

WORK WITH PURPOSE INITIATIVE | PASTORS GATHERING

What's Next? Helping Young People Discover and Love Your Church

This discussion explored content presented by youth ministry leader Kara Powell at Bethel University on March 9, 2017. She outlined six essential strategies for reaching and retaining teenagers and young adults from her book Growing Young.

What were your favorite "aha moments" from Kara Powell's presentations?

- 25 is the new 15 – this is a big revelation for aging churches
- Good vocational stewardship involves building relationships, mentoring, and sharing experiences between younger and older people
- Demographics of churches can be combined (i.e. older congregations and younger congregations) to leverage their strengths
- Unlocking "key change leadership"
 - Wise method of divesting power within your ministry sphere to the younger generation in age-appropriate ways
 - Being not too stingy with power but not offering too much too soon, either
 - Serving as sponsor to younger people in leadership
 - Want to be intentional about it
 - Have older adults serve as mentors and leaders
 - Recognize that youth will not always respond in the ways we expect
- Switching from "1:5" to "5:1" ratio
 - Team of five people surround the student or young person
 - Informal mentoring process that invests in the life of the young person
 - Adults who are seasoned in life attend young person's life events to engage and support him/her (i.e. performances, baptism, etc.)
 - This team of leaders becomes the key players in the young person's life
- More on the 5:1 ratio
 - This really examines what it means to be part of the family of God
 - Encourages us to cheer on those who enter the team (the family) as believers
 - How do we help older generations have confidence in communicating and understanding they have a role in the lives of younger people?
 - How do we help them develop positive impressions so they are not dismissive of younger people and instead notice and acknowledge their gifts?

- Need to help older people see they still matter and have powerful role in mentoring the younger people
- Building a strong multigenerational church is essential for longevity
- Supporting our youth
 - Churches may not be great at giving students or young people space to ask the questions that represent their wondering. In a big church, there may not be a dedicated time to help young people step back and process meaning.
 - What do we do as church leaders when they don't come to the same conclusions as we do? How do we walk with them in an open way?
 - With high school youth, intentionally take them out for lunch on Sunday after worship. Try to build bridges with them. Give students opportunities to get in front of the congregation. They may only be allowed to do this in front of their peers, so this opens up leadership opportunities. Trust them with these roles.
 - Try teaching young people how to have relationship with the pastor. Plenty of Boomers don't know what it means to have a pastor, so how can we expect the younger generation to understand this?
 - Millennials want us to take the message of Jesus seriously. Take what the word of God teaches and put it in practice...in our actual neighborhoods. Bring the community near us as those in proximity to the church.
 - Kara gave an example of the teenage couple about to be parents and the church came around them to support them.
 - Emerging adults – don't assume you know what they want
 - Ask them
 - Invite them into conversation

So how do we apply this to our situation? Now what?

- An older congregation (as a result of church split) is intentionally trying to "grow young" and build up Generation X and Millennial members
 - Is this possible without God? No, he must be central
 - Created a task force to discuss how to do this
 - Oldest task force members are mid-forties
 - Youngest task force member is 18
 - Not all task force members are members of the church
 - Looking for diverse and representative viewpoints to discover what the church is doing right and what it's doing wrong
 - Found out that mentoring is intimidating to older people who have never done it
 - May move from Sunday school to children's church as a result of findings
 - Name and format change are also possibly in the works
- Example of church in Northeast Minneapolis
 - Decided not to disband but instead repackage its delivery and content
 - Older people serving as stewards of knowledge and wisdom

- Allowed new things to happen in that context and under new leadership
- Mission trip prayer partner
 - Seniors pray for students going on mission trips
 - Get photo and information about student
 - Senior is connected to younger person and has a reason to talk to him/her
- Multigenerational church
 - This is a good thing
 - So many want a “young church” but all congregations and members will eventually grow old
 - Multigenerational is sustainable
 - Having a single target age group means limited availability for ministry and limited resource sharing
 - Young people who start attending may bring their parents – typically parents try to keep kids at church, but this new approach works, too
 - Big mistake to talk just about the next generation and ignore the people you already have in your pews
- Take a risk
 - Provide training to those who aren’t currently qualified to be a leader
 - It’s okay to take a risk – you can always clean up the mess later, and if you’re not cleaning it up, then you’re sweeping it under the rug
 - Example of church with multiple interns gives young people looking to pay off student loans an opportunity to raise support from within the church and also contribute to the body in a unique way
- Ask the right questions
 - Ask yourself “what do we have for people” – why would anyone come to your church?
 - You don’t necessarily need to run “fancy” programs
 - Focus on the “why” – ask yourself and your team why you are doing what you’re doing and don’t be afraid to wrestle deeply with this question
 - There may be vastly differing viewpoints on a variety of issues (i.e. whether to keep the building, how to pursue ministry opportunities, etc.)
 - The “why” may not always be apparent to members (they see the what and how)
 - Figuring out “how” is important, but it’s critically important to think about “why” you do things
 - Ask the “whys” for the initiatives you do, too
 - Why do you want to accomplish that initiative?
 - You can only achieve the why when it’s clearly defined
 - Simon Sinek TED Talk: Start with Why:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sioZd3AxmnE>
 - These notes contain an exercise you can use with your team to work through the “why” question

- Attracting multiple generations
 - Draw Boomers into church
 - They are unchurched, too, but it is becoming more relevant to them now that they have grandkids
 - Boomers come to church because their college kids come
 - Do Millennials want a "millennial-friendly church"?
 - Many have left these types of church in favor of orthodox churches
 - Looking for timeless, rooted traditions
 - Want to belong to something that's beyond what we can see
 - We can't assume we fully understand what they need
 - They are searching for the sacred
 - Want instruction on prayer, scripture, liturgy
 - How do we make the church feel like everyone's church, where everyone can serve and all have a voice?
- The role of liturgy
 - How do you keep liturgy fresh and not just repetition?
 - C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*: He appreciated liturgy because he always knew what to expect, so he got to go into a service to worship God and not wonder what's coming next
 - Baptist liturgy is really just repetition of songs and texts
 - Humans like repetition – it helps them learn
 - Keep it fresh with different voices and styles
 - Argument against liturgy
 - Keeps people from being involved
 - But this happens during a Baptist service (pastor does all the work)
 - Scary for people to deviate from the norm
 - I.e. ask them to pray in small groups during service
 - But maybe start doing this regularly (i.e. one Sunday a month)
 - Millennials are starved for beauty
 - Liturgy provides a language of beauty and presence
 - Are young people looking for sacred...or security?
 - They are suspicious of institutions
 - Liturgy unites the congregation
 - Creates continuity and a sense of belonging
 - This provides a sense of security
 - Liturgy allows for shared experiences
 - When people know what to do, they feel part of the community
 - Fosters relationships
- The role of relationships
 - It all comes back to relationships and finding a place to belong
 - More than just community, we need authenticity, too
 - Build small church within bigger church (small groups)
 - This changes culture

- Don't need to just talk to pastor, but can connect with other members of the community
- Generational differences
 - Over 40 crowd – is it true?
 - Under 40 crowd – is it fair?
 - Think about where your audience is coming from
- The faith and work connection
 - Emphasis on story, feasts, and regular rhythms of Sabbath
 - These are rich faith experiences that we're missing because we're focusing so much on just the New Testament
 - Can be used to answer the following questions:
 - How do I live out my faith at a dead-end job?
 - How did people of Israel live out faith in wandering?
 - What does it look like to be in captivity but still grow?
 - These are virtually untapped resources
 - We should consider recovering part of the Bible that we're less comfortable with
 - We can embrace suffering
 - N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* <https://www.amazon.com/What-Saint-Paul-Really-Said/dp/080287178X>

For further help

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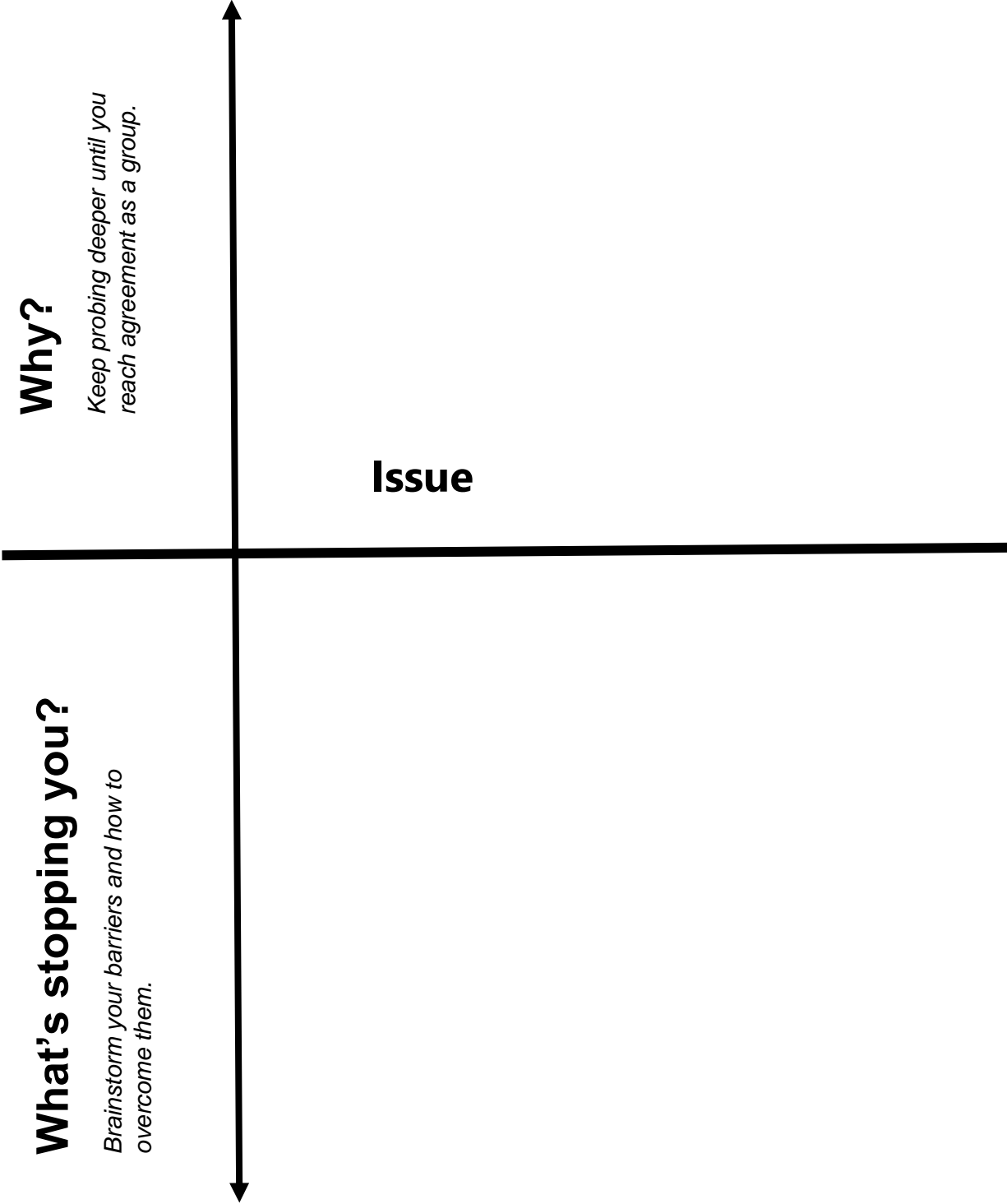
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Example of “Why” Exercise

Issue

Reaching the neighborhood

Why?

- *Because we’re supposed to and it’s biblical*
- *Jesus said “go to all the nations”*
- *He wants people to know about him*
- *God wants to be known to people*
- *It’s good for people*
- *It will help them to know him*
- *People will be changed*
- *God designed us to be in relationship*
- *He loves us and wants to be connected to us*
- *He wants to complete us*

Bottom line: We want them to experience transformation and be completed in God

What’s stopping you?

- *Fear*
- *Lack of resources*
- *Lack of interest*
- *Competing goals*
- *Misunderstanding of mission*