

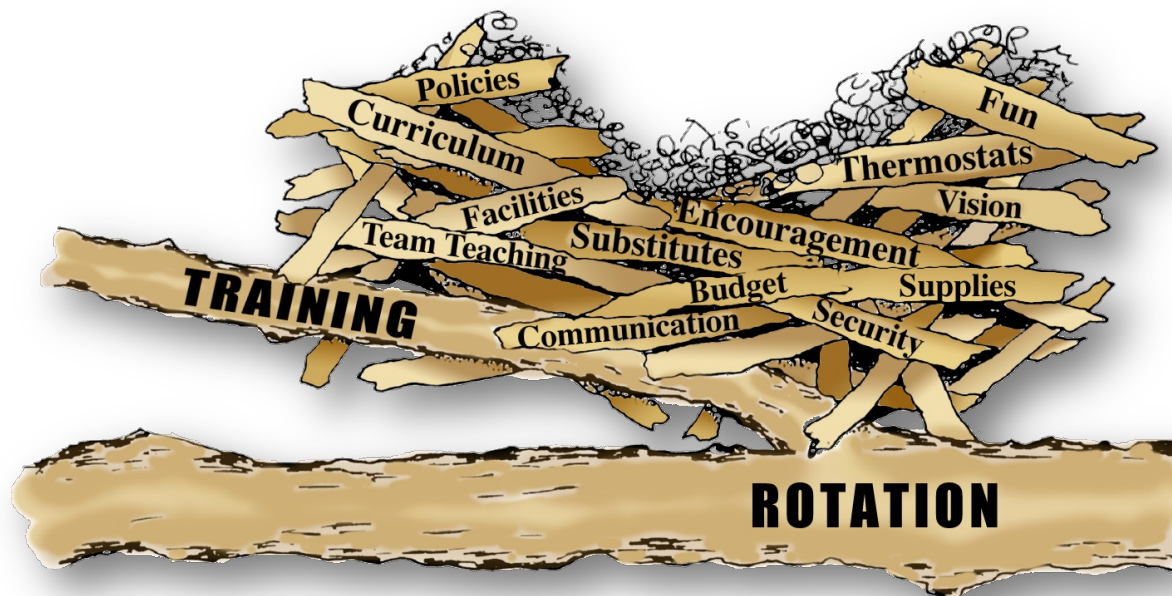
Building Your Children's Ministry Team

By Steve Alley

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.

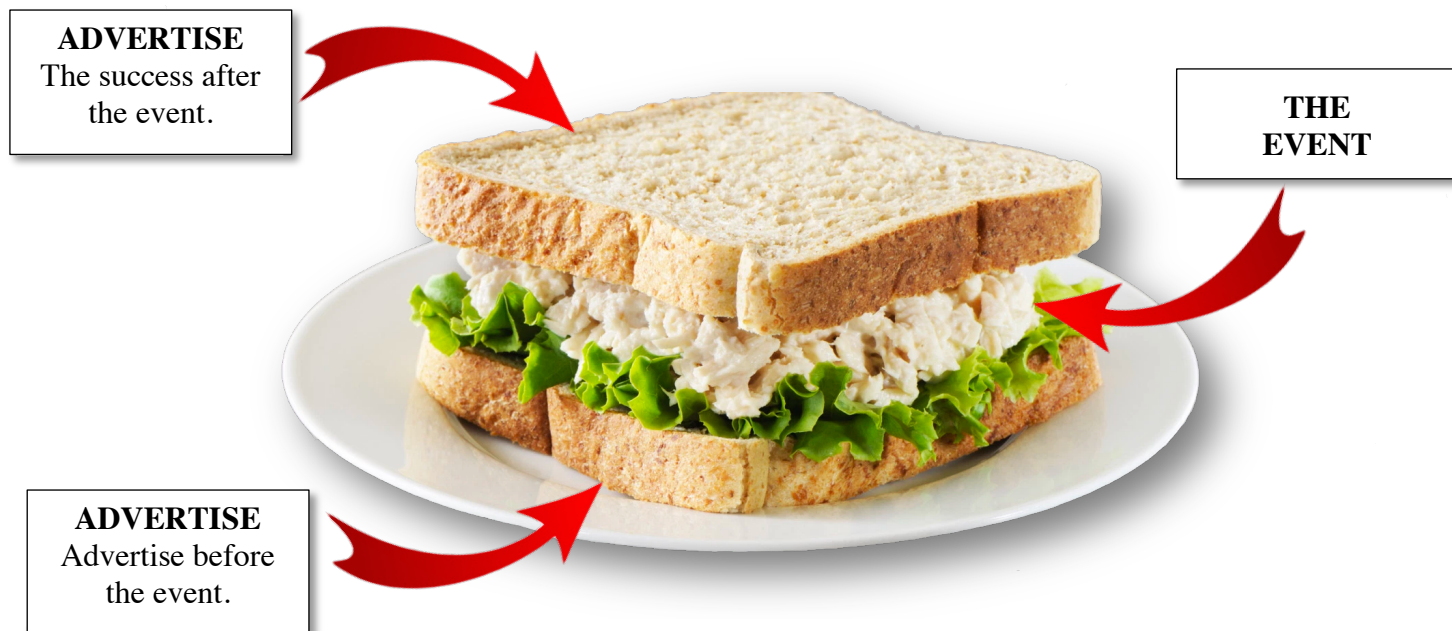
The job of a children's pastor is to do all he/she can, with God's leading, to reduce the frustrations while overflowing support and encouragement to each team member. It is the challenge of the children's pastor to create a warm, safe "nest" in which the team members can flourish and grow.

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."



Vision-based Recruiting

1. Advertise, publicize the ministry vision
 - a. Posters
 - b. Signs at check-in
 - c. Bulletin articles
 - d. Notes to parents
2. "Display the fruit" of the ministry vision
 - a. Testimonies
 - b. Videos
 - c. Casual comments "in the halls"
 - d. The "sandwich principle"



*Don't waste an event! Use it to recruit for the next event!
Recruit to your vision and use the fruit of the ministry in your favor!*

3. Invite the new volunteers to an “orientation” held during Sunday services. During the orientation:
 - a. Introduce the vision
 - b. Share some fruit
 - c. Introduce the coordinators
 - d. Conduct a tour or show a short video
 - e. Collect applications

Vision-based Training

Think what you will about “fast food,” you can’t deny the attraction of enjoying a meal within your window of time! The process of training your ministry team is much the same. In today’s world, you can no longer have a full day training seminar! The people who volunteer to serve in the children’s ministry are likely to be busy with other priorities. They are not interested in spending the entire day on much of anything. Besides the time issue, an all-day seminar is not as effective as a short, half-day introduction with an on-going, on-the-job training process. Effective ministry training must be a consistent process that is incorporated into the entire year.



Topics to cover during a half-day training seminar (9am – 12noon)

1. The critical importance of children's ministry
2. The children’s ministry vision
3. Overview of general policies
4. Building relationships with the kids and their parents (including STORIES)
 - a. At the classroom door (greeting kids and parents) – before and after the service

- b. In the classroom (classroom management)
- c. Within the lesson (child-focused, interactive, REAL application, personal)
- d. Outside the classroom (casual real-life encounters, teachable moments)
5. Age-appropriate procedures (small groups by class or department)
 - a. Learning styles
 - b. Specific classroom management issues
 - c. Schedules for the hour
 - d. Specific needs of the kids
 - e. Specific needs of the parents
 - f. Specific procedure/safety policies (especially check-in / out)
 - g. Specific set-up / clean-up procedures
 - h. Specific team member roles or partnership functions
 - i. Specific communication procedures (rotation, substitutes, etc.)
 - j. Specific curriculum issues or process
6. Final conclusion - spiritual moment of commitment and worship and reliance on God
7. Distribute significant ministry "giveaways" to entire team.

On-going training carried out by the director and the leadership team:

On-going training is much like a girl scout's on-going quest to earn patches. The scout experiences individual adventures, earns a patch, then proudly displays the patches on her vest. Your CM team will encounter small "bites" of training throughout the year. These small "bites" of training go into the team members' growing ability to minister to children safely and effectively. This on-going training can include "live" seminars, phone calls, emails, recorded messages available online, videos, newsletters, etc. The goal is to make "training" a natural process of serving!



1. Age-group characteristics and trends (kids and families)
2. Success stories (from own team and others) which inspire and challenge
3. Scriptural challenges regarding building relationships and discipleship
4. Challenges to personally recruit others
5. Age-appropriate classroom management and discipline ideas
6. Challenges and ideas for parent support
7. Ideas for "out of classroom" encounters with kids (soccer games, etc.) (share STORIES)
8. Age-group curriculum use suggestions and challenges
9. Ministry policies reminders and "refreshers"
10. Shared letters and comments from parents, pastors, and staff members
11. Leadership challenges and opportunities (coordinators, supervisors, etc.)
12. Community news that pertains to the children's ministry
13. Church news that pertains to the children's ministry

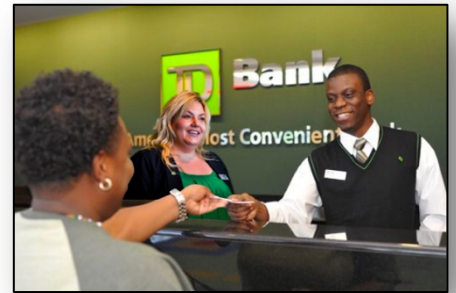
A "to do list" that the director needs to accomplish prior to the half day training:

1. Meet with the age-group leaders to discuss the training process and unify the leadership team.
2. Create, revise, or update the children's ministry vision statement (if needed).
3. Review your policies as they stand now (make plans to update if needed).
4. Create "giveaways" for the half day training (inspirational, vision-related items).
5. Schedule the room for the half day training, and the break-out rooms for the age-group meetings.
6. Print the schedule for the day.
7. Communicate with your team about the day (personal from you and mailed).

8. Invite the senior pastor to participate (speak on the value of children's ministry).
9. Decide on the refreshments for the morning (drinks, pastries, etc.).
10. Create the handouts for the morning (schedule, policies, vision, team roster, etc.).
11. Plan and purchase the decorations for the room (balloons, table and wall decorations, etc.).
12. Recruit help to run the morning (set-up, "registration" table, refreshments, etc.).
13. Prepare the age-group leaders and supplies for their small group meetings.
14. Reserve or acquire the A/V equipment for the large group room.
15. Purchase ministry-related "giveaway" items.
16. Contact volunteers about telling their story (you tell, they tell?).
17. Observe volunteers to look for ways to compliment them publicly.
18. Subscribe to the "Children's Ministry E-newsletter" from Group Publishing for entire team (childrensministry.com).
19. Pray diligently, eat well, rest hard, and laugh lots!

Require An Apprenticeship Period

New volunteers are afraid of many things. Any one of their fears (fear of failure, fear of doing something to hurt a child or a parent, fear of saying something spiritually wrong...) can stop them from applying or continuing in the ministry. A significant apprenticeship period will reduce the fears and add to the consistency in your ministry team.



1. Appoint "master teachers" as apprentice trainers.
2. Design an apprenticeship that increases in interaction with the children over time.
3. Set the apprenticeship period to at least 4 weeks.
4. Include evaluations, meetings, debriefings, etc. between the apprentice, the "master teacher," and the coordinator.
5. At the conclusion of a successful apprenticeship, the volunteer is recognized as an "official" children's ministry team member.
6. The new team member is included into a ministry team-teaching environment.

Establish Age-group Coordinators

In the "early days" of your congregation's development, one person (an associate minister or children's director) was able to keep track of all the children's ministry volunteers, curriculum, supplies, etc. As the ministry grows, that job becomes more and more difficult. Soon, it is not possible for one person to communicate, supervise, and encourage all of those who minister to the children. At this point, volunteers may feel "lost," neglected, or unappreciated.

The development of "middle management" positions in ministry is a Biblical principle. Moses was told to appoint seventy men to assist him in judging the nation of Israel (Numbers 11). The early Apostles chose seven men to assist in the care of widows in the early Church (Acts 6).

Age-group coordinators are your eyes, ears, hands, feet, and voice to the growing children's ministry team. The coordinators assist in training, apprenticing, supervising, rotating, mentoring, and encouraging the team members within their particular age group. It is much like sitting your CM team around round tables at a meal. They build relationships and support each other according to the specific age group in which they serve.

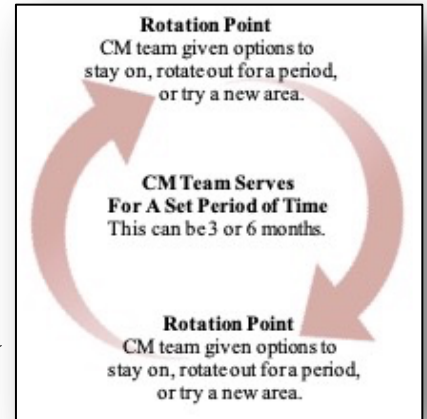


The process of establishing those who have the qualities of a coordinator can be time-consuming. Here are some ideas for finding those people from within your team, and developing them as coordinators.

Develop A Rotation Plan

The concept of “burn out” is well-known among those who serve in the children’s ministry. The children’s ministry has a “reputation” of overusing those who volunteer to serve in the ministry. This can actually be a very big roadblock to recruiting new volunteers!

In order to keep your ministry team members strong and refreshed, it is vital that you create a plan to rotate them! This rotation plan includes a guaranteed “time off” after a period of time serving. The rotation plan will actually **increase your recruiting potential** as well as provide you with a **substitute list** from which to draw when you are faced with sick team members!



The Plan

1. Every team member is “required” to “rotate out” from the ministry every 3 or 6 months. (In today’s busy world, 3 months might be easier to “sell.”) During that “rotation out,” the team member has options:
 - a. To have 3 months completely free of any ministry responsibility
 - b. To be placed on the “substitute list” for any surprise needs
2. Stagger your rotations so that only a couple of members of a team-teaching group rotate out at a given time. This requires much planning. Use your coordinators for this!
3. At the end of a team member’s rotation “out,” he/she has the option of serving in another age-group.
4. Use the rotation cycles as times of recruiting. Advertise the rotation system and announce “openings” in the children’s ministry team!