

Doug's Top 10 Youth Ministry Commitments

[Taken and adapted from Doug Field's *Your First Two Years In Youth Ministry*]

1. ***I will move slowly.***

If you're a volunteer, immediately suggesting changes may communicate a divisive or critical attitude to the lead youth worker. If you're the lead youth worker, fast changes can appear arrogant or reveal a maverick's personality to your church.

Instead of making changes, keep a record of all potential changes as soon as you think of them. This allows you to give them prayerful consideration. Hang on to your list. Continue to be a critical thinker in the arena to which God has called you, but realize you don't have to apply all (or any) of the ideas that come to you. Slow down. If you're in this for the long haul, what's the rush?

2. ***I will regularly check my motives and evaluate my heart.***

God honors pure motives, and the more you check yours, the stronger your leadership and decision-making will be. If your motives are pure, you'll persevere, reproduce student ministers, be productive, and contribute effectively, all while having fun. Most conflicts arise from unclear, mixed, or impure motives. If you don't personally evaluate your motives, others will – and if they're not pure, the impurity will be exposed.

- Why do I want to lead this ministry?
- Why do I want to teach this material?
- What's my motive for saying yes to that request?
- Why do I *really* want to change this program?
- When do I let people know I don't have a clue about what I'm doing?

3. ***I will steer clear of the numbers' game.***

You don't need to be in youth ministry long before you hear this famous question: "How many kids are in your group?" I've heard it asked more times than I want to admit. Now I feel embarrassed for the person who asks this question. It feeds more into the myth that bigger is better and that the value of your leadership is based on how many students you have.

Throwing out numbers can be exciting or debilitating depending on who you're talking to. Bigger isn't better; healthier is better. Steer clear of churches and youth workers who are driven by numbers, and surround yourself with those who are motivated by serving God faithfully and pursuing health.

4. ***I will not criticize the past.***

It's tempting to talk about the past with contempt to make yourself look better in the present or as an excuse to justify a change. Don't do it! Honor those who went before you in the ministry. Some students will wish you were like their last youth worker. But God didn't make you like that last person. In time the students will move forward.

5. ***I will avoid the comparison trap.***

This commitment has a similar result to the numbers game since it can't lead you anywhere good. When you compare you lose. Either you're filled with pride because you're better than another person, or you're dejected because you don't measure up. Both attitudes are wrong and destructive. Comparison places what you know about yourself (or your ministry) against what you don't know about another youth worker (or their ministry). That's not a fair evaluation.

6. ***I will focus on priorities.***

The many demands of youth ministry will keep you busy. But when you're spread too thin, you'll eventually snap. Don't more isn't necessarily good youth ministry. Doing the right things, based on your priorities, is good youth ministry regardless of how much time you have available to spend. The most effective youth workers are the ones who know how to focus on what's expected of them.

7. *I will pace myself.*

Hopefully, you're in youth ministry for a marathon, not a spring. Right away, you must learn how to stay in shape. Since youth ministry is never finished, and more can always be done, learn to take daily stretches – breathers throughout your day and week so you can be refreshed. Discover places, moments, and people who provide refreshment from the busyness of youth ministry and take your mind away from all that needs to be done.

8. *I will serve.*

The longer you're in youth ministry, the more likely you'll be in positions where you lead and others follow. That's fine, good, wonderful, and even appealing. But Jesus gave the church a unique model of leadership that requires serving. If you want to be a great youth worker, serve. If you want to be first, be last. If you can't serve, you can't lead, at least not as Christ intended. You're in incredible example of Christ to church leaders, members, and students when you serve. Actually, you're never more like Jesus than when you serve.

9. *I will be a learner.*

I can only teach what I know, and this truth requires me to keep growing. This habit is especially important to maintaining a decent self-esteem, since many of the teenagers in my church think I don't know anything.

Make a commitment today to be an eager, life-long learner. Read. Listen to tapes. Discuss ideas with people you disagree with. Sit at the feet of teachers who are younger and older than you. You'll learn from your mistakes, but a wise leader is proactive and learns from others, too.

10. *I will pursue contentment.*

Ministry isn't easy. One of the most frequent results of discontentment is leaving, walking away from your ministry. When you leave your youth ministry too soon after arriving, you hurt the church. Students stop opening up when adults rotate through their lives. The next leader has to deal with the backlash.

Short-term commitments may be beneficial for the adult, but they damage the student. If you want to survive, pursue being content with where God has you and the gifts you've been given. Stop looking over your fence into your neighbor's yard, and thank God he's using you where he has you. You've heard the adage, "The grass is greener on the other side"? The truth is, the grass is greener where it's watered. So start watering your own grass.