

Children's Ministry Wisdom

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These are the “bits of wisdom” that I have collected over the years. They may or may not be “transferrable” to you or to all children’s ministry (CM) settings. The Lord will give you specific wisdom for specific settings, in specific situations!

“This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it--the LORD is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’”

Jeremiah 33: 2, 3

The Essence of Ministry

“This is God’s ministry.”

- He created you and all the children and team members.
- He called you to this ministry.
- He is working THROUGH your amazing mind and passionate, faithful actions.
- There will be hard work followed by hard enjoyment when you fall into bed and know that “it is good.”
- Appreciate God's design of "seasons" throughout His creation. He brings things about, and then ends them "in due time"; but that doesn't make it easy!



“God can minister to the children WITHOUT you!”

- He could simply, miraculously, send angels or some other fantastic visuals to minister to the children.
- Instead, He calls, leads, directs, draws, and empowers people to teach His children.
- He likes the "challenge" of using people.
- He loves it when we fall on our faces before Him and beg Him for help as we influence children!
- He loves the work and the victories!
- He loves it when a child says, "Thank you," or hugs us.
- He is right there with us, soaking up that amazing goodness!

“God works in seasons.”

- God instilled “seasons” is everything He created.
- God uses “seasons” of fruitfulness and seasons of harsh winters in our lives and ministries as well.
- Ask God to help you “store up” good things in the fruitful times to survive the “winters.” Remember miraculous answers to prayer and treasured times of enjoying the fruit with the children and your team.

“Balance in ministry.”

- Many of David's Psalms begin with a "Woe is me, life stinks right now" perspective. They flow from that low beginning into a section of praise for God's presence and care; then they always end with a celebration of who God is and what He is about to do. This is the discipline that you need to practice. You face frustrations, react to them, then remind yourself of God's presence and move slowly toward the "no matter what, I'll praise you and serve you" mindset. Sometimes this process happens within minutes, sometimes it takes hours or days.
- In ministry, you have to "steal" time for yourself! This is why Jesus "withdrew to a lonely place alone" many times! The ONLY reason He did that, was to deal with His human exhaustion and frustration. He needed to restore and rest, and so do you.
- George Lucas was asked once about the pressure of completing a production. He said, ‘Sometimes, you're not ready, you just run out of time.’ It's the same with ministry.



- CM is "addictive." You care deeply and begin to develop an "addictive" perspective as you wade into the "bottomless pit" of things to do. The more you give, the more you need to give. Somewhere in the middle of that cycle of devotion and work, you see the faces of children and you hear the Lord's command to "Feed my sheep."
- The only way to survive children's ministry is to spread out the responsibilities and delegate. The best thing to do is to develop coordinators. Delegation is terrifying, but necessary. You must fight the "if you want it done right, do it yourself" perspective.
- A great discipline to develop is to "push away" from your desk and walk away from the work when it is time to go home. There are times when you just can't finish, and you have to tell yourself, "Go home." Ministry gets inside you and follows you home. Your family sees that you are home, but you aren't "there." This is not good. Remember that it is God's work, and not yours. When you "push away" before things are finished, I don't think God is in Heaven, saying, "What? It's not finished yet! Oh, this is bad! Now, what will we do?"
- The "bottom line" is always "What's best for the children," then right next to it is "What's best for you?"
- Remember, you are the ONLY shepherd the children may have at the church! Grab your staff (or rod), gird your loins, and jump in!
- As you're discovering, the needs of the children are sometimes placed under the needs of adults. God has called you to be the voice of these dear children in His strength. At times, you have to be willing to "battle," or "take the hit" for the safety and comfort of the children.



The People Over You



"Don't touch the Lord's anointed."

- Throughout scripture (1Sam. 24:6-10; Rom. 13:1-3) God clearly states that He establishes authority
- Regardless of our feelings, views, or opinions, we are to submit to, and support those over us
- Those over us are not perfect, they need our humble wisdom – HOW we do that is critical
- If you disagree with decisions, speak humbly while obeying faithfully
- God sees what is going on, He will protect you and the children – pray for clarity and unity

"Grumbling about a decision hurts the grumbler, God, and all who hear it."

- Sometimes it is important to "vent" – restrict this to your spouse or trusted friends only.
- Listen to what your "grumbling" is actually "saying" – ask God to convict and purify you.
- If you can't be positive, don't say anything – walk away, cool down, refocus, and return.
- Remember that God sees, hears, and knows – trust Him to fix the problem.
- Be open for God to "stir" you to humbly do something about the problem.



"Sometimes we must lose the 'battle'; but we must never give up the fight."

- Ministry can be about "battles" – God's wisdom helps you know when to "win" and "lose"
- In the "heat of battle," the one with the higher authority always wins
- Even in the "heat of battle" wisdom can be spoken cautiously and humbly
- Once the "guns" are put away, revisit the "issue" to better understand the differences (casually)
- The "revisit" must be started with "I want to better support you, help me understand..."
- In the course of "revisiting," understanding happens on both sides

“Be willing to “take the hit” for the children.”

- The needs of the children are sometimes placed under the needs of adults. God has called you to be the voice of these dear children in His strength. At times, you have to be willing to “take the hit” for the safety and comfort of the children.
- Being a “good employee” doesn’t mean being quiet. You were hired to specifically care for the children. So, speaking up and “taking the hit” for the children is what you’ve been hired to do.
- To “take the hit” may mean saying, “No” to your supervising pastor.
- To “take the hit” may mean saying, “No” to security personnel.
- To “take the hit” may mean saying, “No” to a parent.
- To “take the hit” may mean saying, “No” to a team member.
- To “take the hit” may mean saying, “No” to another pastor or ministry leader.
- God will always honor your protection of the children!

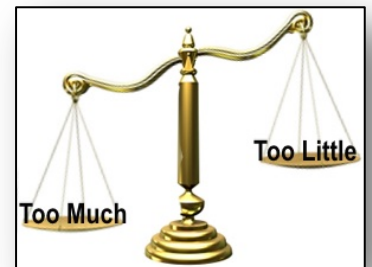


“Don’t let those over you forget about the children.”

- Improvements and advancements in the CM signal a “living and active” ministry.
- Budget figures must be increased yearly – a budget that doesn’t grow may indicate a stagnate ministry.
- Email updates to those over you regarding CM events, news, team reports, etc. increase awareness.
- You have to provide those over you with the same information that you have in order to have unity.
- Share success stories as well as needs for a “balanced diet” of CM.

“Always err on the side of too much communication.”

- “Too much communication” is ONLY a problem when dealing with personal or sensitive issues.
- “Too little communication” can cause division and incorrect assumptions.
- Copying supervisors in emails helps keep them informed and beside you.
- Keeping people “in the dark” is an act of power – people don’t like it.
- Sometimes, you are "stilled" by fear or by a sense that you don't know the "right" thing to say. Talk from your heart and let the truth be told. God blesses truth. Don't worry about "dressing" the truth. Just speak it.



The People Under You



“A good leader sees further down the road.”

- To protect the CM team from harm.
- To plan for surprises or danger.
- To prepare for changes.
- Prayerfully build your CM team (paid and volunteer) in anticipation of the growth, rather than waiting until the growth is upon you. A ministry grows into the leadership, rather than the leadership catching up with the growth. Leaders must be visionaries, and when they are too burdened with the "doing," they tend to neglect the "seeing."



“God will bless you to the degree that you bless and serve others.”

- God is very focused on HOW we treat others (1 Cor. 13)
- The use of “power” can cause division and discord
- Earning “authority” takes sacrifice and care – but the fruit of earned “authority” produces unity
- There is so much that is accomplished by just being nice!
- God’s blessing flows into those who are kind, meek, gentle, etc. (Mt. 5:1-12)
- It is always better to be truthful, “above board,” and honest in ministry leadership.

“A ‘team player’ always accomplishes more than a maverick.”

- God is very clear on His value of team unity. (John 17; Prov. 6:16-19; 1Cor. 12:12-29)
- Unifying efforts among team members may be challenging, but it is always “worth it.”
- Unifying efforts among various ministries is challenging, but it produces good fruit.
- Quickly confront a team member who is not a team player. Document the confrontation.
- Publicly compliment those who excel at teamwork. This challenges the others to follow.



“People won’t care what you know until they know that you care.”

- The easiest way to show respect is by knowing the person's name
- Team members or leadership subordinates must know that you care for them before you can lead them
- The easiest way to show care is to sacrifice or offer physical help (water, assistance, comfort)
- “Big ears, small mouth” is a great way to establish a caring relationship (listening rather than telling)
- Going out of your way to make someone comfortable and happy will produce strong bonds (both ways)

“The best way to influence people is to serve them.”

- Power is taken by force – the result is rebellion and hate.
- Authority is earned by sacrifice – the result is honor, obedience, and respect.
- Serving the CM team is like that scene in the movie, “Gladiator,” in which Russell Crowe's character tells all the Gladiator's to stand back-to-back against the foe. The ministry is filled with surprises, disappointments, and new expectations. Stand back-to-back and support each other as you face the oncoming challenges.
- In leadership and ministry, take advantage of “teachable moments.” These come with “open doors” to the heart. The more we capitalize on them, the greater our impact as leaders.



“‘MBWA’ (Ministry By Walking Around) is the best technique to build a team.”

- Some of the most powerful team development times come before and after a service
- “Walk around” before and after – encourage, thank, support each team member
- Personal contact is ALWAYS a powerful way to retain team members.
- The ‘selfish’ goal of developing a CM team is for you to be able to walk around during the service, with your coffee cup saying, ‘My, my, isn't it a beautiful morning!’
- When a new team member serves for the first time, swing by to see how things went.



“Develop and use others under you – they are your ‘sanity shield.’”

- Developing coordinators, assistants, or other leaders under you protects you from “doing it all”
- Initially, new leaders require some “break in” efforts – if done correctly, they add “wings” to you
- The more you can delegate functions to others, the better your sleep will be
- If you delegate responsibility, you must also delegate limited authority (under you, of course)
- You can retain responsibility and only delegate certain functions until trust is earned
- Make sure you communicate regularly with those to whom you delegate (positive, supportive, etc.)

“The most powerful team development tool is a compliment.”

- In today’s “electronic” world, a personal compliment is a powerful and memorable gift
- You cannot correct without first complimenting
- Don’t assume that team members know you appreciate them – tell them regularly
- Complimenting team members forces you to consider their feelings and needs – it is very healthy
- A verbal compliment is good – a verbal compliment with a touch is powerful
- Create a "cycle of respect." As you thank, encourage, and support, it will come back to you.
- Late recognition is weak recognition. The sooner a team member's service or attitude is recognized, the more significant and powerful that recognition becomes.

“The CM team is ‘fluid’ and changing.”

- Children's ministry is not an "exact science." The one consistent factor is that God is in control, and we must constantly be on our knees before Him!
- Always learn from people who "frustrate" you. They will reinforce the need for more communication and more consistent support.
- Do all you can to "fill" needs within the ministry but be careful to place people according to their interests, gifts, and comfort. If team members feel that they are simply moved around to fill "holes," then they will not stay for very long.
- If you have to move someone around to fill a "hole," make sure that you reinforce the fact that this is temporary.



“Drive out the scoffer and strivings will cease.”

- Proverbs 22:10 clearly identifies the results of having a “scoffer” in the team.
- A negative person can “corrupt” the whole team.
- Confront, challenge, and rebuke the “scoffer” – document when you do so.
- If the “scoffer” doesn’t improve, remove him/her from the team.
- Keep your supervising pastor informed of your every encounter with the “scoffer.”
- NEVER give a “scoffer” any “ammunition” to use against you. Be positive, yet firm.

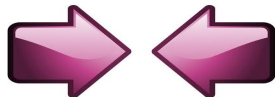


“The value of clarity, honesty, and equity in personnel titles, pay, and status.”

- Secure employees will always generate more positive "fruit" than those who question their value.
- When adding a new team member, always add for a specific function or title within boundaries.
- You can’t build a strong ministry team on "eggshells"! This doesn’t mean that we don’t care about people or their feelings, it just means that ministry is about priorities and doing what is right.



Politics and Policies



“Politics are neither good nor bad, it’s how they are used that determines their worth.”

- Understanding the “politics” (views, fears, loyalties) is critical.
- Submitting to the “politics” is the quickest way to surviving them.
- “Politics” can’t be “fixed” by battling them; it only makes things worse.

***"I respect your passion.
Tell me more
about what you're
thinking."***

“Making exceptions for influential people in the church may cause more harm than good, but it is the attitude and process of upholding the standards that can cause the most harm.”

- NEVER make an exception for an “influential” person when children’s safety is at stake.
- Always be respectful, but say, “No” firmly – take a hit for the children!
- If you are angry or hurtful – those reactions can cause much damage to the ministry, stay calm and firm.

“When in doubt, don’t.”

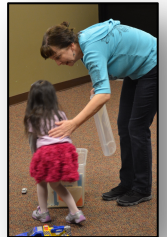
“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”

1 John 3:21

- This guiding principle applies to ALL areas of ministry (policies, procedures, communication, etc.).
- Your “doubts” may be the Lord guiding you or warning you.
- Identify your “doubts” and talk about them with your supervising pastor or with your leadership team.
- You may need to stand firm in the face of your “doubts” – others may not feel what you feel.
- If your treatment of a team member is emotional, “walk away” long enough to gain perspective.

“Make every decision based on, ‘What’s best for the children?’”

- This foundational principle will guide almost everything you do.
- Use this principle as you consider decisions that affect the team, the children and parents.
- Use this principle to “solve” impasses in which you are unsure of which way to go.



“Always protect the two S’s of team development”

- When joining classrooms to ‘take up the slack’ for missing team members, always remember the ‘Two S’s’: ‘Safety’ – never put the safety of children at risk by overloading a classroom, and ‘Sanity’ – always monitor the environment that you put the team members into. If their ‘sanity’ is threatened, you’ll do damage to them, or lose them.

“Understand your calling and ‘push through’ your fears.”

- Ask God to clarify your calling – understand your position and purpose
- “Push through” your fears as you operate in your calling
- God will always give you the strength, wisdom, and discernment to operate within your calling
- Sometimes the confidence you need to “push through” your fears comes after you step into your role and ignore your fears.

“Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing.”

- Joshua 3:15



“But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" - Matthew 14: 27-31

“A required curriculum prevents trouble.”

- The value of a required curriculum is that you can view a scope and sequence and see what is being taught at any point throughout the quarter. It helps you in your accountability to the Lord as well as to your supervising pastors.
- The "slippery slope" of too much freedom regarding what is taught in the CM will eventually cause trouble. At some point a parent will be offended and you'll have to clean things up. It is much easier to hold the line and maintain a tight control on the "boundaries" of what is taught. You can offer "freedom within bounds" for the teachers' creativity, while still requiring them to use the curriculum.
- You may "take the hit" from those who want to "do their own thing" in the classroom but be willing to take that hit for the sake of the children, consistency, and accountability.