

Never Too YOUNG to Lead

Developing

Leadership

in Young

Adolescents

Maureen P. Provencher

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Introduction

Never Too Young to Lead: An Overview

Because younger adolescents make up an integral part of the Church, parish communities benefit from the zest offered by this particular age-group. Young people, as we know, question and challenge; they help us to dream and vision what can be; their idealism helps us to see with new eyes and consider the possibilities. They show us the ageless face of Christ, also reflected by them as they are—fearfully and wonderfully created.

Not only does our Church benefit from all the good this age-group has to offer, Christ himself depends on them, just as he depended on so many of the saints and people of the Bible. The experiences of faith that younger adolescents have to share, their gifts and talents, their enthusiasm and the individual uniqueness each of them has to offer are essential to the wholeness of our parish communities. Just as “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’” (1 Cor. 12:21), our communities need the participation of our young people. We are called to invite and include the participation of the young adolescents within our faith communities in the life and mission of Jesus, the mission of the Church, in which we all share. A commitment to forming our young people to Christian leadership connects to that very mission.

Never Too Young to Lead offers faith communities resources and strategies to develop leadership qualities and skills in young adolescents. The manual includes six themes on Christian leadership: leadership styles, listening skills, conflict resolution, trust and responsibility, leadership and discipleship, and planning and strategy. Each chapter contains three sessions to explore the themes; you will want to select the sessions that best meet the needs of your group. You may choose to use all the sessions in each chapter or you may choose to use just one. The sessions provide a broad overview of leadership with the aid of scriptural images, and include activities for training youth in essential leadership skills and qualities. The manual also offers strategies for using the sessions to create daylong, weekend, or weeklong training programs for young adolescents.

Three Stages of Readiness

Three separate sessions comprise each chapter of *Never Too Young to Lead*. The sessions are geared to address the needs of young people, accepting them “where they are at” through the use of three readiness stages: ready to begin, ready to be formed, and ready to be empowered. These stages are not based on chronological age or grade level; rather they are developed with the individual young person in mind.

The **Ready to Begin** stage is intended primarily for younger adolescents who have had little or no leadership experience. This first stage introduces young adolescents to leadership, intentionally keeping the faith element light and inviting.

The **Ready to Be Formed** stage is intended primarily for young adolescents who have had some leadership experience, as well as those who have had some experience of service. Examples might include young teens who are new to altar serving, lecturing, music ministry, service programming, and student government, and those who display team sportsmanship. Overall these young people will have already displayed some leadership potential on which to build.

The **Ready to Be Empowered** stage is geared for young adolescents who are becoming “seasoned” in ministry through their involvement and activity, for example, those who have served as lectors; altar servers; cantors; class presidents, vice presidents, and other offices; team captains; those who grasp catechesis with enthusiasm; those who have been or currently are being mentored; those who have experience planning activities; and so on. These young people will have obvious leadership potential on which to build.

The sessions in each chapter can be utilized in whatever form or structure best fits the young people you gather. The chapters, as well as the three sessions within each chapter, are comprehensive and build on each other, though they can be used in any order, or they may be used as individual sessions that stand independently of one another.

Within each chapter is a brief overview of each session. In addition, the sessions include a checklist of required materials and preparation, followed by a complete description of the session procedure. The session is intended to fit a 60- to 90-minute time frame, with the exception of those noted as half-day sessions, and will vary depending on the size of the group you have gathered. Session components are as follows:

- **Gathering activity and introduction.** This activity invites the participants to gather, build community, and begin to focus on the session theme. The introduction provides the participants with a clear overview, or “taste,” of what to expect from the session.
- **Learning activity and discussion.** In this segment the participants explore the theme in depth through the Scriptures, activities, and discussion. Ministry leaders present additional background and information to periodically augment the participants’ work. It is from this segment that comparisons to real-life situations concerning the session’s theme will be discussed and considered.
- **Prayer of sending forth.** Each chapter concludes with a prayer experience focused on the chapter’s theme. The different kinds of prayer include guided meditation, shared prayer, music, reflective silence, prayer that is written and led by young people, and reflective reading. The prayer experience gives the young people an opportunity to offer their hearts and lives to God by presenting their insights and concerns to God in prayer. The time frame for prayer experiences varies from 5 to 20 minutes.

How and When to Use the Sessions

The following list offers a sampling of the variety of ways you might consider using the sessions in *Never Too Young to Lead* to create daylong, weekend, or weeklong training programs.

- Use the program within a catechetical structure for a six-week leadership training course. Select six sessions, one from each chapter, according to the readiness stage of the group you will be gathering.

- During the summer months, plan a summer leadership course, inviting the young people to gather once a week throughout July and August.
- Conduct one leadership session per month for the entire year.
- Where the stages of readiness within a group may vary, select a chapter and experience all three of its sessions together in progression.
- Conduct an overnight or two-day leadership retreat, using all the sessions in chapter 5 in sequential order. To add a service outreach component to the retreat, use all the sessions of chapter 4 in sequential order.
- To focus more on skill building, look to chapter 1, “Ready to Be Formed: How Jesus Led”; chapter 2, “Ready to Begin: Listening to Others”; chapter 3, “Ready to Be Empowered: Forgiveness and Conflict”; and chapter 6, “Ready to Begin: Planning Skills.”
- To coordinate sessions offering off-site and active service outreach, look to chapter 1, “Ready to Be Empowered: Called to Lead”; chapter 4, “Ready to Be Empowered: Trust and Responsibility”; chapter 5, “Ready to Be Formed: Servant Leadership”; and chapter 6, “Planning and Strategy,” in sequential order.
- For more reflective sessions, look to chapters 4 and 5.
- For more active sessions, look to chapter 2, “Ready to Begin: Listening to Others”; chapter 4, “Ready to Begin: Building Trust” and “Ready to Be Formed: Becoming Trustworthy.”

Facilitating the Sessions

Role Models

Through the example of youth ministry leaders (both adults and youth), young people learn what it means to be a Christian leader. It is essential that those in positions of leadership be attentive to the example they are setting, in both words and actions. It is also important that they use, during the sessions and throughout the year, the leadership skills they are teaching.

Hospitality and Community Building

Hospitality and community building are significant parts of all youth ministry functions, including leadership team meetings and leadership training sessions. An important aspect of community building is the attitude of those involved in leadership. Leaders, both youth and adults, must build community with those who attend events and programs.

Presentations

In each session the leaders are asked to make presentations of key concepts and teachings. Ensure that those presentations are effective by practicing them ahead of time, personalizing the materials with the addition of your own stories and examples, familiarizing yourself with the material, and inviting constructive criticism from other leaders. If necessary, do some outside reading or learning about the ideas

you will be presenting. The quality of the leadership training young people receive in these sessions will depend, in part, on how well you know the concepts yourself and how familiar you are with the material.

Facilitation

The skills of large-group facilitation are important. When working with the young people, the leaders of sessions or activities should have a strong understanding of the entire session and their role within it. The leaders should be attentive to the time allotted for each activity and to the core purpose of the activity.

Preparing Yourself

Read each session or activity before you facilitate it, and then use it creatively to meet the needs of the young people in your group. Some activities require preparation. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

Standard Materials

To save time, consider gathering frequently used materials into bins and storing those bins in a place accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Here are some recommendations for organizing a supply bin.

Supply Bin

The following items appear frequently in the materials checklists:

- masking tape
- cellophane tape
- nametags
- markers
- pens or pencils
- self-stick notes
- scissors
- newsprint
- unlined paper, scrap paper, or notebook paper
- index cards
- baskets
- candles and matches
- items to create a prayer space (for example, a colored cloth, a cross, a Bible, a bowl of water, and a vase for flowers)

1 Leading as Jesus Did

1 Ready to Begin: For the Sake of Others

Overview

Jesus did not use his energy to tear down, but to build up, to create and restore. How we use our energy directly affects our style of leadership. The choices we make and the example of how we live shape our world, whether it is good or bad. In this session the young people will explore how they use their energy, identifying what gives them energy and what robs them of their energy. In addition, they will be given the opportunity to consider how they are called to be creators, builders, and restorers—just like Jesus—through the use of their energy and gifts.

Preparation

- Gather the following items:
 - eight decks of regular playing cards
 - two buckets or baskets labeled “charity bank”
 - newsprint
 - Legos™, Lincoln Logs™, Tinker Toys™, Popsicle sticks, or other building materials at your disposal; enough supplies for every four participants to build a “house”
 - paper and markers
 - glue
 - several images of houses in need of restoration, taken from home-and-living-type magazines or downloaded photos from the Web; you will need one image for every four participants
- Separate all the jacks, queens, and kings from the decks of playing cards.
- Recruit two young people to serve as “charity bankers.” Provide the bankers with all the jacks, queens, and kings from the deck of cards, telling them that whenever someone approaches them, they are to collect three cards from that individual and, in return, give that person a “trump card,” that is, a jack, queen, or king.
- Recruit three young people to secretly be the “zippers.” Provide each zipper with a deck of cards. You will also need to recruit three others to be the “zappers.” Provide the zappers with five cards of low value. Then provide the following directions:
 - The zappers job is to mingle with the group, discreetly approaching people one at a time and “zapping” their energy by taking away two cards of your choice. Remember, the cards are worth their face value. Taking away two cards highest in value would be to your benefit.
 - Zippers, you have been given an entire deck of cards, and your job is to mingle as well; however, you are in the business of giving people energy. You

will do this by discreetly approaching people one at a time and giving each person two cards of a high value.

- The object for both the zappers and the zippers is to not be obvious to the others.
- But there's a catch for the zappers: if someone you approach happens to present you with a king, queen, or jack, you have automatically been transformed into a zipper.

1. Gather the group, and randomly distribute five playing cards to each participant. Then introduce the activity as follows:

- Each of you have been given five playing cards that hold their face value. For the sake of this game, these cards represent the level of energy you have.
- Among you, in this game, are zappers and zippers. Zappers are people who will “zap” you of your energy, symbolized by the playing cards. Whenever a zipper approaches you and asks you for your energy, you must allow him or her to take two of your cards.
- Then there are the zippers. Zippers are people who “zip” up your energy. Whenever a zipper approaches you, that person will give you two cards of her or his choice.
- You will not be able to tell a zipper from a zipper until you are approached by one.
- During the game, you will have a choice to either keep the cards you have or bank some in the “charity bank.”
- Whenever you bank your cards, you will gain one certain benefit: a trump card. The trump cards are the kings, queens, and jacks. They are gained by banking a minimum of three of your cards at any time.
- It's important to note that a trump card will reverse the role of a zipper to a zipper! If a zipper approaches you and you have a trump card, that zipper becomes a zipper.
- Your goal as a player in this game is to not end up empty-handed. If you are getting low on energy (the number of cards you have in hand), you will want to seek out a zipper to gain more energy. Remember to beware of the zappers!

2. Check to see if there are any questions and, if so, respond and clarify as needed. Allow the game to go on for about 5 minutes. Be sure to pay close attention to the activity so as to be able to share what you observe.

3. Summarize the experience by inviting the participants to respond to some of the following questions, and by offering some of the following comments as well:

- Count up the face value of the cards you still hold. Who has 10 points, 20 points, 30 points (and so on)?
- For those with the fewest points, how did you use your energy during the game? For those with the most points, how did you use your energy? What were the risks you took? What did you gain?
- How many of you chose to keep as many of your cards as possible? What were the benefits and risks of keeping your energy to yourself? What kind of an effect will keeping your energy and gifts to yourself have on your friendships, family, teams, and clubs?

Then offer the following comments:

- The zappers represent the things and people in our lives who steal away, or “zap,” our energy. Some of the things that zap our energy might include that we worry a lot and lose sleep over some things we can’t change or control, or that someone in our lives is persistent in tempting us to consider trying something that would not be good for us, like drugs, for example.
- The zippers represent the things and people in our lives who boost, or “zip,” our energy. Some of the things that zip our energy might include a simple kindness that was shown to us, like a smile or a hug; a compliment or a word of support; some time spent with God in prayer; or a person who believes in our abilities and encourages us.

4. Now tally up the value of the cards placed within the charity bank. Note how generous the group was or was not. Then discuss the following questions with the participants:

- How might this relate to sharing your energy positively with others?
- How might some of the injustices of our world, like homelessness, poverty, and hunger, be affected if we were to commit to giving to charity regularly through donations of time and money?

Then offer the following comment:

- The charity bank represents the times we share our gifts and energy with others, when we go beyond ourselves and meeting our own needs. And, as we know, there are benefits for ourselves to sharing what we have with others. It feels good to do something for others, and when love is shared, oftentimes it is returned a hundredfold. So it is with this game. When goodness is given freely, goodness grows.

5. Now ask the following questions. Be sure to record the answers on newsprint.

- What are some of the positive ways young people today use their energy?
- What are some of the negatives ways young people use their energy?

6. Make the following points in these or your own words:

- How we use our energy directly affects our style of leadership. Think of all the ways you use your energy: what you spend your time doing, what you spend your time thinking about, and how much time you spend worrying about what to say or what to wear, being kind to others, or perhaps at times gossiping about others.
- Based on how you use your energy, think about the leadership you model for others. If we look to Jesus as our ultimate model of leadership, we see time and time again that he always used his energy to glorify God and to benefit others. This is what true Christian leadership is all about.
- Jesus had tremendous energy, and he knew how and where to direct it. For example, he often refused to engage in meaningless conversation with people who wanted to argue rather than learn. He did not waste his time or energy even at his trial with what would have been a meaningless defense.
- Leadership is directly connected to the example of how we live and how we choose to use our energy. For example, other people watch what we do,

imitate us, follow our lead, can fall under our influence, and so on. Some other examples include:

- If we choose to seek to “get our way” all the time, our style of leadership will be very directive and we may not be open to what others have to share.
- If we choose to experiment with sex or drugs, our style of leadership is showing others irresponsibility and disrespect.
- If we take the time to listen to a friend who needs to talk, our style of leadership is one of compassion and understanding.
- If we choose to go to church every Sunday, our style of leadership shows that God is important in our lives.
- Each of us needs to be in tune with our source of energy. Like Jesus, we too must use our energy intentionally and purposefully.

7. Have the participants form two groups, assigning one group the role of “creators” and asking them to gather around the tables with the Legos, Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, paper, markers, glue, and Popsicle sticks, and any other materials that are available. Assign the second group the role of “restorers,” asking them to gather around the tables with the images of houses already supplied for them. Within each group, ask the participants to pair off with a partner. Provide a sheet of newsprint and a few markers for each pair. Then explain that in this next exercise, they will be creating or renovating “houses.”

Tell the creators that each pair is to create a house using the supplies provided. Tell the restorers that each pair’s task is to develop plans to restore the house found in one of the photographs provided. Do not provide any further instructions except to inform them that they have only 10 minutes to complete the task.

8. Ask for a few volunteers to share their creations or restorations with the entire group, allowing 5 to 10 minutes for all who want to share. Keep the group seated at their respective tables and conclude the activity by sharing the following comments and questions:

- Take a moment to consider the way you used your energy in this activity. Were you more like an architect who dreams and can envision what the house can be? Were you like a builder who can take a plan and make it a reality by focusing on the pieces that fit together? Were you like a restorer who can take what is and make it beautiful and like new again?

9. Distribute a piece of paper and markers to each of the participants and ask them to draw the outline of a house. Provide these instructions:

- Consider situations that need to be recreated, built up, and restored, for example, a group of your peers at school who are constantly ridiculed or harassed or a sports team that needs some good motivation to work together. Take a quiet moment to write about or to draw symbols representing these situations.

10. Allow a few moments for the participants to accomplish this task. Have them write the following phrase at the bottom of their drawings:

- I am capable of creating, building, and restoring by how I use my energy.

Then offer the following comments:

- Jesus is the ultimate leader. He showed us how to lead by the way he lived.
- Jesus led by compassion and forgiveness, by choosing the right actions and by ultimate love.

- Jesus did not use his energy to tear down, but to build up, to create and restore. For example, he did not condemn the woman caught in adultery. Instead, he told her that her sins were forgiven and to go and sin no more (John 8:1–11). He did not ignore the blind man by just walking by him. Instead, he restored his sight (Mark 8:22–26).
- Jesus did not give up on the Apostles when they were in the midst of a storm at sea and his closest friends didn't trust that he would be able to keep them safe because he had fallen asleep! Instead, he challenged their faith a bit but calmed their fears (Luke 8:22–25).
- Being a Christian leader is all about becoming a creator, a builder, and a restorer. As Christian leaders we are challenged to share our ideas and energies freely and for the benefit of others.

Invite everyone to take their drawings home and to consider creating, building, or restoring just one of the situations during the coming week.

11. Conclude the session by leading the participants in the prayer service, “Prayer of Sending Forth,” at the end of this chapter.

A Simple Recipe for Soup

The following recipe is simple, quick to make and easy to adjust according to your need. It is traditionally known as Italian Flag Soup, as the colors of the ingredients are those of the Italian flag. It is meatless, though a favorite meat could easily be added if so desired. The recipe below is designed to make one large, industrial-sized pot of soup, to feed approximately 100 people. Adjust accordingly for a larger or smaller anticipated crowd.

- nine packages of dinner rolls (twelve per package)
- four tablespoons olive oil
- six large yellow onions, chopped
- four large cloves of garlic, minced
- eight 16-ounce cans of chicken broth
- six large potatoes, peeled, cut in two, and sliced approximately one-fourth inch thick
- four 16-ounce cans of diced tomatoes
- one tablespoon salt and one tablespoon pepper; oregano or basil is optional
- one bag of fresh spinach, chopped

In a large, industrial-sized pot, combine olive oil, onions, and garlic, and cook until onions are softened and translucent, stirring constantly. Add chicken broth and potatoes and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Let boil for 10 minutes, lower the heat, and add tomatoes, salt, and pepper, along with any additional spices if so desired. Finally, add the spinach 10 minutes before serving and stir into the soup.

Acknowledgments

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The five-step process of mediating on pages 43–44 and handout 3 is adapted from *Mediation: Getting to WinWin!* teacher’s guide, by Fran Schmidt (Miami: Peace Education Foundation, 1994), pages 28–29. Copyright © 1994 by Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation.

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