have heard people say, or even said this yourself, “I need to get more people to volunteer to serve in the children’s ministry.” The statement reflects a flawed perspective of recruiting. The person who makes this statement about children’s ministry (CM) recruiting believes that it is up to him/her to somehow “get” people to volunteer to serve in the CM. In reality, it is God who brings the people, but He waits until the ministry is ready to receive the new volunteers!

Years ago, I was serving as the Children’s Ministry Pastor at a mega church in California. Like all CM teams, we needed more people to join our team. For weeks I prayed for God to bring more people. For weeks, I found myself substituting in classrooms to fill the void of not enough team members. I became very discouraged! I even tried praying the exact words that Jesus used in Matthew 9: 37, 38 “*Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’*” I prayed for more “laborers for His harvest field”! That didn’t work! After several weeks of struggling and praying, God told me (not in a voice, but definitely in a deep sense in my spirit) that He was ready to bring more people to me, but I wasn’t ready to receive them yet. This stirred and challenged me to shift my focus from “those lazy people who won’t volunteer” to the structure of the ministry. God began to show me how to build a comfortable “nest” in which the CM team can be safe and flourish.

I began building this nest by focusing on the major “branches” that would hold up the nest: team **training** and team **rotation**. I realized that people wouldn’t volunteer to join the CM if they knew they would be “thrown into” a room without any training or be expected to serve every Sunday for the rest of their lives!



Developing a training plan was much easier than building a rotation process. How could I give CM team members “time off” if I don’t have enough team members now as it is? As I began to discuss the idea of scheduled time off, people told me that they would volunteer to join the team if they knew they wouldn’t serve every week for every month! I built a rotation schedule that was based on 6 months “on” and 6 months “off.” I used that concept to advertise the “openings” on the CM team. I also advertised the training process that I had created. I was surprised to see the results! God brought people to join the team who told me that they “were waiting for something like this”!

As I continued to work on building the CM “nest,” I discovered that those who were currently serving on the CM team were tired! They wondered if they were appreciated! Many of them were paying for teaching and craft supplies out of their own pockets! These conditions, and more, led me to begin building the smaller “sticks” of the nest. I thanked the current team members for their service! I gave Starbucks cards to team members who had extremely challenging experiences. I made sure that the ministry supplied the supplies that the team needed to teach the lessons. I planned more fun social events for the CM team. From the rotation process, I invited those on rotation to serve as substitutes for team members who couldn’t serve during their scheduled time. The Lord helped me build a safe environment for the children and team members through strong policies. The “nest” changed the “health” of the CM team!

After many months of work on the “nest,” I was shopping in a local mall. As I opened the door to the mall, I smelled the delicious smell of cinnamon buns! That smell surrounded me! I soon was looking for the place that was baking those buns! I needed a cinnamon bun! Soon I was standing in front of the Cinnabon store. I ordered a cinnamon bun. While I was paying I asked the employee serving me, “Do you guys blow that delicious smell out into the mall?” The lady serving me looked around sheepishly, then leaned toward me and said, “Yes!” Cinnabon installs large fans behind the ovens to blow the aroma of the cinnamon buns out into the mall. This is their marketing technique that works very well!



As I was enjoying my cinnamon bun, I began to think about the connection between Cinnabon and our children’s ministry! The Lord showed me that the “aroma” of the CM may not be attracting new volunteers. Yes, He helped me build the CM “nest,” but did the church know about it? In the next few days and weeks I began to discover that the “aroma” of the CM among the church people wasn’t very good. The CM had a reputation of not training people, burning people out, and not being a fun place to serve.

Since the “nest” was built and there were happier CM team members than before, I made it my goal to blow the “aroma” of the CM out into the church gatherings more effectively! I asked the senior pastor if I could have happy CM team members give testimonies on stage during the worship service. I asked if I could show some inspirational videos of the CM on the screens during the pre-service announcement time. I asked if I could print large inspirational posters that depict the joys of serving in the CM and place them around the church hallways. I asked if I could write inspirational stories about those serving in the CM and post them on the church website or in the Sunday bulletins. I became a salesman for the CM much like Cinnabon employs! I didn’t get everything I asked for, but the church began to enjoy the “aroma” of the CM and this definitely increased the size of the CM team!