



# UNSTOPPABLE YOUTH MINISTRIES

**SNEAK PEAK**



# INTRODUCTION

HIRING THE RIGHT YOUTH LEADER IS NOT THE ANSWER

## UNSTOPPABLE YOUTH MINISTRIES

*WRITTEN BY DUANE SMITH*

In 1981, at the age of 20, I received an offer for my first youth ministry leadership position. I had not yet landed on youth ministry as a vocation, but the affirmation of my emerging gifts and the excitement of such a possibility drew me in. I'm not quite sure what the ministry Director was thinking, hiring a 20-year-old for the level of responsibility needed, yet he saw something in me that moved him to take a chance. I made numerous mistakes, yet through it all, God affirmed his call in me to this amazing, challenging, draining, yet rewarding work of youth ministry.

By God's grace, I've had the privilege of serving youth in various capacities for over four decades. I've witnessed radical shifts in youth culture, many of which are still occurring today. I began when video technology was in its infancy, thinking that a VCR and TV was an incredible tool (some thought a tool of the devil) only to witness the evolution of technology, bringing the amazing realities of the world to our fingertips. While I've experienced many failures along the journey, God graciously allowed me to experience many undeserved, positive results. These results were not random, but tied to intentional, strategic efforts that applied continued learnings to current and future endeavors. Other colleagues, many of whom remain committed to today's youth, shaped my learnings by forging and pioneering new strategies and approaches that prepare youth to radically live their faith, amidst the complexities of shifting youth culture and the inability of most churches to adapt and build sustainable, transformational youth ministries.

Despite the plethora of available books and resources, the church continues to struggle with youth ministry. At the same time, there are pockets of encouragement where we see a few churches get “beyond on the box” to a new paradigm that produces lasting results. A great challenge we face is an increasing gap between our churches and culture, resulting in cultural lag. This is causing many youth to conclude that the church is no longer relevant or has little to offer them as they navigate the complex realities of emerging worldviews. In spite of our efforts to shrink this gap, we've seen little change that would produce a different outcome. Why is this?

Examining job hiring sites like ChurchStaffing.com and others, we can conclude that the position descriptions outlined for most vocational youth leaders do not represent a “beyond the box” robust approach, but rather a paradigm that is twenty or thirty years in our rearview mirror. Ironically, our events-based, attractional strategy didn't yield lasting results back then, yet we persist in using these outdated methods in the hopes of achieving a different outcome. Someone once coined this as the definition of insanity. Should you choose to read on, one of my biggest observations and concerns is the church's consistent bent toward “outsourcing” youth ministry, hoping that if they just land the “right” leader, that they will experience a different result. While I am not against the hiring of a youth director or pastor, churches often hire with the wrong expectation of how vocational leaders should approach their role. Likewise, they too often mistakenly transfer power and authority to the hired staff person, relying on this young adult to cast their vision for the youth ministry, versus hiring someone with the skills to understand the church's vision, and then implement a vision that truly aligns with the church. Unclarified and misaligned expectations, coupled with a lack of accountability, have left most of our churches in a state of limbo, with their youth ministry gaining little to no momentum as they watch their youth depart.

It's no wonder that as of the writing of this book, upwards of 75% of churches in America have stagnated or are in decline. Many are aging out, with the average age of their congregation being 50 or higher. These churches often lack young families, given that their teenage children have little to no interest in the church. Finding the right youth leader will not solve this dilemma. Only as we engage the hard work of building a solid framework that truly prepares and empowers youth to embrace a radical, transformative faith, will we see our seats on Sunday morning begin to fill again by youth and young adults.

This book does not blame churches for their cultural lag. There are numerous reasons for the loss of relevance. But we need to stop repeating what doesn't work. If you are a young vocational youth worker, do not accept a church ministry position where the weight of the youth ministry falls on you while the congregation sits back and waits to evaluate your performance. Should you accept such a position, my prediction is that you'll be looking for another job within two years or less. If you are a lead pastor, a church elder, or you represent a group of parents that are hoping for something different in your church's youth ministry, don't fall into the trap of “outsourcing” your youth ministry, hoping for different results. It's not the answer.

The first section of this book outlines the paradigm shift that is needed, and only as this shift occurs will your church move from hoping they make the right hire to laying a life-giving, faith-producing, sustainable foundation that will produce the results in youth that you are longing for.

The second section will focus on empowerment, empowerment of a ministry team, empowerment of youth, and the very important value of empowering parents.

The third section will help you further work out various strategies as we consider four, possibly five different groups of youth you'll want to embrace.

The final section will help you leverage available resources while you further lay the groundwork for a thriving youth ministry.

Within the chapters ahead, I'll leverage insights and observations from a number of trusted authors. Several write specifically about youth ministry while others bring business or other organizational insights to the table. With each resource, I'll attempt to interpret and apply their thoughts directly to the context of an unstoppable youth ministry that will create agents of flourishing.

Understand that this is not a "how to" book. Considering that there is no "one size fits all" solution and that effective youth ministry always evolves within context, you won't find a "plug and play" approach. You'll notice words like "consider" and "explore" multiple times. My purpose is to help each reader think critically about all the various components that require attention, knowing that every component must be crafted and adapted to fit your unique context and culture. Although most of us did not receive training to become adaptable agents, I believe we can acquire these skills through practice and time. My hope is that my approach will help you further acquire and sharpen such skills.

Throughout the various sections, I'll refer to [unstoppableym.com](http://unstoppableym.com), where you will find a large array of downloadable resources. Some are free (as part of free membership) while access to all resources will require a small annual contract fee. We use all collected fees for further research, which leads to the availability of more helpful resources.

Finally, I am with you now, and I will be with you in the future. You are not alone in your God-ordained calling. My hope is that someday we'll meet in person, but if that doesn't happen, I pray that emerging technology will allow us to engage in collaborative synergy together as we forge ahead in our efforts to equip and empower youth as world-changing ambassadors of Christ.

Thanks for picking up this book. Let's dive in!

