BUILDING STRONG MINISTRY TEAMS
One of the most important things in every healthy church is having strong ministry teams. There are many reasons for it and the purpose of this eBook isn’t to argue why they’re important, but to coach on how to actually build strong ones. For clarity sake I want to hit really briefly the “why” of ministry teams before diving deep into the “how.” This eBook will be good for anyone who leads a ministry team or oversees people who do.

First, why are ministry teams important?

- They are a primary avenue in the local church for people to use their spiritual gifts and talents.
- They are a place for community and connectedness within the body of Christ.
- They are a primary source of fulfillment in being a part of God’s mission to reach the world through the local church.
- They help retain your members long enough for real discipleship to happen.
- As we all know, when we serve others we are served and we ourselves get discipled.
- Last, but not least, when done well they have significant kingdom impact both inside and outside of the church.

If you need more on why ministry teams are important for every church, this isn’t the eBook for you. Let’s get on with how to build strong ministry teams.

Most leaders don’t intuitively know how to build and lead strong ministry teams. This means they have to be trained and coached. It may mean you need some guidance, too. I know I did!

Below is a process I recommend for you to help strengthen your own team, OR, you walk through with anyone who leads a team to help guide them on how to build a strong ministry team.
Phase One
THE LEADER

Go through this process (either individually or in a group setting):

1. Brainstorm with your team.

Get in front of a whiteboard and ask them, “What does an amazing ministry team look like? What characteristics exist in a team that you would describe as incredible?”

Write down all the words that they come up with...for example:

1) Energetic and Fun
2) Passionate
3) Vision (aligned and “the why” is clear)
4) Cared for
5) Organized
6) Relational/Strong Community
7) Kingdom Impact

The list could go on and on...

2. Lead them to evaluate and implement.

Ask them, “Which 5 of the adjectives you came up with, do you think you are the strongest with?”

Once they list them out ask them, “What does it look like to implement these 5 things in your team? How do you apply it?”

Give them time to write out some ways to integrate their strengths into their team.

Quick coaching note: none of your leaders are the same, it is OKAY if they have different strengths and their teams take on some different DNA as long as it is aligned to the mission and vision of the church. The shape of the teams can look different, just not their purpose.

After they talk about how to apply their strengths, look at their list and give them more ideas for implementation to help them maximize their strengths. God made them that way for a reason, He wants to use them!
3. Help them identify barriers.

Ask them, “What are the 2-3 you struggle with the most?”

Have them list out their answers. Let them know, “We don’t want you spending a lot of time and energy trying to make weaknesses a strength. Sometimes, but rarely, their weakness gets well-developed and becomes a strength. For the most part, they are weaknesses because of the way that person is wired.

When you get the list of 2-3, identify whether or not you see any of them as debilitating weaknesses. We all have weak areas, we just can’t let them be debilitating. Ask them, “What are some things you can do to minimize the pain points of these weak areas in your ministry?”

For example: if it’s “vision,” you can give them the discipline to never walk into a team huddle without a written out “why”. An example of this may be a written 2-4 sentences connecting what they do and why they do it, and the purpose it serves. It should take the team member less than 10 minutes and yet it mitigates a weakness.

4. Follow up

In your next few 1:1s ask them, “How are you doing maximizing your strengths? What fruit have you seen from it?” and, “How are you doing mitigating your weaknesses? What improvements have you seen?”

CONCLUDING PHASE ONE

A ministry team can only be as strong as the leader guiding it. These four steps will show them how to become stronger leaders, cultivating a stronger team.

Phase Two
THE STRUCTURE

1. Create solid templates

Every ministry team and leader needs a template. For example: When do volunteer scheduling emails go out? When do they huddle together before they serve? What does the on-boarding process look like for their team?

Make sure every role on the team has a job description to give volunteers clarity on what is expected of them. When you have a solid template, it lets volunteers know operations
are organized and purposeful. This gives them confidence in their leader and sets the expectations on how the team should operate.

2. Create a playbook for each team.

Playbooks cast vision, create clarity, and show each person how they fit into the whole. Here’s what the playbook should communicate:

• The “why” of the team and how it aligns with the mission of the church
• The culture of the church and how it connects with what the ministry team does
• Expectations for every person on the team, including:
  • Trainings
  • Scheduling
  • Time to show up and where
  • Living out the culture
  • Job descriptions
  • Etc.

People are not in your church just to “serve a role.” As co-laborers of Christ, they carry the culture and mission of the church, so the church can grow its people and the people can grow the church. When God says, “I will build my church” we know he means both individual and the institution. We partake with Him, and we are co-laborers with Him when we live both the culture and mission of the gospel. A good ministry playbook should show how both of those things happen.

3. Develop strong recruiting skills.

Leaders should know, “Never recruit out of need, only out of vision.”

God isn’t desperate for that person to be on the team, and your leader shouldn’t be either. Cast a compelling vision of what God is doing and show the impact of the work and how it changes lives. Ask them if they want to be a part of it. If they say no, awesome. If they say yes, more awesome!

Too many leaders say people’s “no” for them because they believe the person is “too busy” or “has never done it before.” A ministry leader’s job is to make the ask, and God’s job is to lead the person on whether or not it is the right decision for them. Ministry leaders, you are not the Holy Spirit. Ask them to be a part of what God has called you to lead and build. If the Holy Spirit tells them no, it is not a personal attack on you.

Recruit as diligently as you believe in the mission of your team.
4. Have an eye for leadership development.

Your team can only be built as strong as leadership develops. Every ministry leader needs to look out for potential leaders on their team and have “I-see-in-you” conversations. These conversations are about taking someone who currently volunteers on the team and 1) letting them know how you see Jesus in them and their spiritual maturity, 2) acknowledging their ability to lead others, and 3) casting a vision for them to be more deeply developed as leaders and go from:

- leading self to leading others. OR
- leading others to leading leaders.

Teams need a consistent flow of new team members onto the team and team members getting more deeply developed as leaders. One person can't do it alone.

5. Have successful formal training (twice a year).

Most “training” in ministry is “on the job” as it should be. Coaching and discipleship conversations happen as you go, and they are in the moment. But, it is important for the life and rhythm of your teams to have planned times where the entire team comes together for training...BUT, here is the thing--the training itself is the least important part.

Here is what formal training should look like:

**Make them FUN.**

Have food. Have music as people walk in. Have a game or something interactive for everyone. People should know you are pumped to be there.

**CELEBRATE.**

15 minutes of your hour should be you and others sharing all the awesome stuff God has done in the lives of your team members and THROUGH your team members. You want people to walk out of those trainings KNOWING the deep and wide impact they make on a weekly basis through their team. Let them know how they make a difference.

**Communal.**

Many ministry teams don't interact consistently with other volunteers, so these trainings help them see “we are all doing this together and it is so worth it.” Make sure people have time to interact. Don't just get them all together for them to listen to you talk for an hour. Barf.
Okay, do a little training.

Give a 10-minute talk about something you want to see your team grow in collectively. Typically, it is best to tie these ‘big picture’ items to mission or culture. Don’t spend 10 minutes deep diving a new policy. Double Barf.

Updates

Finally, spend less than 5 minutes giving any detail or calendar updates that you simply have to share.

CONCLUDING PHASE TWO

When you do your trainings like this you will see more and more people keep coming back because they’re fun, impactful, and they build community. Your team gets stronger as they feel more connected and more deeply bought into how what they are doing is making a difference.

EXTRA TIPS AND TRICKS

CONSISTENT FLOW OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND THANKS.

Whenever I lead a ministry team I set two 15-minute time blocks into my calendar. In those 15 minutes I simply send as many text messages as possible to my volunteers that are only a couple of sentences long. It is a simple moment to say thank you and let your team know you are thinking about them and praying for them. To do this efficiently, I would use iMessage on my Mac to copy and paste the text and change the first name on the front. Sending messages to your volunteers shows you value your team and makes sure they feel relationally connected to you. (If you don’t have a Mac in order to do this in an efficient manner I may have to write a whole different eBook just to help with your decision-making process. Ha!) Seriously though, I would keep my list of people on my team updated and everyone heard from me personally at least once every couple of months in an informal fashion. You can find other creative ideas as well: I had some staff members send out birthday cards or make sure everyone got a hand-written letter once every six months. Whatever you’ll consistently do is the best thing to do, no matter what it is.

BRING YOUR TEAM IN ON BIG DECISIONS FOR THE MINISTRY AREA.

No one likes to simply be told what to do and when. At the same time, you’re asking them to sell out for the mission. Ask them what they think, what they see, and what they know
we can do better. Ask your team for ways to grow and be strengthened. You need their wisdom and insight, and when you get it you will be made better. When you do this they also trust your leadership more, are more deeply bought in, and will pour themselves out to a greater degree.

PRIORITIZE YOUR PEOPLE OVER PROCESS.

As a church grows more processes have to be put in place for things to run smoothly... but remember that your processes exist to serve your people, not the other way around. Make sure your team knows THEY are your main priority, so they don’t feel like they are there to serve you or simply be a cog in your machine. No one means to make people feel this way, but we do it unintentionally when we ask our people to bend over backwards for our processes instead of them seeing us bend over backwards for them. Don’t set things up in a way that is harder on your team, but easier on you. I have seen people fall into this trap over and over and over again. When setting up systems and processes, put yourself in their shoes and ask what is best for them. Then YOU need to have the attitude that you will do whatever it takes to make it a great experience for them.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MUST BE VIEWED AS A CRITICAL PIECE.

It isn’t an “extra” you add on. It is a core of every ministry team. You should always be recruiting new volunteers and developing volunteers into coaches/leaders. If you are not consistently developing leaders in your area, you’ll eventually hit a cap on growth AND lose great people because they aren’t being fully invested in. Everyone who leads a ministry team ought to see their first two jobs as 1) to carry the culture 2) to develop and equip others for the work of the ministry.

FIND THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO LEAD.

A common mistake ministry leaders make is simply selecting the most willing person or the person with the most time available and placing them in a leadership role. That’s not what you want. Here is what to look for when trying to identify the right leaders for your team:

• **Do they embody the culture of the church?** Your leaders are what shape the culture of your team and you want your team to be well-aligned with the church.
• **Follow the fruit.** Who does a lot of your ministry fruit come from? Where does there tend to be the most excitement and life change?

• **Humility.** Who is humble, eager to learn, and seeks feedback and opportunities for growth? Don’t just choose the person who has been in Kids Ministry for 15 years, thinks they have all the answers, and then put them over your volunteers. Do they carry the culture, is there spiritual fruit, and do they display humility? Notice what I didn’t say: how much experience do they have? How old are they? How long have they been a Christian?

**HAVE GREAT TEAM HUDDLES.**

We touched on it above, but it is worth re-iterating. You only get so many opportunities to be in front of your team, so make the most of each one. Whenever your team huddles before you start serving together, take that opportunity to do a few things:

• **Share a story** that shows the impact of what the team does—tying it to the WHY.

• **Spend a moment** either hitting on a culture distinctive of the church and how it applies to the team OR simply honor a team member who went above and beyond (what you celebrate you cultivate!).

• **Pray** for your time serving together.

• **End on a high note.** Whatever that means, you can stack it up, you can have a fun little chant, you can all clap, whatever fits your team. But let people walk away from a huddle with a smile and excitement for what they are about to do.

Help your staff members build strong ministry teams and see what happens when the entire body of Christ is, “doing the work of the ministry.”

**Celebrate what God does all along the way!**
ABOUT CHURCHOPS GROUP

Whether plateaued or growing rapidly, every church is a few strategic steps away from reaching the next level. We have partnered with churches of all sizes, shapes, and in different growing seasons and we have never found a church that couldn't experience even healthier and more sustained growth. Every church faces barriers and complexities that hold them back. We exist to identify those and give you the tools to overcome those obstacles and get to the next level.

Our Mission

It is our passion to walk alongside pastors and churches by giving them strategic systems and operational solutions that actually work. Instead of speaking in theories and ideas we drill down into the nuts and bolts of ministry and give you the practical steps to help you succeed.

Testimonials

“Without Matt Svoboda's strategic leadership and systems, we simply would not have been able to scale from 250 people at a single location to over 3,000 at multiple campuses in 7 years. His ability to identify and solve barriers to growth and health is amazing. Probably even more than that, his ability to structure a staff and identify the leaders necessary to facilitate growth and health is the best I've ever seen.”

Josh Howerton
Lead Pastor, Lake Pointe Church, Dallas TX (13,000 Attendance)

“ChurchOps has been instrumental to me in helping our church keep up with the season of growth that we find ourselves in. They bring invaluable experience to the table that allows them to help you diagnose the issues you're facing in your church and then chart a path that fits your context. This is not one-size-fits-all tips and tricks. With ChurchOps you get practitioners who know what you're facing and are eager to come alongside you to help you lead your church with maximum effectiveness. Whether you're a church of 100 or 10,000, ChurchOps can help you take the next step.”

Stuart R. Owens
Pastor of Discipleship, Christ Community Church, NC (650 Attendance)