

The Children's Ministry "Nest"

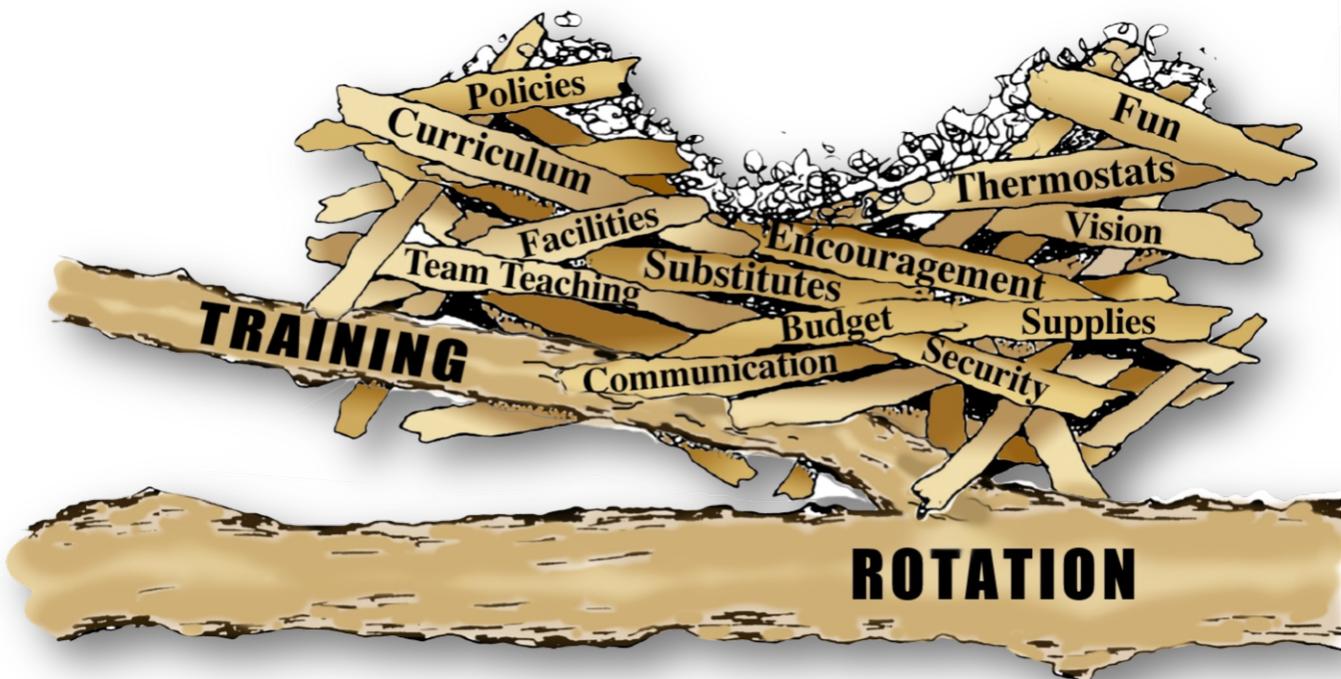
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Serving in the children's ministry is perhaps the most difficult areas of ministry available in the church. At the same time, it is also one of the most potentially rewarding ministry areas. As difficult as it is, those who "stay on" in the ministry do so because they find deep, inspiring rewards that overshadow the challenges.

The job of a children's pastor/director is to do all he/she can, with God's leading, to reduce the frustrations while overflowing support and encouragement to each team member. It is the challenge of the children's pastor to create a warm, safe "nest" in which the team members can flourish and grow.

In one of my earlier ministries, I struggled with not enough people on the children's ministry team (I know, hard to believe...) I would pray diligently for more volunteers, and for more faithful team members. After a particularly difficult Sunday, I got close to "giving up." God then began to explain to me that He had "volunteers on a thousand hills" to send my way, but that He wasn't going to send them to be "misused or burned-out." He showed me that the structure of the ministry wasn't ready" to receive these new Heaven-sent volunteers yet. He opened my eyes to the "ministry nest" concept. As the leader of the ministry, it was my responsibility to build a "nest" into which the children's ministry team members can "nestle," feel safe, and flourish!

This children's ministry "nest" is built from many small "sticks" of ministry values, and the entire nest rests on two main "branches" of support. The two main "branches" are: a "rotation" plan, and a systematic training process. When placed into this "nest," children's ministry volunteers will have a high probability of "staying on" and developing into strong children's ministry "experts."



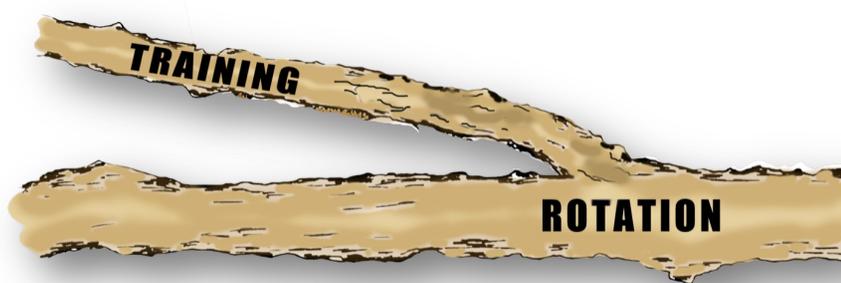
The Purpose For Building A Ministry “Nest”

The most obvious reason for building a cozy, safe ministry “nest” is very selfish. You build it, with God’s leading, to attract more volunteers and to reduce the stress of leading the ministry!

The other reason for building a strong ministry “nest” is to honor God’s calling and to be a faithful steward of what He has given you.

Build The Nest On Two Large Branches

Of course you could build your ministry “nest” without the two large branches of “Training” and “Rotation,” but that “nest” could be blown away or knocked over. It is best to rest your “nest” on the two strong branches that will protect it for a long period of time.



Rotation

Work on this large, supportive branch first. This will encourage and strengthen your existing team members. You can almost guarantee that a significant number of your existing team members are tired and ready for a break. Be ready for some “push-back” from them, though. Good people who are passionate about serving the Lord don’t like the sound of a “break.” You may hear comments like, “Why would I want to stop doing what I love to do?” Assure them that these short breaks are to strengthen them so that they can come back even stronger.

Obviously, before you can give any of your current team “time off” from the ministry, you have to attract new volunteers. You may be very surprised when you announce that you are beginning an on-going rotation process in the children’s ministry! You will probably hear people comment on the fact that they now are ready to volunteer because they will be protected from being “trapped.”

Decide on a target date to begin the rotation. Plan for enough time to establish some initial training of the new volunteers and a couple of weeks for them to be “apprenticed” by the veteran team members.

Before you can “market” this plan, you have to decide on the length of time that the rotation will last. You can rotate your team members every 2, 3, or 6 months. You can also offer a 1-year rotation commitment to those who desire it. The length of the rotation cycle must match the “culture” in your church or community. If there isn’t a strong service “culture,” you might need to start with a very short rotation cycle and build up to a longer one as the volunteers begin to enjoy serving together in this ministry.

Training

There are two perceptions that can block people from volunteering to serve in the children's ministry. One perception that they might have is that once they volunteer to serve, they will never "get out." This perception is addressed through your rotation plan. The other perception is that if they volunteer, they will be "thrown" into a classroom and fail miserably. This perception is directly addressed by a well-advertised, thorough training process.

Both new volunteers and veteran team members need some level of training. The new volunteers need initial training that will help them feel successful in their first few weeks of ministry. The veteran team members need on-going training to strengthen their abilities and to give them ideas for how to better minister to the children that God brings their way.

The initial training needs to include a brief overview of the policies and procedures and an overview of the curriculum they will be using. This initial training can be actual, face-to-face "live" training, or it can be "virtual." With either platform, make sure that you present the training in short "bites." Today's volunteers are not likely to view anything longer than an hour as "positive." The benefit of training that is online is that the new team members can return and rewatch the training whenever they feel they need to. Ideally, the new team members will be placed into rooms or environments that are supervised by veteran team members until the new team members are confident.

The overall training should include some on-going training for the veteran team members. This on-going training should include policy and procedure "refreshers," creative teaching techniques, as well as new ideas for dealing with the changing "culture" of the children and parents.

Begin Building The Nest Itself



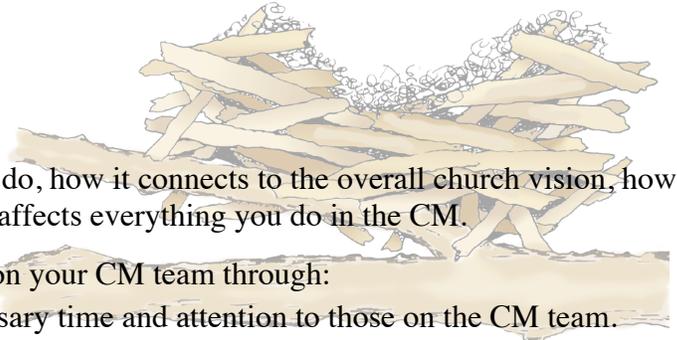
The nest is made up of vital "sticks" that are all designed to make the team members feel safe and happy. Do all you can to improve on each of these important parts of the nest whenever you can. Remember that the children's ministry team is made up of people! People are "finicky"! I've had people quit the ministry because the room was too hot or too cold. That's why you see an important "stick" labeled

“Thermostats.” A room’s temperature can vary due to the number and age of the children. You can’t make everybody happy with the temperature, but you should be able to control the temperatures in individual rooms or at least in small groups of rooms.

You’ll also notice a “stick” labeled “Substitutes.” To prevent a team member from feeling “trapped,” you can offer them a list of substitutes that can jump into their ministry area if they are sick or their family needs them. These substitutes can actually come from the list of team members that are “off” due to a rotation!

Make sure that the nest you build has enough supplies, curriculum, and anything else the team members need to be successful! If your team members are paying for supplies out of their own pocket, that is not a good “nest”!

Building Your “Ministry Nest”



Ministry Vision – Knowing why you do what you do, how it connects to the overall church vision, how it connects to the “Great Commission,” and how it affects everything you do in the CM.

Team Development – Nurturing those who serve on your CM team through:

Encouragement / Support – Devoting necessary time and attention to those on the CM team. This is eventually not possible without the help of assistants or department coordinators.

Positive Communication – Creating and protecting effective, positive communication from the CM leadership to the CM team, among the CM team, from the CM leadership to the church pastor(s), from the CM to the parents, and from the parents to the CM.

Enjoyable Interaction – Building a CM team who enjoy serving together, and who are encouraged to interact before, during and after the services. An active, growing plan to engage the CM team socially and electronically.

Team-Teaching – Creating an environment, which doesn’t permit CM team members being alone with children. A CM team that is made up of satisfied, happy volunteers who deeply enjoy serving together in teams. (This “hallmark” creates a reputation/image that attracts others to join the team!

Training – A plan for initial and on-going training for those who serve on the CM team. This training includes creativity, classroom management, interaction with children, interaction with parents, child evangelism/discipleship, emergencies/surprises, security, etc.

Rotation – A plan for “rotating” the CM team through set “cycles” of service (6 months, etc.). When the “cycle” of service has ended, the team members have the option of “rotating out” for an entire “cycle,” being available as substitutes, or serving as “floaters” to serve wherever needed during services.

Team identification – Attractive, professional, secure CM team ID badges, team wear, etc.

Curriculum – Developing, evaluating, and maintaining a set curriculum that is vision-based, child-focused, interactive, scripturally-sound, and that includes effective tools for teachers and parents.

Policies / Procedures – Establishing CM policies and procedures that protect the children, the team members, the CM leaders, the parents, and the entire church.

Supplies – Create a process for providing the CM team the supplies they need to be effective teachers. The process also includes a supply room in which supplies are stored, catalogued, and distributed.

Budget – Establish, maintain, and grow a CM budget that is “your CM vision expressed in numbers.” The existence of a growing CM budget legitimizes the CM and is an excellent tool for monitoring the growth of the ministry.

Facility – Effectively using the current facility; letting the facility express the CM vision; using the CM facility as a recruiting “tool”; and developing dreams for an expansion of the facility to better serve the ministry growth.

As you examine your own “ministry nest,” ask God to show you what you can do to provide a warm place for your current ministry team to “flourish.” As you build the nest, others hear about how comfortable it is, and they will join the team too!

