

Building Your Children's Ministry From The Ground Up!

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In today's ever increasing "me first," high-tech, impersonal world; where is God, and how can we lead others to find Him? God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8); it is the world around us that is constantly changing. This is the challenge facing every church today as they seek to remain "current" regarding evangelism and discipleship. Today's children or youth pastors are discovering that what "worked" a few years, or months, ago no longer seems to produce the same "fruit" in their ministries. What can we do to stay fresh and current while staying faithful to His calling and principles?

Of course, God builds the ministry, but He lets you do the work. In Proverbs 16:9, God affirms this "orchestration" between God and you:

"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

Paul underscores this same principle in 1Corinthians 3:6 when he writes:

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."

When you "build" a children's ministry (CM) from the ground up, you are like a contractor who is building a house. You know what the finished building will look like, but the building department dictates the order of your construction, and they are the ones who approve the plans and check off each step of the process. God is building the ministry as He directs your steps through the process. Building a CM will be paralleled with building a house throughout this document.



Seeing The Finished Product

As the CM leader, you need to envision the "finished product" before beginning the process of building from the ground or remodeling the CM.



From This



To This

STEP 1 – Laying The Foundation

The ministry setting, community needs, and the ministry vision



Every builder studies the place where the house is to be built. The building considers the slope of the land, the soil conditions and the size of the lot. As you build or remodel the CM, ask God to help you study the community and church needs, the challenges that you face, and the overall ministry vision. The CM vision must reflect the overall church vision.

Remember Who Is Building The Ministry

This is the Lord's work!

"Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied...

...then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery...

... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God."

- **Moses** (Deut. 8:11-20)

Moses' stern words of warning were given to the people of Israel just before they entered into the "Promised Land." These words of caution from God are for you as well. As you build the ministry, remember who is actually building it. Remember who gave you this position of authority. Remember who gave you the gifts and talents that you are using to build and lead this ministry! Don't forget God! Don't become so impressed with yourself that you take all of the compliments onto yourself! If you do, the last part of the warning will be yours to claim: *"I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed..."* It is not a good thing to forget.

Consider The Setting And Needs

A ministry "speaks the language" of the people.



God blesses those ministries that are focused on Him and on the needs of the people. Missionaries have understood this for hundreds of years. A missionary knows that he/she needs to "speak the language" of the people and to "live" with them before they will listen to the message. A builder studies the land to make sure the house is suited for the land. Yes, a builder can adjust the land slightly to provide a better foundation for the house, but the foundation is usually set on the specific characteristics of the land.

When building a CM from the ground or remodeling an existing CM, you must understand the "culture" and needs of the people in the community and in the church. What do they expect? What do they fear? What do they believe? What do they need the CM to accomplish for them? A "healthy" CM can offer or support many things to the community and families:

- The Gospel message presented to the children.
- Support for parents and families.
- Security for the children.
- A pleasurable environment for the children.

The Ministry Vision

What God wants to accomplish and how?



A ministry vision is very similar to marking out the foundation lines on the land before you begin digging the foundation. A ministry vision clarifies what you are doing and why.

Ministry vision comes from God. It can be adapted to suit the specific community, but it should always give specific boundaries for carrying out the "Great Commission" in the particular community and local church.

The Ministry Vision Expresses

- How the overall church vision is reflected in the CM.
- Why the CM exists, for whom it exists, and how that purpose will be carried out.
- A "rallying point" for your team, programs, and challenges

Sample CM Vision Statements

- *“(name of church) Children’s Ministry exists to help kids Pursue God, Build Community, and Unleash Compassion.”*
- *“The goal of (name of church) Children’s Ministry is to connect kids to God and others.”*
- *“(name of church) Children’s Ministry exists to build spiritually strong Christ-centered families and equip them to become servant leaders in our community.”*
- *“(name of church) Children’s Ministry exists to carry out (name of church)’s vision, which is, ‘To Know God, and Make Him Known.’ We will design child-focused ministry environments, at church and in the children’s homes, in which children are inspired to know God personally and become faithful examples of Christ’s love to their friends.”*

Lay The Foundation For Programs And Efforts



Once the ministry vision is established, the next step is to apply the ministry vision to EVERYTHING you plan to do in the ministry: the policies, the CM team, the programs, the curriculum, the communication, and the processes within the ministry. Ask yourself, “Does this program or process match or fulfill the ministry vision?” There may be events that are planned just to have fun; but even these fun events should be connected to the foundational purpose expressed in the vision!

STEP 2 – Building The Walls



Once the foundation of the building has “cured” for a while, the builder begins the process of preparing to build the walls of the house. In the same way, after the vision is established, you can begin to prepare to build the protective “walls” around the ministry. The ministry to the children happens within strong, safe, warm walls that provide a “space” in which the ministry takes place.

Create or Refurbish Your CM Policies / Procedures



Today’s parents are more interested in their child’s safety while at church than the lessons that you teach. As you build the walls of your CM, keep the children’s safety as a critical focus. The children’s safety should affect all you do; from recruiting to offering great programs! The first thing you should do is to create or refurbish your CM policies and procedures.

Every program, event, or effort must be protected by the strong “walls” of your CM policies/procedures. The walls of a house stand on the firm foundation and they hold up the roof. If the walls crumble, the whole house falls.

The CM policies are based on your CM vision and they create boundaries that protect the children and keep them safe. The CM policies should cover two major areas: “**Personnel**” (those who lead and serve in the CM) and “**Programs**” (everything you do with and for the children and families).

Personnel Policies

Building your CM team with the right people will save you so much trouble in the long run! Don’t fall into the ditch of desperation as you recruit and build your team. Yes, you need people, but you don’t need the wrong people. Create standards for who you want to serve on the CM team and wait until God brings those people to you! Your personnel policies should cover:

- The qualities/characteristics of those who serve on the CM team (spiritual, servant’s heart, willingness to work, love of children, respect for others, etc.).
- The screening process (background checks that cost something!).
- The orientation/training process (with apprenticeship).
- Supervision of all CM team members (“Never Alone” rule).
- Discipline of CM team members.
- Removal of CM team members.
- Reinstatement of CM team members.
- Appropriate touching.
- Appropriate classroom management (discipline of children).

Program Policies

- Check-in / check-out of children.
- Dealing with sick children.
- Protection and security of children / access to CM area.
- Adult / child ratios / “Never Alone” rule.
- Program development and procedures.
- Emergency procedures (including intruder procedures).
- Reporting child abuse.
- Use of the facility.
- Transportation of children.
- Communication with / support of parents.
- Lesson presentation (use of curriculum, videos, guests, animals, etc.).



Develop or Refurbish Your Curriculum



When a builder is constructing a house, the concept of a “beam” is critical. A beam is a large piece of wood that gives support for walls, windows, doors, or the roof. The roof has a large beam that sits at the highest point in the roof, and all the other pieces (rafters) come off of that beam. The curriculum you use can be viewed as the “beam” of your ministry. It is critical to set your curriculum before you begin to build the lessons or programs.

The curriculum you use should fit within your church’s doctrinal views, and it should further your CM vision. There are many sources from which you can purchase curriculum. Some churches choose to create their own curriculum. Writing your own curriculum can be costly and it demands that you have someone who is qualified to create meaningful lessons that don’t bore the children. It is much better to supplement a purchased curriculum than attempt to create one from scratch!

An Effective Curriculum Includes:

- A scope and sequence that gives an overview of what the children will learn and in what order.
- Creative ideas for teachers that prevents the lessons from being boring.
- Visual tools for the teachers to use (pictures, object lesson ideas, etc.)
- Small group discussion prompts to stimulate interaction between children.
- Parent communication that lets parents continue or reinforce the lesson at home.

Care For The CM Team



Every contractor knows the long-lasting power of being good to those who do the work. If the construction workers are happy, they will stay with the contractor for years! This builds a very effective team! Taking care of those who serve on your CM team is exactly the same. Being kind, considerate, and ready to sacrifice for them will produce a strong team that won't need to be replaced as often!

Before you consider recruiting new CM team members, do all you can to support those who are currently serving on the team. They will either be your best recruiters, or they will discourage others from joining the team.

Care For Those Currently Serving

You can safely assume that there are people on the CM team who are tired. They continue to serve because of their love for the Lord and their commitment to the children; but their “spark” may have gone out. It is always easier to support the current team than to recruit new volunteers. Here are some ways to support and strengthen the current CM team:

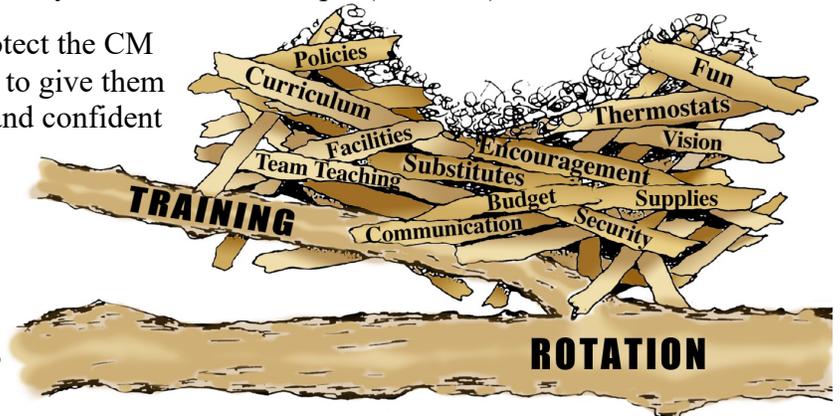
- Personal compliments and thanks (not texts or emails).
- Before service, during service and after service connections (“How are you?”)
- Public affirmations at CM meetings.
- CM social gatherings (no work, just fun!).
- Create teams in rooms (rather than one CM team member serving alone).
- Time off (re-arrange team or combine classes periodically).
- CM appreciation dinner.

Building A “Nest” That Attracts New Volunteers

Before God will bring new volunteers to the CM team, you have to create a comfortable “nest” that supports the CM team. Like a bird’s nest, this “nest” is made up of many small things (sticks) and it rests safely on two main concepts (branches).

The nest is designed to protect the CM team from “burn out,” and to give them all they need to be happy and confident as they serve the children.

The two main “branches” that support the nest are “rotation” and “training.” These two critical factors must be present in order to create a sturdy nest.



TRAINING



Building a house requires detailed plans. Builders are confident in their work because of the plans. In the same way, people will be more interested in joining your CM team if they see evidence of an effective training program. Most people are afraid of failing or doing the wrong thing with children. A well-advertised, on-going training process is one of the greatest recruiting tools you can have!

Initial Orientation



When people volunteer to join the CM team, or even while they are considering it, you should offer an “Introduction” or “Orientation” to the ministry. This can be done during a service (best idea), or immediately afterward. If you offer this after a service, make sure that the CM team stays to minister to the children of those who are attending the orientation or introduction. At the short (45 minutes) introduction or orientation, accomplish these things:

- Goodies (coffee, tea, donuts or bagels)
- A warm greeting from the CM Director/Pastor.
- A short (5 min.), well-done, introductory video that presents the CM vision and gives an inspirational introduction to the ministry.
- A short (2 min.) overview of the focus of the ministry (to influence children and to support parents) and the power of ministering as a team.
- A short (2 min.) overview of the training process with a glossy, 4-colored card that includes this short, bulleted list of training topics and on-going training process.
- A short (2 min.) overview of the major policies/procedures that govern the CM with a glossy, 4-colored card that includes this short, bulleted list of policies/procedures.
- A short (1 min.) overview of the team-teaching process and the “Never Alone” rule.
- An introduction of the area coordinators or master teachers on the CM team.
- Hand out CM applications or receive those already filled out.
- Take ID pictures.
- Conduct a walking tour of the CM facility.



Initial Training



The initial training of new CM team members must be made mandatory before the new CM team members are permitted to be with the children. The new CM team members must have successfully passed through the screening process (application, interview, background check, and orientation) before being invited to attend the initial training.

Hold the initial training during a worship service, when there is children’s ministry, to make it more available to all new CM team members. If you do this, you can give a tour of the ministry during an actual service as well!

A “mini” CM manual should be created and distributed at the training. This “mini manual” includes abbreviated overviews of significant CM policies. The full CM policy manual will also be handed out. The initial training should include the following items:

- Goodies (coffee, tea, donuts or bagels)
- A warm greeting from the CM Director/Pastor.
- A short (5 min.), well-done, introductory video that presents the CM vision and gives an inspirational introduction to the ministry.
- The “Never Alone” policy.
- Appropriate touching policy.
- Check in / check out security.
- How to handle emergencies / injuries.
- Dealing with sick children.
- Basics of classroom management.
- An introduction to the Department Coordinators who will conduct training in:
 - Classroom procedures.
 - Check in specifics (repeat).
 - Curriculum (if applicable).
 - Specific challenges (parents, classroom control, etc.).
 - Getting a substitute.
 - Scheduling their apprenticeship and service.



On-Going Training



Every CM team member needs on-going reminders of policies and exposure to new ministry techniques. This is what keeps the ministry “fresh” and safe! Rather than requiring CM team members to attend training sessions during weekends or during the week, it is good to create an on-going training process. This process can be carried out through:

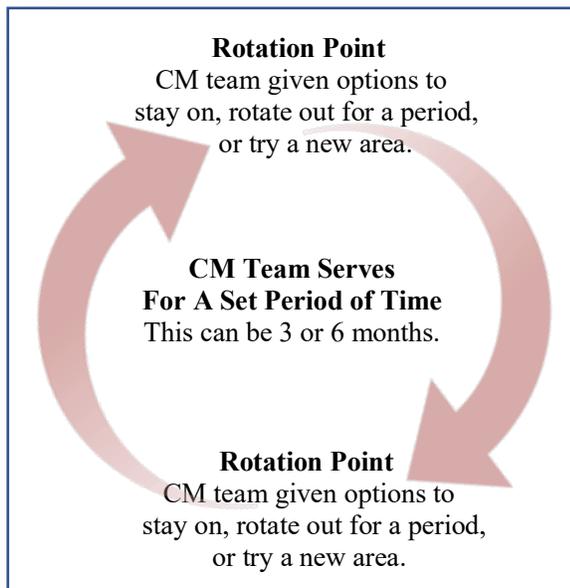
- Zoom meetings.
- During pre-service prayer times.
- At CM team social events.
- Website, blog, or vlog posts.
- Social media connections.
- Email or text messages.

The topics covered during the on-going training process are:

- CM vision.
- “Never Alone” policy.
- Process for acquiring a substitute.
- Creating a secure Environment
- Restrooms / Hallway Assistants
- Appropriate touching “refresher.”
- Handling emergencies / injuries.
- Dealing with blood and bodily fluids.
- Dealing with sick children.
- Classroom management.



- Child evangelism / leading a child to the Lord (partner with parents).
- Developing relationships with children (talking, questioning, etc.).
- Developing connections with / support of the parents.
- Understanding the various learning styles and age-group characteristics.
- How to teach a lesson (creative teaching).
- The use of the curriculum.
- Process for showing video clips.
- Process for taking your class outside.
- Policy for offering refreshments / snacks.
- Use of youth volunteers.
- Creating a balance between fun and learning.
- “Guided Conversation” techniques.



The Value of A Rotation Plan

Everything God created needs a rest. Flowers need the winter, crops need a season, animals need to sleep, and people need a break from work. The CM team is made of people. Those people on your CM team are mostly volunteers with other priorities and expectations in their lives. They don't have limitless energy or commitment. They need a scheduled break.

The danger of leading a CM is thinking, *“We need every volunteer we have! We need to keep them serving as long as we can. We couldn't do this without them!”* When you keep the CM team serving without any breaks, you will eventually create tired, “burned out” people. The result of this could be a CM team that dislikes serving but is doing it because they feel they have to in order to please God. This isn't a good team!

Brief Description of The Rotation Process

- The rotation process is advertised and used as a recruiting incentive.
- The recruitment process begins with the target of getting new team members screened, oriented, and initially trained before the rotation dated.
- The current CM team is notified of the upcoming rotation date and invited to choose:
 - To stay on and not rotate out.
 - To rotate out for a rotation period. *
 - To rotate into a different age or ministry area.
 - * Those who choose to rotate out can choose one of the following:
 - To completely take a break from ministry for the rotation period.
 - To be available on the “substitute list” as needed.

- To serve as a “floater” and show up during services to serve when able.
- New, cleared CM team members are placed within the CM team a few weeks ahead of the rotation for the sake of apprenticeship under CM team members who will not rotate out.
- The rotation point arrives, and the CM team adjusts. New CM team members continue serving under “veteran” CM team members or are placed in areas vacated by CM team members who are rotating out.
- The CM team continues to serve through the rotation cycle, and soon, the recruiting process begins again.

Training During The Rotation Process

- Orientation and initial training take place before the rotation cycle begins, at the end of the recruiting process.
- On-going training continues throughout the rotation cycle.

STEP 3 – Move In



Once the building is finished, it is time to move in! “Moving in” means you begin creating CM programs and strengthening your CM team. What you do with the children, when you do it, and who does it are all things that are included in “moving in.”

Developing Programs

CM programs generally fall into two categories: those that occur during weekly adult worship services, and those that happen apart from weekly adult worship services.

CM Programs During Weekly Adult Services

- Either age-based classes or multi-age, large group gatherings.
- Curriculum-based lessons and experiences.
- Child-focused worship.
- Safe environment with multiple CM team in each room.
- Communication with parents regarding lesson-related activities at home.

Building The CM Team

- Initial training (basic policies and procedures).
- On-going training (policy refreshers and creative teaching techniques).

A. The value of “untraditional” programs

1. Service projects
2. Sports involvement (watch, volunteer)
3. Campus involvement (clubs, volunteer)
4. Neighborhood events
5. Planned and unplanned mall encounters
6. Ice cream shop encounters (with parents)
7. Fishing, camping trips (non-established, small group)