

by Tim Schmoyer



1930

YOUTH MINISTRY
TIPS & IDEAS

Who this ebook is for

This ebook was written for the small-church youth leader who volunteers their time from a huge heart for students but has very little training and even feels a little lost in this whole youth ministry thing. It's also for the new youth pastor who is just starting out in his or her first youth ministry position and needs some pointers to help get started and tips to avoid common mistakes. However, that said, there are still plenty of ideas here that will benefit even the veteran youth worker.

The inspiration for this ebook

My wife's grandmother follows much of what I write concerning youth ministry at [Life in Student Ministry](#) and is always eager to pass it along to her church's youth ministry volunteer team. Several times she's asked me to pull all my content together in a book and sell it. Although I'll never sell this ebook because I'm a strong supporter of the open source community, I finally heeded her advice and attempted to compile many of the youth ministry tips and ideas from [Life in Student Ministry](#) into one place. Youth Specialties also has a [list of tips](#) for youth workers that inspired some of these ideas.

This ebook continues at <http://timschmoyer.com>

If you enjoy this ebook, check out my *Life in Student Ministry* blog at <http://timschmoyer.com> where I regularly post



other youth ministry tips, ideas, thoughts and free resources. In fact, you can [click here and sign up to receive all site updates automatically by email.](#) Registration is free!

What you can do with this ebook

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1. Share stories from your own life when speaking to teenagers. Show them that what you're talking about is real and personal, not just something theoretical from scripture.
2. Admit failure. No one is perfect, so don't pretend like you are. Students will respect you more for it.
3. Take advantage of the free videos on YouTube. Some of them make great lesson illustrations.
4. Learn every student's name as soon as possible. It communicates that you take a personal interest in each of them individually. Avoid calling anyone by generic nick-names like, "Dude" or "kid with the glasses."
5. Communicate with parents as much as you can. Informed and valued parents will be supportive parents.

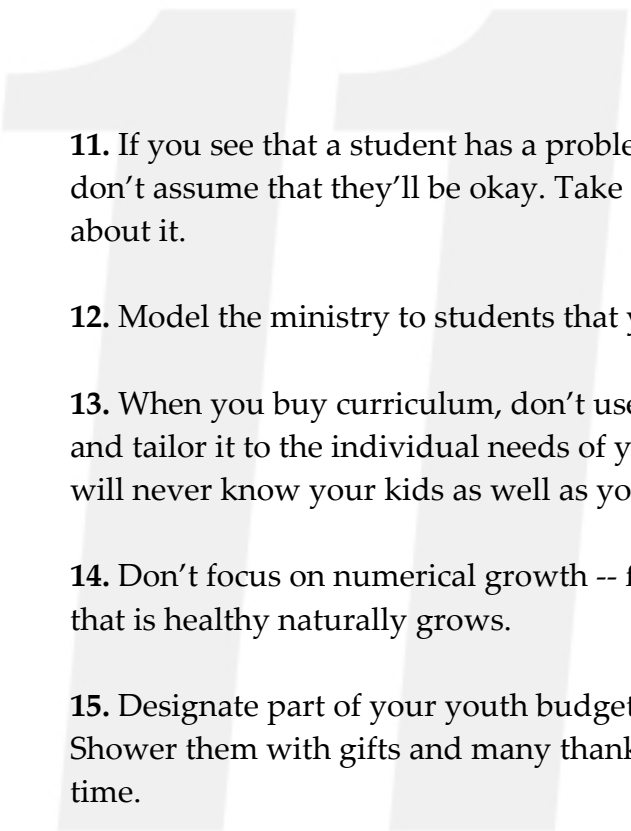
6. Remember, you're the leader before you're a friend. Don't "lower" yourself just to gain approval or to be "cool." Students don't need another friend, they need someone they can look up to and trust.

7. Affirm your students in everything they do and always encourage them, both publicly and privately.

8. [Buy a phone number from Skype](#) and use it as an information center "hot line" for students and parents to call to hear the latest news and announcements.

9. Ditch the "Christianese." Use language teenagers understand. Your deep theological lesson and countless hours of preparation mean nothing if they don't know what you're talking about.

10. Give students opportunities to write down prayer requests that can be shared with the church body. Distribute these requests to adults in your church who will pray for them.



11. If you see that a student has a problem or is struggling with something in life, don't assume that they'll be okay. Take a couple minutes to talk with him/her about it.

12. Model the ministry to students that you want your volunteers to imitate.

13. When you buy curriculum, don't use it "as is." Go through it ahead of time and tailor it to the individual needs of your students. The publishing company will never know your kids as well as you do.

14. Don't focus on numerical growth -- focus on being a healthy group. Anything that is healthy naturally grows.

15. Designate part of your youth budget for monthly [volunteer appreciation](#). Shower them with gifts and many thanks for their hard work, dedication and time.

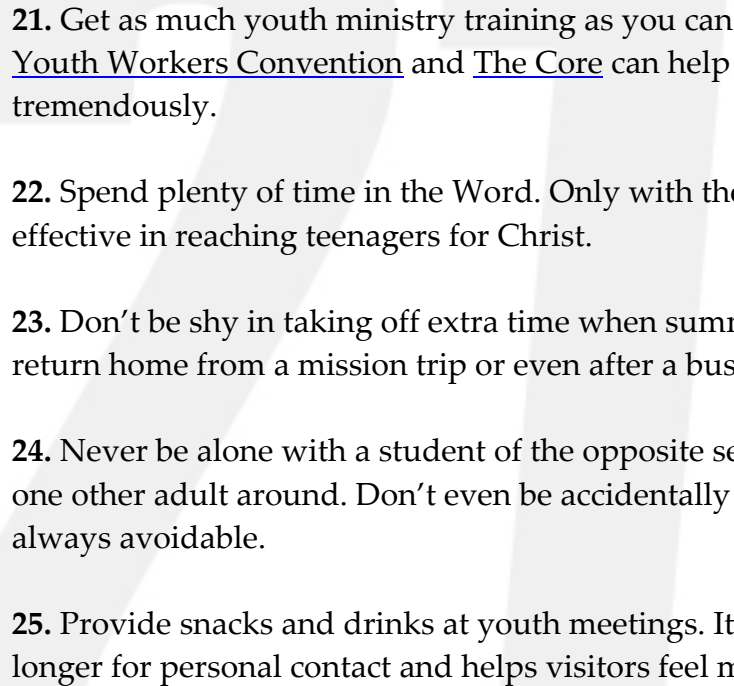
16. Don't take yourself or your circumstances too seriously. Nothing is ever as bad as you think it is and nothing is ever as good as you think it is.

17. When at youth group, try to give kids the same amount of attention. However, outside of youth group, don't apologize for investing extra time into a couple specific kids.

18. Run your ideas by the Sr. Pastor to get his/her input.

19. Don't do things or say things that are prohibited for the kids. Whatever standard you hold for them is the standard you should follow, too.

20. Do ministry out of imagination, never out of memory. Create the future instead of repeating the past.

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- 21.** Get as much youth ministry training as you can. Events like the [National Youth Workers Convention](#) and [The Core](#) can help you and your group tremendously.
 - 22.** Spend plenty of time in the Word. Only with the Lord's wisdom can you be effective in reaching teenagers for Christ.
 - 23.** Don't be shy in taking off extra time when summer camp is over, when you return home from a mission trip or even after a busy time of the year. Rest up!
 - 24.** Never be alone with a student of the opposite sex. Make sure there is at least one other adult around. Don't even be accidentally caught in this situation. It is always avoidable.
 - 25.** Provide snacks and drinks at youth meetings. It keeps kids around a little longer for personal contact and helps visitors feel more relaxed.

26. Don't become emotionally attached to every student's need or try to rescue them from every problem. There's no way you can provide all the emotional stability every student needs and not burnout. You are here to support teens, not be their savior.

27. When a student consistently makes a scene, fights for attention, or acts out, don't be too quick to make judgments about him/her. Chances are there are things taking place in that kid's life that cause him/her to act that way. Love the student and talk openly about their life issues and then deal with those things.

28. Don't over-react about the problem of cliques. Instead, provide plenty of opportunities for everyone to interact and discover each other. Breaking up cliques is usually an exercise in futility and somewhat counter-productive.

29. Never attempt to control everything. You cannot control all the planning, the results, the future, the people, the workplace, the weather or God, so don't even try.

30. If you have not already done so, join your kids in their online worlds. Create a Facebook account, join MySpace, get AOL Instant Messenger, read their blogs and even start one of your own.

31. When implementing changes in the ministry, make sure you do so in a respectful and thoughtful way that brings others along with you. You're not a leader if no one is following.

32. Get students involved in the life of the body as much as possible. Encourage them to participate in leading worship, taking the offering, handing out bulletins, ushering, sharing their testimony, etc.

33. Base your self-worth on God, not the "success" of your ministry. Be diligent in investing your life into teenagers the best you know how and then leaving the results up to Him.

34. Form a team of adults who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.

35. Keep good records of any budget money that's spent, not just for the church's sake but to protect your own reputation and integrity.

36. Always cover any ministry expenses for your volunteers. Without them the trip wouldn't even be possible. The least you can do is cover their expenses so they can continue to serve without financial restrictions.

37. Don't hold expectations too high for the kids. Let them come to youth group and just be themselves.

38. There's no greater gift you can give students than well-trained passionate volunteers. Provide regular training and encouragement for each individual volunteer.

39. Handle discipline problems privately and one-on-one. Don't embarrass them in front of their peers. It is never necessary and is never in your favor to do so.

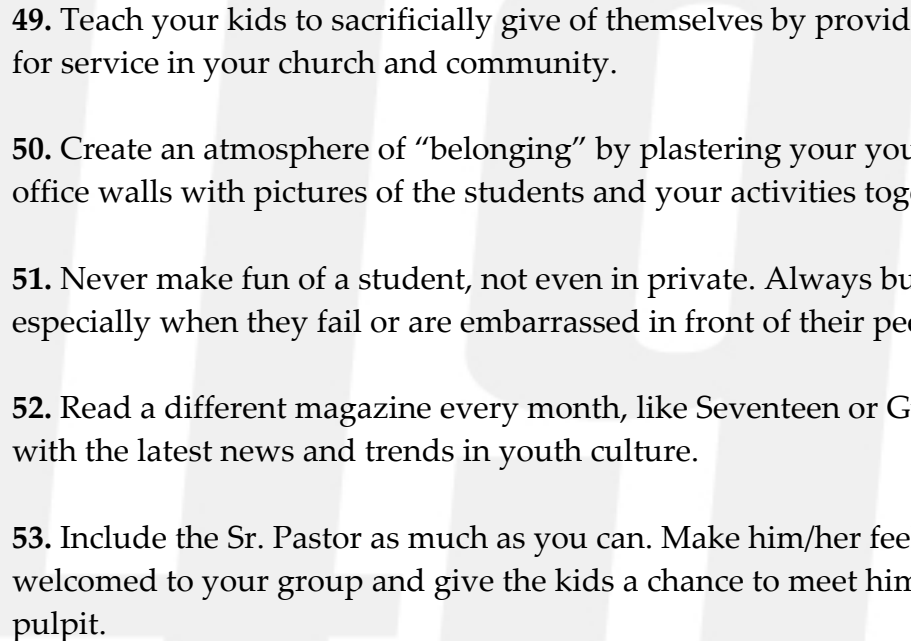
40. Don't feed spiritual consumerism by trying to have the best and greatest youth ministry in town. It's not a competition, it's a ministry.

41. Spend more time focusing on people than on programs. Programs should be done within the context of relationships.

42. Don't dwell on problems or get upset when something doesn't go right. There is no such thing as a perfect youth ministry. Focus on what really matters: reaching and discipling kids for Christ!

43. Spend more time nourishing your own soul than you do preparing to nourish the souls of others.

44. Dream a huge vision for the future and be passionate about it! Passion is contagious and will take the ministry in exciting new directions.
45. Expect to make mistakes. The only bad mistakes are the ones you don't learn from.
46. Create a safe environment for students and then model the transparency and vulnerability you want them to display. Don't expect them to open up and share just because you're the leader. Allow time for trust to be established.
47. Set time aside for yourself to relax and have fun. In one sense, you need to put yourself first because if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be any good to anyone else.
48. Invite students over to your house or apartment. This gives them a glimpse into your life and may even become a special safe haven for your kids.

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49. Teach your kids to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities for service in your church and community.
 50. Create an atmosphere of “belonging” by plastering your youth room and office walls with pictures of the students and your activities together.
 51. Never make fun of a student, not even in private. Always build them up, especially when they fail or are embarrassed in front of their peers.
 52. Read a different magazine every month, like Seventeen or Guitar, to keep up with the latest news and trends in youth culture.
 53. Include the Sr. Pastor as much as you can. Make him/her feel like they are welcomed to your group and give the kids a chance to meet him/her outside the pulpit.

54. Be sure to ask your students for their input on different events, plans and lesson illustrations. Make sure they know that their opinion is valued.
55. Find or start a group of other adults that will pray together regularly for the students in your community.
56. Encourage your volunteers to intentionally build relationships with students. As the ministry grows, there's no way you can personally connect with every student that walks through the doors.
57. Nothing erodes credibility faster than making promises you can't keep or threats you can't fulfill.
58. Actively participate in all games and youth meeting activities. Be the first one to jump in, show excitement and let the kids see how to have a good time.

59. Make sure all the Bible lessons are highly applicable and relevant to individual students. There's nothing worse than teaching lots of deep facts that remain largely disconnected from a student's life.

60. Meet in a room that's comfortable, welcoming and not too big. It's better to have lots of people crowded into a small space than spread out in a big empty room.

61. At the end of each year get together with your students just to reminisce about all the good times you've had together, how you've grown and what God has done in your lives.

62. Never get so busy with events and scheduling that you can't spend time with kids.

63. Tear down denominational barriers in your community by pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups in the area.

64. Whenever problems arise, make sure you first review them with your Sr. Pastor. This is the best preventative maintenance you can do to protect yourself and the ministry.

65. Don't feel like you have to do everything yourself. Ask, "Can this be done just as well by a volunteer, a parent or a student?" If the answer is yes, delegate it to someone else.

66. As you come across good resources, compile them together to share with your volunteers and parents each month.

67. Keep an eye out for good potential volunteers. Invite them to be a "fly on the wall" at youth meetings a couple times before committing.

68. Get involved with your local public middle schools and high schools. Participate in events and introduce yourself to the principle, teachers and coaches.

- 69.** Build relationships with your volunteers and provide them with opportunities to fellowship with each other. Then model this unity to the students.
- 70.** Establish accountability for how you spend your time each week. Fulfill your ministry duties and make sure you leave time for yourself and your family.
- 71.** Go out of your way to meet parents. When you call a student's house, create small talk with the mom or dad if they answer the phone. Also greet parents warmly as they drop their kids off at youth group and pick them up.
- 72.** Determine the needs of your group and build programs that meet them. Don't hold an event just because it's cool or sounds fun. Be purposeful in what you do.
- 73.** Keep recreational items in the trunk of your car at all times. There's no telling when you'll need a football, a Frisbee, or a tennis balls.

74. Do whatever is necessary to make sure every student that comes to your youth group feels welcomed and unconditionally loved.

75. Give kids a quiet time to worship. Our culture is so loud, so noisy, and so intense. We're so deeply immersed in it that we don't really notice the screaming volume until we intentionally take time to focus quietly on the Lord.

76. Unfortunately, people don't always change overnight, so don't become frustrated when your investment into a student doesn't show fruit right away. Continue to love on him/her and let the Holy Spirit work through you in His timing.

77. Strive for excellence in all you do even if it means limiting the calendar. It's better to do a few things well than lots of things half-way.

78. Read lots of books: books on youth ministry, theology, Christian living, and even random fiction. You'll be amazed how much it shapes your thinking and ministry.

79. Have fun and make sure others have fun along with you. Play games, tell jokes, share funny stories and watch funny video clips from YouTube. Create an atmosphere that makes kids think, "Wow, I love this place! I have fun with these people."

80. Meet kids on their turf: in their homes, their schools, their athletic fields and even their dance floors. You'll learn a lot by watching them in their different environments.

81. Find effective ways to communicate with your group. Take advantage of text messaging, instant message, websites, Facebook and more.

82. Take retreats with your kids several times a year. Relationships that are formed during this time will be invaluable to your ministry.

83. When only a few students show up (or even one!) for a youth meeting, don't express disappointment or ask, "Where is everyone?" Let those who do show up know they're just as important as those who don't.

84. Keep up with Top 40 radio stations and discuss the music with the kids from time to time.

85. Develop students to be leaders every chance you get. Have them lead games, prepare Bible lessons, lead worship, work on your group's website, shoot video and anything else you can think of. Ensure that each student will succeed in their task. Never accidentally set a student up to fail.

86. Run background checks on everyone who works with your youth, including yourself. Make sure everyone knows the proper procedures for reporting abuse and getting help.

87. Never joke around about sensitive issues, such as homosexuality or abortion. You have no idea if a student in your group quietly struggles with one of these issues and will never talk with you about it because of your “joke.”

88. Know your limits when you counsel students. Most of us are not professionals, so don't tackle situations where you're not trained. Ask your Sr. Pastor for help and even refer the student to a trained professional.

89. Do your research before spending budget money. The money is generously donated by the people of your church to further the Lord's work, so be the best and wisest steward of it that you can possibly be.

90. Asking students to open up and share will rarely work. Instead, be patient by taking a year or two to focus on creating an environment where they feel like they belong, a place that's safe and place where they are loved unconditionally. They'll open up in due time.

91. Build a library of ideas and resources. [Youth Specialties](#) has several good ideas books that are helpful. Also check out [Egadideas.com](#) and some of these [other resources](#).

92. Always reinforce to students that you love them, care about them and enjoy spending time with them.

93. TiVo the shows your kids watch. Keep up with what they're seeing and the latest values they're hearing.

94. Plan events well in advance. This allows you to organize it well, iron out all the kinks and make it as effective as possible.

- 95.** Become a good listener. You'll learn much more about your group by listening than you ever will by talking.
- 96.** Do your best to have a backup lesson and game ready to go in case plans have to change at the last minute.
- 97.** Discover the spiritual gifts of each student and find ways to use each of them in the ministry, even if you have to create new aspects of the ministry to do so.
- 98.** Let students get to know the real you by involving them in your life. Invite them to come along when you go shopping, when you take your pet to the vet, or even when you go to another student's orchestra concert.
- 99.** Whether you like it or not, you are a role model. Don't take this lightly. Be very careful of every word you say, every action you perform and every attitude you communicate.

100. Make sure your ministry is pleasing to God before it is pleasing to other people. After all, He's the one you'll stand before and give an account for what He's entrusted to you (Romans 14:12).

101. Find unchurched students in the community who don't know your church or your students and get them to come be a "secret shopper" at your youth meeting. Give them a questionnaire to work through about their youth group experience and talk with them about it afterwards. How many people talked to them? Did they feel welcomed? What suggestions do they have for you?

102. Don't complement students only on their outfit, haircut or new shoes, which places the focus on physical appearance for approval. Instead, build students' self-image by complimenting their character. "Sally, I'm proud of you for telling the truth when asked about cheating on your algebra test."

103. Communicate well with all the other ministries in your church.

104. Make sure all your volunteers know their responsibilities and are clear on expectations. Then provide them with everything they need to do their job well. Set them up to succeed.

105. Be the first one to arrive at youth group and the last one to leave. Make the most of every opportunity to talk with kids as they arrive and while they wait to be picked up.

106. When a new volunteer comes on board, don't use them to fill the holes of your ministry. Instead, discover their unique giftedness and passion and equip them to use it within the context of your ministry. Remember, people aren't here to serve the ministry; the ministry serves the people.

107. Be humble. Assume that everyone has something they can teach you.

108. Find ways to make the ministry intergenerational by including younger siblings, senior citizens and everyone in between.

109. Create safe forums where students can openly discuss and question Christianity. Encourage them to ask the hard questions of their faith and investigate what they believe. If you don't, their university professors will.

110. No matter how desperate you are for help, never accept a volunteer whose life does not reflect "role model" quality in all areas of life. Keep your standards high. Your kids are worth it.

111. Remember that real ministry is sometimes more grind than glamour. It often requires getting into sticky areas of depraved lives and doing whatever is necessary to encourage growth and maturity.

112. Unfortunately, part of the territory that comes with youth ministry is criticism. When it comes, humbly listen to any words of advice and filter out what is unfounded and misunderstood. You are ultimately responsible to God for fulfilling what He's called you to do, so don't get too discouraged. God's approval is more important than man's approval.

113. Re-evaluate the youth ministry at least once a year. Replace the things that aren't effective or working well with a different idea that might work better.

114. If you struggle with any sinful addictions, get help! Just because you're in a position of church leadership does not mean you can't or shouldn't talk with anyone about your struggles. Take care of it now before it ruins you, your ministry and the people you serve.

115. Do outreach solely from a burden for lost souls, not as "recruitment" for your youth group.

116. Significant growth takes place through experiences, very rarely through head-knowledge studying or teaching.

117. Know what you do and why you do it. Communicate it often.

118. Do more spiritual discovery *with* students than *for* students.

119. Go through great lengths to be creative in ministry. Never let the sacred become routine for yourself or the students.

120. Develop a [missional mindset in your students](#) by viewing your town as a mission field.

121. Be careful not to become too wrapped up in a Christian church bubble. Go out into culture and meet unsaved people.

122. Work hard in ministry, but don't give your life to it. Decide what matters most and learn to say "no" to everything else.

123. Be yourself. Don't try to be someone you're not by acting "cool" or trying to use current jargon in poor attempt to be relevant.

124. Always publicly support and speak well of your Sr. Pastor and church leadership. Any conflicts and differing opinions should be dealt with privately behind closed doors.

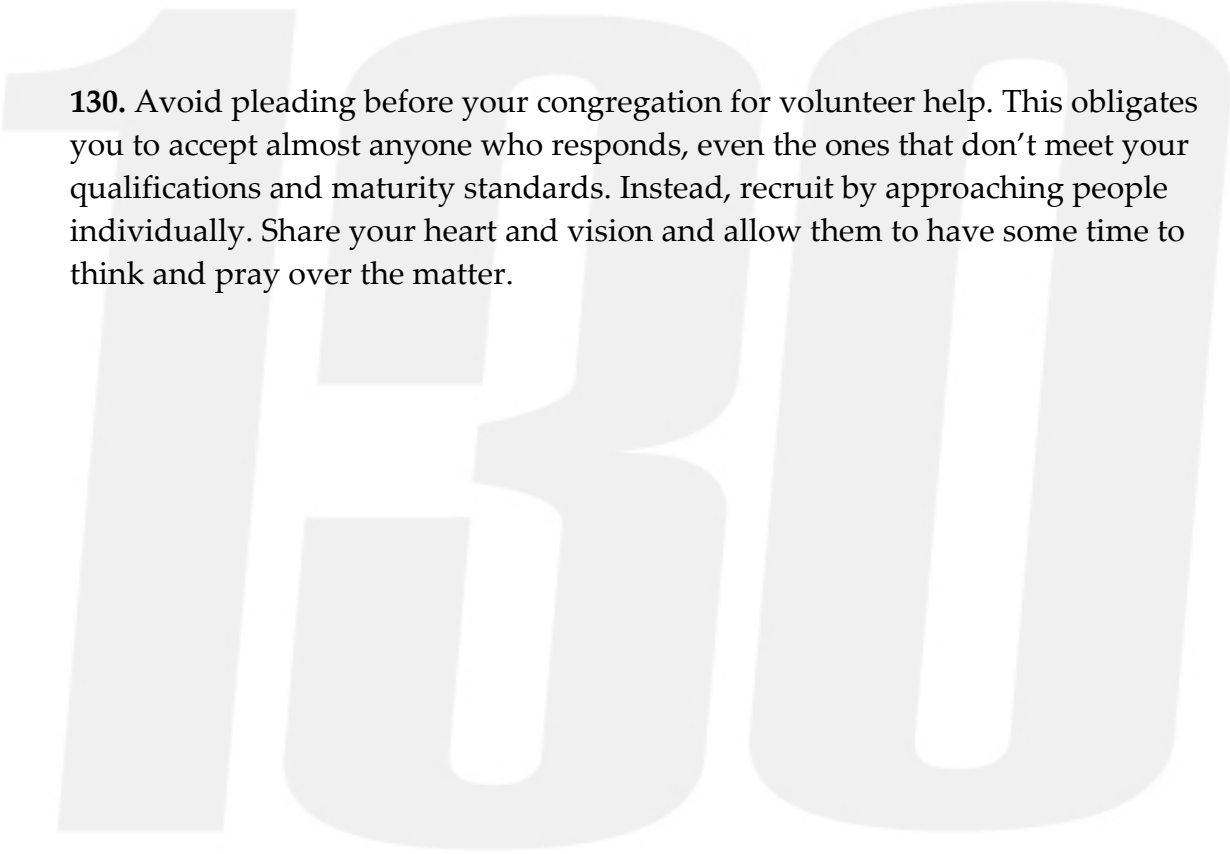
125. Think through the first impressions a visitor might have of your youth group. How can you make their first experience as positive as possible?

126. Relationships have a greater impact in ministry than teaching and lectures.

127. Pay attention and remember the little things in a student's life. It means the world to them!

128. Be consistent. It earns respect and proves your dependability.

129. Don't pray like a wuss. Continually saturate both yourself and the ministry in prayer. Pray even for the little things.



130. Avoid pleading before your congregation for volunteer help. This obligates you to accept almost anyone who responds, even the ones that don't meet your qualifications and maturity standards. Instead, recruit by approaching people individually. Share your heart and vision and allow them to have some time to think and pray over the matter.