



part 1 of 3—

Being a Pastor / Coach to Your Children's Ministry Leader

by John M. Palmer

Today's effective pastor also needs the skill and heart of a coach. A successful athletic coach leads, motivates, teaches, and corrects. One of America's all-time greatest coaches is John Wooden. He coached the UCLA men's basketball team to 10 national championships in 12 years. Wooden, who is 91 years old and a committed follower of Jesus, was the consummate coach.

One of his best players, Bill Walton, said, "John Wooden taught us how to focus on one primary objective: Be the best you can be in whatever endeavor you undertake. Don't worry about the score. Don't worry about image. Don't worry about the opponent. It sounds easy, but it's actually very difficult. Coach Wooden showed us how to accomplish it."¹

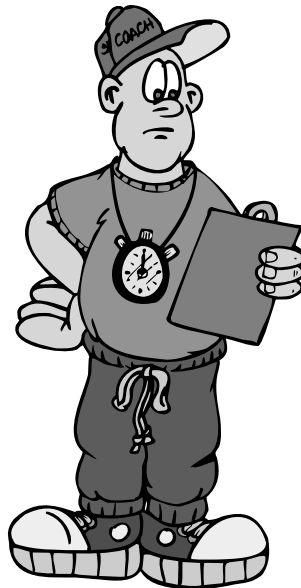
The pastor-coach will do the same. An enthusiastic, visionary, loving, Spirit-anointed pastor-coach is the key to effective local church ministry. And one of the most vital ministries in the local church is children's ministry.

The pastor-coach has three primary responsibilities in providing effective leadership to a local church's children's ministry.



Find the Right Person

The key to an effective, growing children's ministry is the leader. Whether paid or volunteer, male or female, young or old, full or part-time, it doesn't matter. The leader makes or breaks the ministry.



And just as the basketball coach needs to find the right person for each position on the court, so the pastor-coach must seek God's wisdom to identify the person(s) to lead the children's ministry. The ability of a pastor to build a ministry leader-

ship team is as crucial as his or her ability to preach God's Word. While great preaching will draw a crowd, it takes an effective discipling ministry to grow and maintain a solid, soul-winning church.

What kind of person should the pastor-coach look for to lead an exciting, spiritually alive children's ministry?

Spiritual Qualities

The children's pastor should be a person:

- ❖ who loves Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ whom God has called and anointed to minister to children.
- ❖ who is submissive to spiritual authority.
- ❖ who has a burning passion to see children saved and disciplined.
- ❖ with a Christlike servant's heart—that is, a person who is not looking for a position of ministry but an opportunity to minister.

Personality and Character Traits

The children's pastor should be a person:

- ❖ who loves children and enjoys being with them.

- ❖ whom children love and are drawn toward.
- ❖ with integrity.
- ❖ who has high energy and a contagious passion.
- ❖ with a good sense of humor.
- ❖ who has the capacity and desire to continue to grow.
- ❖ who can effectively communicate with children and adults.
- ❖ who is creative.

Leadership Skills

The children's pastor should be a person with the ability to:

- ❖ connect with and encourage people.
- ❖ understand and motivate people.
- ❖ gather and recruit people.
- ❖ equip and empower people.
- ❖ develop and multiply people.

While all of the above qualities, traits, and skills are important, few people possess all of them. With the Spirit's anointing, incredible things happen in our ministry, even when we are inadequate. The apostle Paul believed and taught: "Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Corinthians 3:4,5).

You can have an effective chil-

dren's ministry if your children's ministry leader(s) embodies the spiritual qualities and personality/character traits identified above. However, if you desire to have a cutting-edge, growing children's ministry and one that effectively reaches and discipled a larger number of children, it is essential that you prayerfully seek someone who also possesses or can develop the five leadership skills listed above. Without these skills, an individual, no matter how Christlike and committed, can only minister to a limited number of children. But when a person with the spiritual qualities and the personality/character traits also has these leadership skills, there is no limit to how many children he or she can influence with the love of Jesus.

Finding the Right Person

Whether in a smaller church or a larger one, here are some practical things a pastor-coach can do to find the right person to lead the children's ministry.

- Pray that God will raise up someone in your congregation who already possesses the gifts and passion for children's ministry.
- Pray that God will help you disciple and mentor someone who has the potential gifts and passion for children's ministry.

- Pray that God will help you lead someone to Christ who eventually could minister to children. (Several of our most effective children's ministry leaders have been individuals whom we led to Christ and discipled.)
- Share your heart with your deacons and other ministry leaders in your church. Ask them to pray with you.
- Ask a neighboring pastor to assist you in identifying and developing leaders in your church. Others are willing to help if we are not too proud to ask.
- Ask help from your district office. Your district leadership will consult with you about your situation. They love you and want to help.
- Call the student ministries office at one or more of our colleges. They will provide names of graduating seniors or recent graduates who have a passion for children's ministry.
- Because leaders attract leaders, develop your own leadership gifts. As you do, you'll find that young leaders will ask if you have a place for them.

This article is reprinted from the *Enrichment Journal*, published quarterly by The General Council of the Assemblies of God. For subscription information, contact GPH at 1-800-641-4310.



part 2 of 3—

Being a Pastor / Coach to Your Children's Ministry Leader

by John M. Palmer

Equip the Children's Ministry Leader

While the children's ministry leader (either paid or volunteer) has the responsibility to equip or "prepare God's people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12), the pastor-coach has the privilege of helping to equip the children's ministry leader by:

Association

Spend time to develop a good relationship with the children's ministry leader. The Gospels record that Jesus called His disciples to "be with him" (Mark 3:14). As He spent time with the Twelve, Jesus poured himself into them, equipping them to effectively do the work He would ask them to do.

All of us are busy. But if we want to be the kind of leaders who are developing and multiplying people, we must spend time with those we are leading. If you will spend time with your children's ministry leader and develop a solid personal relationship, your children's ministry leader will begin to flourish.

Instruction

There are things your children's ministry leader needs to know. Your instruction-investment will reap a big harvest. Coach Wooden was a great coach

because he was a great instructor. He taught by example and word. A little bit of instruction each week, over time, will result in an excited, maturing team member.



Demonstration

While instruction is *telling* them what to do, demonstration is *showing* them how to do it. This is a powerful way to equip and train. For example, one of the best ways for the children's ministry leader to improve his/her preaching is to watch you preach. Encourage your children's ministry leader to closely observe you and other leaders so he can more readily learn. Jesus not only instructed His disciples concerning prayer, but He showed them how to pray.

They learned by watching the Master.

Giving Feedback

Positive and corrective feedback is essential in the training process. Your children's ministry leaders need to know when they have done well and when they could improve. And while corrective feedback is absolutely critical for growth, positive feedback is even more important.

A word of caution: Some pastors have strong perfectionist tendencies; they expect a lot of themselves and of others. While that quality is good, it can be a source of discouragement for leaders under them.

In the past, I have discouraged several young assistant pastors. My tendency has been to point out the areas in which improvement is needed rather than to give positive feedback for jobs well done. I deeply regret having done that.

As I change and grow as a leader, I am learning the value of giving much more positive than corrective feedback. Positive feedback is an effective way to equip and train.

Provide Resources

Provide as many resources for your children's ministry as your church can afford. Resources could include:

Budget. Whether it's \$500 or \$50,000, provide finances for the children's ministry. Money is needed for training materials, retreats for the children, puppets, appreciation dinners, and curriculum.

Seminars and conferences. An effective children's ministry leader needs to master skills: administration, leadership, recruiting and training, dynamic preaching, puppets, storytelling, balloon animals, and illusions. It is money well invested when you provide opportunities and encourage your children's ministry leader to attend local, regional, and national conferences. An alert and growing leader will benefit greatly from them.

Here are three practical notes about seminars and conferences:

1 If possible, provide the money to send your leader with his/her spouse.

2 Ask your leader to research the various seminars and conferences that are available, and put together an appropriate budget. Then the two of you decide together which opportunities would be best for that individual.

3 Many districts conduct annual training conferences. Encourage your children's ministry leader(s) to participate in and support them.

You may ask, "Why invest all that money in training? They'll become effective and some bigger church will hire them away from us." That may happen. But which do you prefer—a well-trained leader who is with you for

awhile, does a great job of evangelizing and discipling your children, then leaves for another place, or an untrained nonleader who stays with you forever? I'll take the former every time.

- Assist with recruiting volunteers for the children's ministry. In nearly every church, the largest cadre of volunteers are those who minister to children. It takes several committed people to provide ministry through Sunday School, children's church, Royal Rangers, Missionettes, Junior Bible Quiz, and well-staffed nurseries. You and your children's ministry leader are teammates, so do all you can to help him or her succeed in building a strong children's ministry team.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What steps can you take to equip your children's ministry leader(s)?

This article is reprinted from the *Enrichment Journal*, published quarterly by The General Council of the Assemblies of God. For subscription information, contact GPH at 1-800-641-4310.



part 3 of 3—

Being a Pastor / Coach to Your Children's Ministry Leader

by John M. Palmer

Senior Pastor, First Assembly of God, Des Moines, Iowa

3 Empower the Children's Ministry Leader

Turn your children's ministry leader loose to do what God has called him or her to do. One of the most frustrating things for an assistant pastor or a lay volunteer ministry leader is having responsibility but no authority—being given a task but not the freedom to do it.

Some pastors are good at asking someone to do something, but not good in letting him or her do it. Let's face it—they probably won't do it like we would, or as well as we could (at least at first). But if we insist on monitoring their every move, we will stifle their enthusiasm, creativity, and desire to do what God has called them to do.

Here are a few practical tips on empowering others to minister:

Establish Boundaries

Discuss with your children's ministry leader what you expect. Let him know if there are some things he is not permitted to do.

Discuss Lines of Accountability

To whom is the children's ministry leader accountable? With

whom will he meet on a regular basis to discuss the ministry?

Discuss Compensation

Is this a voluntary ministry position? Is there part-time pay? If your children's ministry leader



is full-time, how much will he be paid? Are there other benefits, such as health insurance, vacation, mileage, or ministry expense reimbursement? To avoid misunderstanding later about the compensation package, spell out the details in writing when you hire your children's ministry leader.

Communicate

When bringing in a new chil-

dren's ministry leader, be sure your church leadership, children's workers, and congregation are made aware of his responsibilities and expectations. While specifics of compensation are certainly not to be shared with the congregation, it is important for them to know whether this person is full-time or part-time and what his or her individual responsibilities are. This communication benefits everyone.

From time to time, give your children's ministry leader an opportunity to speak to the adults for a few minutes during the Sunday morning service, or let him preach on Sunday morning. When you allow your children's ministry leader to share his heart with the adults, you are empowering that person and making effective children's ministry more possible and probable.

Encourage and expect your children's ministry leader to try new things, be creative, and make mistakes. You may have a burn mark on the new gym floor (as we do) when an illustration doesn't go exactly as intended. But it's not the end of the world. Maturing disciples—not having a stain-free floor—is our goal.

As pastor-coaches, the members of our team may sometimes disappoint us. But let's not forget the many times they have made us proud. If we will do our best to prayerfully and wisely select the best individuals to lead our children's ministries teams; if we will do our best to equip our children's ministry leaders to do the

best possible job they can do; and if we will empower them by turning them loose, we will have many joyful experiences and positive memories.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What steps can you take to empower your children's ministry leader(s)?

This article is reprinted from the *Enrichment Journal*, published quarterly by The General Council of the Assemblies of God. For subscription information, contact GPH at 1-800-641-4310.