

REACHING & LEADING

MILLENNIALS



**PRACTICAL
CONVERSATIONS
TO GET YOU
UNSTUCK**

BY TONY MORGAN & THE UNSTUCK GROUP

foreword by Haydn Shaw

Reaching and Leading Millennials: Practical Conversations to Get You Unstuck

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FOREWORD

When it comes to Millennials, churches are stuck. Churches of all denominations are struggling both to hold onto the Millennials who grew up in their church as well as to reach this first post-Christian generation who are outside the church. Consider these facts:

- Twentysomething Millennials are the most underserved group in the church. Most churches offer ministries for young people until they graduate from high school and then pick them up again as young families, but most churches, even some megachurches, have nothing for the majority of twentysomethings.
- As a result, seven out of ten 18-23 year olds, even those who were active in the youth ministry, will drop out of church for at least a year. A third of those don't come back.
- Millennials are less likely to claim any religious affiliation.
- The great recession of 2008 pushed back marriage for men to the age of 28 and dropped the childbirth rate in the United States. Churches have always been better at ministering to families with children and are struggling to catch up with the demographic shifts.
- Single Baby Boomers did attend church in the '70s, whereas today single Millennials, especially the men, do not.
- The new life stage between ages 18 and 28 that sociologists now call emerging adulthood explains many of the differences between Millennials and the other generations. The Millennials aren't the problem, our lack of understanding emerging adulthood is.
- And most disturbing, even those who grew up in churches that emphasize the Bible are more likely to explain (and distort) Christianity with psychological categories rather than theological ones. They misunderstand basic Christian doctrines but are quite confident they understand Christianity. It's no wonder many of them walk away from a watered down faith.

In my new book *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, the Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future Is Bright*, I suggest that ministering to five generations is the

single biggest challenge the Church faces today. Now that people live 30 years longer than they did 100 years ago, churches must serve five generations for the first time—and they struggle with juggling the needs and preferences of them all.

We will not reach five generations unless we dramatically increase our generational IQ. That's why I'm glad The Unstuck Group created this book to give us practical ideas for getting unstuck with Millennials. I recommend it for three reasons.

First, it's well written. When I first opened it, I had planned only to scan it so I could estimate how long it would take to read. I ended up reading almost the whole thing.

Second, it's short and reads quickly so you can send it to other leaders in your church and know it will get read.

Third, it's full of practical insights from people who are working hands-on with churches. I can't think of a single resource on Millennials that covers as many key topics and offers as many useful insights in such a small space as this one.

Haydn Shaw

*Generational researcher and author of **Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, the Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future Is Bright** and **Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart**.*

INTRO: WHAT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND HOLDS US BACK

As The Unstuck Group facilitates strategic planning retreats for churches all over the country, one of the most consistent priorities churches identify is attracting Millennials and young families. We haven't been to a church yet that has said, *"We don't really need to reach young people. We're doing just fine with an aging population and our old ways of doing things."* (Churches who honestly feel that way don't usually call us.)

Still, Millennials get a bad rap. We hear leaders complain that they don't follow through, they get bored too easily and are too self-absorbed. Under the specific complaints, however, we hear an honest frustration at the fact that what was working to reach this age group in the past isn't working any longer.

In 2015, the term "Millennials" included people ages 18-34. While we are not generational experts (we recommend you read [Haydn Shaw's research](#) for that), our team is working with churches across the U.S. every week that are learning how to connect with this crucial age group. We've seen first hand examples of where churches are succeeding and where they are not.

Many churches think they are being intentional about reaching this generation, but statistics continue to reinforce they are coming up short. Pew Research Center's [report](#) in the spring of 2015 demonstrated that Millennials are leaving Christianity and that there is a rapidly growing trend towards Americans with no religious affiliation at all. Millennials are closing their Bibles and turning away from the values their parents once held so dearly. "Be yourself," "feel good about your choices" and "do whatever works for you" are now the highest goals for many Millennials.

We can cover our eyes and ignore the fact that our churches are not connecting with the younger generations they desperately need to reach, or we can do something about it.

Churches have to understand:

- Writing off a generation because they have different issues is a stubborn and unproductive approach.
- Millennials were born into a very different world, and it is essential that they learn to live out their faith differently than their parents' generation.
- Fulfilling God's purposes requires figuring out how to speak the language of all of the different generations.

To borrow from Shaw, we have to start having the right conversations. Too many churches get hung up on talking about why young people won't come to their church. Instead, they need to be talking about what they are willing to do differently.

Seth Godin once said, *"Yesterday's remarkable is today's really good and tomorrow's mediocre."*

Mediocre is ineffective. What worked to connect with 18 to 34-year-olds in the 2,000's won't be the same things that work to connect with the same age group in the next decade. Reaching Millennials is not about building even better facilities, flashier stage designs and Disney-esque children's programs. It's about discovering what really matters to this generation, and presenting the truth of the Gospel in a way they can hear and understand.

What follows are a series of practical chapters to help you think through some of the most important aspects of reaching Millennials. We have included questions at the end of each chapter to help you and your team discuss where you are and how to move forward.

Now is not the time to wave the white flag. Actually, just the opposite. Now is the time to aggressively embrace and empower a generation that will be next to carry the baton.

CHAPTER 1

**MILLENNIALS
AND TECHNOLOGY**

The Millennial generation is the first to be considered “digital natives.” Churches cannot afford to miss the significance of this shift. Technology has built their world, especially when it comes to communication. If we do not understand the ways a generation communicates, how can we expect to fulfill the Great Commission?

We find most churches are far behind when it comes to technology, and generally, they are not too concerned about it. Here’s why that is a big problem:



If You Fall Behind in Tech, You Fall Behind in Culture

Tiffany Deluccia

Last year, I observed a smartphone culture phenom while sitting among 37,000 Clemson football fans at the Spring Game. A girl—maybe 18 or 19 years old—sat on the row in front of me, staring at her cell phone. From my angle, I couldn’t help but see her thumb furiously scrolling down her Instagram feed so quickly that the photos barely had time to load.

Every few moments she would stop for a millisecond to tap a photo twice to “like it” and then would keep scrolling. I don’t know how her eyes even registered the photos that her brain apparently interpreted favorably every couple of seconds. How could she process what she was “liking”?

It got me thinking.

Technology advances influence the behavior of each rising generation. I’m not going to debate the sometimes absurdity of that behavior. The point is, technology changes culture, and each generation is left to figure out how to sort the good from the bad impact it’s having on their lives.

The relevance of this goes beyond the discussion of church bulletins and newsletters. I’m a firm believer the Church needs to take advantage of new tools to build the Kingdom, but studying technology is also a cultural expedition. It’s modern ethnography.

If you were going to be a missionary to a village in the Amazon for the next 20 years, you would start by learning the language, understanding their customs and tools, and figuring out how the people live and make sense of their world.

The next generation—even in our own country—deserves that same diligence.

We fail when we assume because they are fellow Americans, born and bred in our own communities, that we automatically speak their language.

Technology builds culture.

Here are just a few of the recent major cultural shifts related to American young people and technology, and some questions you should be asking yourself:

Many teens now favor tech over clothes, and restaurant environments are increasingly popular hangouts because of free Wi-Fi.

via NY Times

- Are you creating Wi-Fi environments that make teens want to hang around your facilities?
- How tech and social media savvy is your student pastor? It may matter more than whether or not he dresses like a hipster.

Young women, in particular, have become obsessive about posting selfies and measuring the reaction of friends. Not unexpectedly, they also typically struggle with low self-esteem.

via Teen Vogue

- How are you addressing the “selfie” culture in your church? Craig Groeschel discusses this topic in his book *#Struggles: Following Jesus in a Selfie-Centered World*.

Teenagers are less interested in driving and owning a car than ever before. A smartphone connects them with their friends 24/7.

via NY Times

- How is your current student ministry strategy dependent on car transportation?
- How are you equipping your student pastor and volunteers to reach students where they are (online)?

Even MTV is losing traction with Millennials. Why? They haven't figured out a mobile strategy quickly enough, and Millennials don't want to pay for cable.

via The Street

- Are you relying too heavily on what used to be cool to young adults even just five years ago? Jersey Shore was a MTV hit, but that was 2010. Now the network has been experiencing a significant ratings decline. Culture moves on quickly.
- What is your **mobile strategy**?

YouTube stars are more popular than mainstream celebrities.

via Variety.com

- How many YouTube celebrities can you name? It's not enough to keep up with what movies young adults and teens are watching.
- Do you have a YouTube strategy? Its potential to reach people is greater than a TV ministry, streaming your sermons on your website, or even uploading all your video clips to Vimeo.

24% of teens go online "almost constantly," facilitated by the widespread availability of smartphones. 92% go online at least daily.

via Pew Research, April 2015

- How are you spending resources on online and mobile strategies as compared to your events and facilities budgets? Online may matter more in the long run.

These are just a few of the cultural shifts technology has brought about in recent years. As church leaders, we need to be students of technology and its impact on culture. Tech is constantly influencing both the people we're trying to reach and the methods we'll need to use to reach them.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What intentional steps does your church plan to take towards improving your understanding of technology and the ways Millennials use it?
- When was the last time you asked some Millennials to give feedback on your website, social media and/or mobile apps?
- Where can you lean into this generation's love of technology?

CHAPTER 2

**MILLENNIALS
AND MUSIC**

It's a generation that has every song in the universe at its fingertips—for free. Millennials have more access to quality music than any predecessor. The trend in church music for the last 15–20 years has been to mimic the concert environments that young people enjoy. Will that approach continue to connect with Millennials?

Maybe, maybe not.



Two Truths and A Lie About Millennials and Music

Amy Anderson

The research, and our personal experience, suggests music in the church is important to Millennials, but do most churches really know what Millennials are after? We took time this week to ask some young adults for their thoughts on this topic.

Here are two truths and a lie about Millennials and music, in their own words:

Truth: They love music that is authentic.

One of the most important things to Millennials is the need for authenticity. This is never more evident than it is in worship. They want real, messy, imperfect worship teams that model a genuine love and need for God. They need a leader who can establish a genuine connection with them. They are looking for a team whose hearts are prepared to lead worship, not a team whose minds are set on perfect execution...and perfect clothes.

Millennials choose passion with imperfection over polished excellence. One Millennial we spoke with said, *"Some churches try too hard. It's like being around that person who's always trying really hard to be cool and fit in. You just want to tell them, 'Be who you are!'"*

Another said, *"My husband and I were 'church shopping' last year after our church went through a split. We visited so many churches with quality music but zero evident passion."*

We wanted to be invited into the presence of God, not just stand in a room with strangers singing wordy, well-practiced songs. The church where we landed had quality and authenticity. The leader was more genuinely concerned with leading people to Jesus than perfection. It was a major reason why we came back after the first week, and then again, and ultimately a major reason we stayed."

Truth: They don't love overproduced music.

While many worship centers need to be equipped with sound, lighting and video so that worship teams/pastors can be seen and heard, almost every Millennial we spoke with gave examples of how their churches had crossed a line in at least one of these areas—becoming more of a form of entertainment than an invitation to worship and connect with God.

The biggest violator was lighting (bright lights in the face, moving lights), followed by extreme volumes. While these things are accepted and enjoyed at worship concerts, they were not okay in worship services.

One Millennial said, *"It's hard to connect (with God) with so much going on."* Another said, *"I can't invite my friends to church. It's too overwhelming."* Ouch.

Lie: To connect with Millennials music needs to be organic (unplanned), acoustic (unplugged), and intimate (unbig).

Millennials still enjoy excellent, planned and well-executed music. They still love a full sound where they can sing and not stand out. They still love a leader who has been thoughtful about what he or she is going to say. They still love a high-energy experience, and they still love a crowd.

But they also love it quiet. And they also love it a little raw. They want some risk, challenge and vulnerability in the experience. And they need a little personal space. And, really, don't we all?

One Millennial summed it up this way, *"I want real and relatable. I want permission to*

praise my Maker and be challenged to engage. I want leaders who aren't afraid of being seen as "weird" to newcomers, rather embrace this important piece of our faith and take a couple minutes to explain WHY we lift our hands and sing together."

When it comes to Millennials and music, the key is to lead and design it in a way that points people to God, not people. If you use that filter, you may reach more Millennials, and a few others, too.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Who influences your church's music most?
- How can you plan to keep evolving musically so that you don't get stuck?
- Why does catering music to young people tend to attract multiple generations yet catering to older generations only seems to attract older people?

CHAPTER 3

**MILLENNIALS
AND SERVING**

Books, newspaper articles, business magazines and countless blog posts have tried to dissect the collective mind of the Millennials. One point that consistently comes up, particularly in articles about attracting and retaining young adults in corporate jobs, is their need to feel they are contributing meaningfully to the world and doing something they believe in. They want to help other people.

The topic is complicated—this is also the generation for whom the term “*slacktivism*” was created—but it is worth delving into, especially since passion for serving those in need is something the Church is too often lacking.

Here are a few thoughts to get you started.



3 Insights About Millennials and Social Justice

Mitch Nelson

Unfortunately, my generation is often characterized as lazy, selfish and undetermined. We get press about how we are moving back to our parents’ houses, or how long it takes us to launch our careers once we graduate college, rather than the fact that we are the most educated generation ever, or that social justice is at the forefront of our minds.

In fact, many of us are using our education to start organizations and initiatives that are changing the world. Huffington Post shared an article titled, “*7 Millennials Who Are Too Busy Changing The World To Take Selfies,*” that speaks volumes to the types of changes our generation is capable of making.

The potential of this generation is too important to be ignored by churches and ministries. Instead of complaining about this generation’s flaws, why not engage its strengths?

The desire to do something meaningful runs deep, and in many cases, is an easy on-ramp for people both inside and outside the faith. Consider these three observations about Millennials:

They Care About Their Communities.

Millennials are not just mindlessly living where they are—they care about their communities. They want to contribute and make a difference. Beware of creating a church in a bubble (in the name of fellowship) that allows Christians to become isolated from the real issues the community is facing.

They Want To See Action.

Just talking about making a difference is meaningless to Millennials. They want to be part of a church that is doing things that are valuable, visible and memorable. They want to see words put into action.

They May Not Be Looking For A Sunday Morning Experience.

It's great to have a top-notch worship band and a talented communicator speaking every Sunday, but that is not necessarily what many young adults are seeking. They can become frustrated if it seems like a church's greatest aspiration is to gather a crowd on a particular day of the week.

People often bemoan that the Church in America is known more for what it is against than what it is for. Could the Millennials be the start of changing that stereotype?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you know what causes the Millennials in your church are already supporting? It might surprise you.
- How is your church helping people experience and connect with God beyond your Sunday morning service? How can you communicate that better?
- Are you intentionally recruiting passionate Millennials to lead in practical ways?

CHAPTER 4

**MILLENNIALS
AND THE BIBLE**

The Bible has endured attack for centuries. It seems like generations either cling to it or doubt it like the tides coming in and going out. We're experiencing one of those cultural shifts as more and more Millennials disregard the authenticity and authority of the Bible. Their children will be raised not just skeptical of it, but more likely, biblically illiterate. We can panic, or we can make a plan.

Church leaders have a big responsibility.



The Infallible Word of God? Millennials Are Not Just Taking Your Word For It

Tiffany Deluccia

During the 2014 Christmas season, Newsweek published an article that accused Christians of being ignorant of what the Bible really says, and also of having fabricated essential parts of the Scriptures throughout the centuries—the kinds of things on which we base our faith, like that Christ claimed to be God.

Setting aside the fact that the author did exactly what he accused Christians of doing (failing to verify the accuracy of his research and citing only texts he believed supported his point), the story concerned me. This is why: As a young adult who believes the Bible is full of life-changing truth, I was motivated immediately to find out what credible Bible scholars and other Christian leaders had to say in response. I would venture to guess that a large percentage of the young adults who read the article were less motivated to seek out contradiction.

A few months earlier, Barna Group had released a [study](#) on Millennials and how they view the Bible. In some ways, the research seemed encouraging. It found that practicing Christian young adults still have a very traditional, high view of Scripture. But it also found non-Christian Millennials have mixed and sometimes extremely negative perceptions of the Bible—and also of those who read it.

According to Barna's research, non-Christian Millennials' view of the Bible should make pastors stop to think hard about what "relevance" means to this generation.

Non-Christian views of the Bible often tip from benign indifference toward strong skepticism. While a plurality of non-Christian Millennials relegate the Bible to merely a “useful book of moral teachings” (30%), nearly half agree with more negative characterizations: About one in five say the Bible is “an outdated book with no relevance for today” (19%) and more than one-quarter go so far as to say the Bible is “a dangerous book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people” (27%).

“We believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God.”

Lots of pastors make this statement from the pulpit, on their websites and in one-on-one conversations. I’m not taking issue with it. But I do want to shine the light on the fact that young non-Christians don’t simply disagree with it, many are skeptical of people who make claims like that. And if young Christians can’t explain why they agree with that statement, they are not in any better of a position to reach their peers for Christ than you are.

What’s to be done?

Millennials need pastors who are proactive in addressing their questions, pastors who try to see through their lens and then jump in to provide clarity. They need pastors who read Newsweek and aren’t afraid to discuss the issues on Sunday or after church on their blogs. They don’t expect you to have all the answers immediately—in fact, too quick a response probably inspires distrust.

Many Millennials would love to ask their questions but are not always bold enough to do so. They tend to start with a Google search. And Newsweek is there waiting with an answer.

If you really want to reach the next generation, you need to be in tune with the skepticism of the culture and preach the truth of Jesus unashamedly, but also not expecting them just to take your word for it. They need more than to know you believe the Bible is inerrant: They need to know why.

Can you and will you make delivering that message a priority?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does your church create environments that welcome doubt, skepticism and questions?
- What language are you using regularly that assumes people sitting in your Sunday morning seats know and have a respect for the Bible? How can you adjust to acknowledge those who are more skeptical?
- How can you be proactive in addressing the questions people have about the Bible?

CHAPTER 5

**MILLENNIALS
AND THE CHURCH**

Every generation has preferences that shape what they believe the Church should be and how it should look. With making disciples as our directive from Christ, we believe God invites our creativity and loves the diversity of His people. That means, from culture to culture, the Church can look different, so long as its focus is Jesus and His way.

That also means, from generation to generation, the Church can look different.

One thing is certain: Reaching Millennials will require engaging them to lead and sometimes reimaging the models we created to connect with them.



Two Alarming Trends in Churches That Say They Want to Reach Millennials

Tony Morgan

So far, I have never served a church that was uninterested in reaching young people. I have served plenty who say they want to while doing nothing to substantiate the claim. But overall, most churches see leading the next generation to Christ as the top priority.

With that priority in mind, I'm seeing two trends on a regular basis that are each alarming in different ways.

Churches that want to reach young people don't actually have young people involved in any visible roles.

No young staff members teaching from the stage. Few young greeters or leaders of groups. No young musicians or singers. Little if any imagery of young families on their websites. (Relevant imagery on church websites is hugely lacking... but that's another topic for another day.)

The message you send is very clear to a 20 or 30-something: We want you to come and absorb what we're dishing out, but we don't want your ideas, your creativity,

your culture or your interests affecting what we have going on.

It's not a subtle message either. Young adults pick up on non-verbal cues very quickly, especially in your communication channels. If you want to attract young adults, you will have to make the young adults you already have visible.

And what that really means is that you need to be equipping and empowering them to lead and to do ministry.

The other issue we're seeing is the exact opposite:

Churches that want to reach young people have only young, attractive people involved in visible ways.

A band full of hipsters. A greeter core made up of college students who smile at other young people and get awkward with older folks. Video and photography that clearly reads "We are young, and we like people who look like this. If you're one of us, you're welcome here."

I have no doubt they don't intend to communicate an "exclusive" message. The danger is in knowing your audience so well that you create an insider-embracing culture of a certain type of person. All young people in your city aren't hipsters, and all Boomers in your city aren't country club members.

As we're sure you can guess, of the two, the churches who are being extremely intentional about the way they brand themselves typically do reach their target market better. But when it comes to who you make visible in your church, it is possible to be intentional without becoming exclusive.

It wouldn't hurt for us all to remember 1 Samuel 16:7, *"Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

That means not dismissing a potential leader because of how young he is, and it

also means not dismissing a humble and talented musician because she isn't your standard of cool. Remember that Millennials are turned off by inauthenticity. They just might be able to sense if you feed them a Hollywood-scrubbed version of the family of God.

Give young people opportunities to visibly lead. You may be surprised by the ideas they bring to the table.



Future Church: How Millennial Leaders Will Make Disciples

Ryan Stigile

In just the past couple decades, the Church has experienced a major transition as the Sunday School model has been replaced by small groups. This strategic shift was pioneered by forward-thinking leaders seeking a more effective method of discipleship relevant to their culture. While this transition was critical, I'm sure it's not the last to be made. As our culture continues to change, our methods will undoubtedly have to adjust.

What future shift could be on the horizon? Here's what I believe:

Volunteer teams have the potential to replace small groups as the strategic cornerstone for community and discipleship.

By "volunteer teams," I'm not just talking about people who serve during weekend worship services. While those are certainly important, the greatest potential lies with serving in the community. The work of the Church, after all, is to equip followers of Christ to do as He did.

Consider the following factors that could lead the Church to this change:

Millennials are already serving more than previous generations.

In 2014, The Associated Press **reported** a significant increase in the level of

volunteer involvement among adults under 30 years old. In 1989, just 14% of adults under 30 volunteered. In 2013, that number reached 20%. Granted, one out of five leaves plenty of room for growth. But previous generational trends suggest that Millennials will only get more involved in community service.

Millennials are already serving with the purpose of developing community.

Churches utilize small groups to develop relationships. Volunteer teams have already shown that they can accomplish the same goal. Recent **research** from The Case Foundation suggests that over half of volunteering Millennials serve with the motivation of meeting new people. If you've ever been a part of a service project, you've likely seen what happens when strangers discover a shared sense of purpose as they work toward a goal they could never accomplish as individuals.

Service projects can be strategically leveraged to form small groups.

Service projects provide a great opportunity for people to meet and make personal connections. In fact, they're much more relational than the majority of small group connection systems. In the near future, could churches replace registration forms with service projects and lead people to form groups with those they meet while volunteering?

Service projects are incredibly invite-able.

As the unchurched rate in our society grows, we cannot continue expecting people with no felt need for the Church to see immediate value in our worship services. Service projects on the other hand are naturally valued by the vast majority regardless of their opinion of church. How much easier could it be for your members to invite their friends to serve the community?

We just might look more like the Church Jesus called us to be.

When Jesus called his followers to be salt and light, He was clear on what that looked like:

*“In the same way, let your **good deeds** shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” Matthew 5:16 NLT*

What if the greatest evangelistic strategy lies outside of our buildings?

I’m not suggesting that the principles underlying small groups have no place in the future church. But as society continues to value community involvement, it is only a matter of time before the Church also heightens its value for volunteering to engage more people in community and discipleship.

What incredible potential the Church has to organize, equip and commission groups of people to do what Jesus did in their own neighborhoods. The bond formed in doing ministry together is uniquely powerful, providing the opportunity for a level of community that most of our churches have yet to experience.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How are you intentionally equipping young adults to lead in visible ways?
- How could you reimagine the purpose and process of your small groups and volunteer teams?
- How could you involve Millennials in designing church-led volunteer opportunities to which they could invite their unchurched friends?

CHAPTER 6

**MILLENNIALS AND
THE CHURCH BUILDING**

The church building has changed over millennia, from the gothic architecture of Notre Dame to the iconic steeple to modern facilities that get mistaken for shopping malls. Each design has served a purpose in its time. Where we typically get hung up today is not on completing a magnanimous monument to the greatness of our God, but more simply, on thinking we always need the newest thing.

The truth is, regardless of the age or style of your church building, you have the opportunity to create a space that engages Millennials. Here's what we mean:



4 Tips for Designing Spaces for Millennials

Ryan Stigile

When I was in high school, my youth group did its best to make our church sanctuary look relevant on Thursday nights. With foam insulation panels, pipe and drape made with umbrella stands, and the cheapest can lights that money could buy, we set out to create a space that our peers would appreciate. What we got was a lesson in DIY (Do It Yourself) church design. Frankly, it looked like Home Depot threw up in our sanctuary.

Designing a space for Millennials is a challenge many churches are up against. With the generation (18 to 34 years old) hitting a prime “come-back-to-church” stage of life, leaders should be rethinking their spaces. But since most have a building from a previous generation, many can easily feel like there is little they can do.

What will it take to re-engage Millennials with our buildings? Just last year, [the Barna Group asked Millennials](#) to select words that described their ideal church. Here are a few word preferences that may surprise you:

Sanctuary, not *Auditorium* (77% vs 23%)

Classic, not *Trendy* (67% vs 33%)

Quiet, not *Loud* (67% vs 33%)

Along with a few words you might expect:

Casual, not Dignified (64% vs 36%)
Modern, not Traditional (60% vs 40%)

And the word most often chosen by Millennials:

Community, not Private (78% vs 22%)

There's no doubt that some of these preferences seem contradictory. Sanctuary and Classic appear in contrast to Modern. So what does this research mean for the local church?

You'll never appeal to everyone.

Millennials are way more complex than they are often assumed to be. One church could never appeal to an entire generation. Take time to understand the young adults in your community. Then be clear about the type of person you are working to reach.

An older building should be seen as a resource, not a restraint.

Many leaders view their aging building as a detractor to Millennials. But the truth is that many prefer a more traditional space. If you have the privilege of leading in an older building, leverage its character. The worship and teaching must offer relevant meaning, but a traditional space can be a resource.

Create space for relationships.

More than anything else, the research showed Millennials value community. Most buildings from past generations were not designed with this in mind. Small lobbies and tight hallways make it difficult to hold a conversation. If this is your situation, get creative and develop space for relationships. Dedicate a visible area as a cafe or remove a wall to open up nearby classrooms. I once saw a church utilize its front lawn by adding tents and patio furniture.

Don't forget about families.

Many Millennials are beginning to have children. As you develop space for relationships, make sure they are comfortable leaving their kids in your hands. Walk a few parents through your space and ask them how you could make it feel more exciting, comfortable, and secure. Use wall space to artistically show the values you're teaching.



Q&A With the Experts

As we explored this topic, we caught up with our friend Steven Chaparro, Project Executive for [Visioneering Studios](#). Steven and his team have done extensive work helping churches of all sizes design new buildings or redesign their current facilities.

What trends have you seen in church building design that focus on reaching Millennials?

Steven: More than anything, there is a trend for churches to see themselves as more than just a “temple” or as a place where only sacred things happen. We have seen many churches take the approach of becoming what we call a “postmodern Jacob’s well.” Just as the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus at the well, or the center of the community, churches are offering members of their community reasons to intersect within their natural rhythms of life.

Many invite people to come and connect, grab a cup of coffee, play a game of basketball, or collaborate in a workspace. Churches that are doing this are offering more reasons for Millennials to come that are already part of their natural rhythms.

In your opinion, what do Millennials care most about in a church building?

Steven: Community. I am not even sure that it’s about the lights, technology or even music. There are a lot of places that can offer that. In fact, it’s been said many times that Millennials are the most technologically connected, yet the most lonely.

Any church that offers spaces for community through lounges, outdoor gathering spaces, collaborative workspaces, etc. will be an attractive place for Millennials.

How can churches best serve young families through their buildings?

Steven: One practical step is to develop a good way-finding system. When a parent can't find their way around a building, their anxiety level can be high. There should also be a "wow" factor that causes children to want to drag their parents back week after week.

A great team exercise is to script the experience of a young family from the time they first visit the church's website all the way to the point when they arrive on the campus, are greeted, check their kids in, and experience the service. At Disneyland, they script the experience from the gates to the castle to make it the "Happiest Place on Earth."

Many churches have a building that is at least 15 years old with no current plans to rebuild. What are some practical adjustments they can make to their current buildings to better engage Millennials?

Steven: Lipstick on a pig. I know that's crass, but sometimes it's that simple. Paint will go a long way, but it needs to be done right. Choosing the right colors, adding environmental graphics, changing backdrops, and even laying out the space in a new way can do wonders.

We have helped some churches completely transform spaces with lighting and staging. We have learned lessons from hotels that are transforming their lobbies from compartmentalized spaces to open planned lobby/lounges.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Is your attitude about your facilities helping or hindering your mission as a church?
- What elements could you address immediately to improve the appeal of your building to Millennials? What projects should go on the long-term planning list?

CHAPTER 7

**MANAGING AND
LEADING MILLENNIALS**

Millennials can be some of the most passionate, driven and innovative leaders in an organization. They can also be unfocused, preoccupied and difficult to motivate. Because Millennials think differently about life and work, successful leadership requires leading with a different and unique perspective. Making a few small changes can lead to dramatic results.



Leading Millennials Who Attend Your Church

Tony Morgan

One priority question that consistently comes up in our strategic planning sessions is, “How can our church attract talented, young leaders?” It would be nice if there was a simple A-B-C formula that would make young leaders flock to your church. The reality is two churches could sing the exact same songs, have the same modern facilities, and preach an identical message series but still experience completely different results.

How can that be? Because there is not a very simple answer to that question, I’d like to follow-up with three questions of my own:

What are you doing to get Millennials in the door?

Churches can’t have Millennial leaders without first attracting Millennials. This is where I think branding becomes a key factor. It’s important to understand that your brand matters to Millennials. Not having a clear brand quickly lumps you in with the thousands of other churches who are not standing out, not being heard and not being known for anything significant.

Millennials want to know the story of why your church has a higher calling than just getting people in the seats. They want to understand how they can fit into the big picture. This story is told in the parking lot, on church signs, digital media and through the culture that is created. These things all matter, and if your church isn’t being intentional, you are probably not seeing your desired results.

When Millennials do show up, how do you engage them in leadership roles?

Have you considered that your current structure may be making it difficult for leaders to get involved? This happens in both large and small churches. Sharp leaders are trained for a role, they learn the church DNA, show that they are dependable and quickly become a fixture on the team. Once all the necessary roles are filled, recruiting leaders becomes an afterthought until the next leader deficiency arises.

I think every Christian has a role in the church. Deep down, everyone wants to discover that role; everyone wants to make a difference. The problem occurs when churches make it difficult to get involved or unintentionally give off the vibe that they don't need any more leaders.

If your church is fortunate enough to engage Millennial leaders, how do you keep them?

I know an usher who started volunteering when he was 19 and is now 29. Today, this probably isn't going to be the norm.

Initially, when Millennials start a new role, they are excited about the new opportunity and are eager to serve. Greeters, parking lot team members and ushers can always learn new things, but there comes a time when someone's leadership capacity outgrows their current role. When this happens, they may leave the team, looking for something else to inspire and fulfill them. This is where many churches completely miss the mark. They train for roles rather than prioritizing leadership growth.

Leadership development must be an extremely high priority for churches to reach and keep Millennial leaders—an essential part of the discipleship process for people who have these gifts. Especially if your church is reaching the unchurched, they will not intuitively know how to get involved in leadership as they grow spiritually unless you are committed to helping them.

So, ask yourself these questions and answer honestly. Our churches need more Millennial leaders.



What to Start (and Stop) Doing When Leading Millennials

Jason Vernon

Many churches hire young leaders but never fully maximize their potential. They put them in situations that lead to discouragement and possibly even burnout. Making a few changes in how you lead the Millennials on your team can create lasting positive results.

Practically speaking, here are 10 things to stop and start.

Stop trying to uphold outdated policies and procedures that ultimately create a rigid work environment. Forcing Millennials to adhere to a strict office schedule with no flexibility is a quick way to lose young staff.

Start letting team members come in later when they have exceeded normal working hours. Use technology so that team members can sometimes work from home.

Stop assuming Millennials don't require affirmation. Many Millennials came from "helicopter parents" who constantly told them they could do no wrong. This obviously doesn't fly in the real world. It is inevitable that young leaders will make many mistakes as they grow. However, churches can tend to focus on the negative rather than noticing the good things young staff members are accomplishing.

Start being intentional with new ways to show value and appreciation. In a world consumed with text messages, emails and social media posts, handwritten thank you cards go a long way. Five minutes of undivided attention can be a game changer.

Stop micromanaging the daily tasks of young leaders. Millennials want to do work

that matters. They quickly become frustrated when every minute detail of their day is monitored. Their creativity and passion is blocked when you get involved in projects they can handle on their own.

Start empowering Millennials by giving them the resources they need to accomplish the vision. Once you have empowered and provided proper resources, walk away and let them thrive.

Stop giving Millennials projects and responsibilities without clear expectations. They want to know why they are doing what they are doing. They want to understand what success looks like. They very much want to win but grow discouraged when they are trying to hit a moving or unclear target.

Start defining what the win looks like. Always take time to explain the “why.” Clearly describe what the expected outcome should look like and how they will know that they accomplished the vision.

Stop making approval processes difficult. Many Millennials complain that they work extremely hard on projects but feel paralyzed because once a task reaches a certain point, they wait too long for decisions and approvals to be made.

Start empowering Millennials to make quick decisions (creative, financial, etc.). Help them understand exactly where to go with questions and concerns.

Stop underestimating Millennials. Many times they are given mundane tasks until they serve their time and prove their worth. Ironically, Millennials are more than likely the most tech savvy, innovative thinkers on the team.

Start helping Millennials reach their potential by giving them responsibilities that stretch their capacity. Give them a seat at some of the tables where decisions are made.

Stop isolating Millennials with solo projects. This keeps them from learning from other more experienced leaders and also lowers motivation.

Start forming high capacity teams of all ages that are not afraid to tackle big challenges.

Stop throwing Millennials right into their tasks when they come on board. Churches can travel at such a fast pace that it is tempting to let new team members hit the ground running. This communicates a negative culture to the new team member and also presents an environment that reacts to circumstances rather than being proactive with a clear strategy.

Start looking for mentors to partner with new Millennial team members. This gives them a chance to understand the organization while learning from a proven leader.

Stop assuming that Millennials are developing as leaders on their own.

Start creating a leadership development plan. Once a new team member is in place, he or she needs to have a clear understanding of the growth path for their job.

Stop leading with no clear mission and vision.

Start communicating the mission and vision and let Millennials develop strategies to accomplish them.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How are you currently investing in the leadership development of the young adult volunteers in your church? What needs to change?
- How are you equipping the Millennials on your staff to succeed? Where are you holding them back?

CONCLUSION

CONTINUE TO LEARN

Instead of blaming young adults for not engaging in our ministries, it's about time we start taking some responsibility. Our strategies and systems are broken. Our basic assumptions are often wrong. The Gospel message doesn't need to change, but the methods we use to reach people for Jesus has to reflect our current environment.

There's a reason why **churches and denominations are in decline**. We continue to be religious about using the same methods hoping and praying they'll somehow generate different results. That's a recipe for decline and ultimately death.

Of course, we'd rather be comfortable in our own preferences than take risks that may help us reach the next generations. And, that's another reason why churches are stuck.

We sincerely hope these chapters start meaningful discussions about what needs to change. We all must commit to continuing to learn, in humility and with great passion, to see our nation's largest living generation discover faith in Jesus, the hope of the world.

BONUS

WE CAN'T STOP AT MILLENNIALS

As we mentioned at the start, Millennials are comprised of people ages 18-34. That means the teens in your student ministry and the kids in your children's ministry are part of yet another generation—one that will have its own particularities, preferences and issues. As we work hard to understand Millennials, we need to be cognizant that what we learn will not stand forever.

There is little information out there to study about this youngest generation living today (though MTV is already *analyzing* them), so use your eyes and ears. And pray that God will open the eyes of your understanding long before you ever get stuck.



Why 3 Young Christians Do Not Invite Friends to Their Megachurch

Tiffany Deluccia

I sit in my usual Friday workspace, the hipster coffee shop with great chairs and the longest wait times. Three high school girls sit down across from me at the communal table, and I try to block them out with cheap headphones and loud Spotify. No dice. Can't help but hear their chatter. One of the 10 branded silicone bracelets on one girl's arm catches my eye. These three attend the student ministry at one of the largest churches in the country. And they are so close, I can't help overhearing...

They are trying to start a Christian club at their school, a breakfast club for students, with worship, prayer and teaching once a week before school starts. This is their brainstorming meeting. What should this thing be like? Here are their bullet points:

- They want community. It should be a place where everyone feels like they belong.
- People who come shouldn't feel like a number. The names and stories behind the numbers are important.
- It should look and feel homey and welcoming. Not just like a big empty room.
- One wants it to look really adorable. (She doesn't elaborate.)

- They think it's ok to start small, so they can make sure the leaders are super passionate.
- Capturing photos is important. One promises to bring her Polaroid. (I laugh out loud.)
- They think t-shirts are a must. Probably goes back to that feeling of belonging.
- They understand that social media is essential to this thing's success.
- They're planning a vision night. (That makes my heart happy.)
- They're matching their teaching ideas to songs they love. (If you didn't like the latest Hillsong United album, you'll probably need to get over it. It's connecting with young people.)

The over-priced lattes arrive. The cold-brewed coffee follows. The "dirty hippie" drink isn't what the girls expected. They pass it around and sip, turning up their noses.

At this point, I had to break my silence and ask, "So, you girls attend (megachurch). Why do you want to start this thing at your school? What will it give you that's different? How could (megachurch) do that for you?"

They were honest:

- "A lot of people at our school have a bad perception of our church. They won't come when we invite them. But God spoke to us that He wants us to be a light at our school. So, we want to find a way to reach them with something we think they'll come to. Maybe that will also help us change the bad perception."
- "Our student ministry has middle schoolers and high schoolers combined. We feel like the teaching is geared towards the middle schoolers. We want something more direct, more on our level if we're going to invite our friends." (I ask them if they've shared that feedback with their leaders. They say no but think their leaders would be open to hearing from them. I suggest they should speak up.)
- "We love our student ministry, but we know we can reach our friends better."

I apologize for interrupting them. They smile, and say sheepishly, “Thanks for asking us.” They invite me to a city-wide worship night they helped organize, an event created by high school students to try to unify the churches in our city. They go back to planning, and read [Ephesians 4](#) together. They talk about teaching things they learned at church to their high school friends. Before they leave, they follow me on Instagram.

And I can’t help but think to myself:

Maybe we adult leaders need to *theorize less* about the best ways to reach young people and *personally invest more* in the ones we’ve already reached. It sounds like they have ideas, if we’re willing to listen and support them.

The larger your church, the more difficult it may be. These young disciples are holding their own vision nights and creating their own services to reach their friends in ways they feel their student ministry can’t. In a lot of ways, that speaks to the success of their student ministry’s impact on their lives. But it also sounds like that same ministry may have to evolve to keep drawing in young people.



Predictable: A Final Challenge to Youth Pastors

Tony Morgan

Earlier this year, I shared my thoughts on predictable weekend services. You can read the articles in the series here:

- [Predictable: It Feels Like I Am Attending the Same Worship Service Every Sunday](#)
- [Predictable: 9 Reasons Your Church Services Are Stuck in a Rut](#)
- [Predictable: 4 Biases to Promote Creativity and Make Services More Engaging](#)
- [Predictable: 9 Practical Challenges for Church Leaders](#)

I want to conclude with a challenge specifically for youth pastors. That’s right. I’m talking to you.

I'm an old guy now, but I haven't always been old. Back when I was in my early twenties, I used to be involved in youth ministry. I loved youth ministry because I really felt like I was on the front lines helping students wrestle with life issues and find new life in Christ.

Of course, student ministry was a lot easier twenty-some years ago. Some of that was because the environment we were creating for students was so unique. Our monthly "Big Events" were filled with relevant teaching, current music, engaging activities and other creative elements. It was very different than what the students might experience on Sunday morning.

We got away with a lot. The old people were never around, so no one ever complained that it wasn't expository preaching. No one ever complained about the music we chose, and the music was never too loud. There were no traditions to follow, so we never had to worry about offending church people...particularly the ones who gave a lot of money. And, in the process, hundreds of students had the opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Over the last few decades an interesting transition has taken place in the church. Those youth pastors ended up planting churches. When they became the senior pastors, they took the strategy they used with students and used it for adults. And it worked. People like Bill Hybels launched brand new movements that completely transformed the church in America. For many, many people, church became relevant for the first time.

What I find ironic, though, is that today's youth pastors are oftentimes trying to recreate Sunday services at some other less optimal time of the week. Only now, the teaching, music and the other elements of the student gatherings aren't typically as good as what the students might experience on Sunday morning.

The Challenge

Rather than competing with Sundays, I think it's time youth pastors reinvent student ministry all over again. It's time for you throw out the rule book. Go ahead.

I dare you. How could you best reach as many students as possible for Jesus? Don't just give me the company line based on what your preaching heroes would say. Those guys used to be youth pastors. They were the rule-breakers, and now they're the old guys.

I really believe there's an opportunity out there for today's youth pastors to help us break through the predictability challenge. Create something brand new. Take some risks and fail. In the end, though, I'm praying you help us find a way to reach more students for Jesus and help them experience the abundant life only found in Christ.

That's the win. Doing something new just to do something new isn't the win. Doing something new that helps people become fully-devoted followers of Christ is the win. And the more that happens, the better.

Are you ready for that challenge? If so, I'm one old guy who is in your corner hoping you'll start a new movement that transforms the church in America.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- "Millennials" has become such a buzzword, and church leaders talk about this generation all the time. What have you noticed about the next generation—the junior and senior high schoolers—in your church? How are they different?
- How can you be a church that leads the movement to reach this next generation?

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