

# The 30-60-90 Rule

Most every job begins with a probationary period. This valuable time allows an employee to learn on the job while working alongside an experienced, trained, worker. From firefighters to the wait staff at Chili's Bar and Grill, most employees go through a probationary period. So why in youth ministry do we often take an untrained, naïve, and often tentative volunteer and simply open the youth room door and say, "Well, there they are. You'll do great."

It is during the probationary time that the employee is given the opportunity to learn the skills needed to fulfill the role, ask questions, and receive feedback and instructions. In ministry, a probationary period also allows time for the volunteer and the ministry staff and youth to feel each other out. Let's use boxing as an example. In the first round the fighters usually don't do much fighting. They dance around, throw a few jabs, and then take a break. Although it didn't look like much happened, there was actually an amazing amount of activity going on. The combatants were feeling each other out. The fighters were setting the range for their punches, noticing how their opponent reacted to their movements, and collecting all kinds of data in order to help them win the upcoming rounds.

A probationary period in ministry should be seen along these lines. The new volunteer and the youth pastor are both collecting data, getting a feel for what is going to happen, and setting the stage for future success.

## 30-60-90 Rule: Recommended Guidelines

- **During the first thirty days**, a new volunteer shadows an established team member. This should be another volunteer team member, not the youth director. This volunteer should be asked ahead of time to serve as a mentor and should be selected carefully and thoughtfully. The team member introduces the new person to the kids. He answers questions from the volunteer perspective. He establishes a relationship with the new person. The team member gives regular feedback about how the person is doing and provides insight into what the new person might need to do differently. Allowing a team member to do this is less intimidating for the new volunteer. It also allows for another perspective from a trusted ministry partner. An added perk of this period is it limits liability, as a new person is never alone with any of the students. After thirty days, the director meets with the new person for conversation and evaluation. The director should talk with the mentor prior to this meeting to get his/her input. The director should find out how the new person feels he/she is doing by asking such questions as: "Who are some kids you feel you are connecting with?" "Where do you see yourself plugging in?" "What has been your favorite thing?" "What has been most difficult?" The director should listen to the stories, address any concerns, give encouragement, and help instill confidence. If the director and the new person agree to proceed, they should establish some clear, simple goals for the next thirty days and set the date for the next meeting.

- **Days 30-60.** The new person should be encouraged to venture out during planned events and programs, but should have no alone time with students. During the program time, the new person is now freed up to begin building relationships in a controlled environment. He/she has a structure and support system around him/her as he/she forms healthy bonds with students. The mentor from the first thirty days should still make himself (or herself) available for questions and support, but no longer is he/she assigned specifically to the new volunteer. This is also a good time to begin to let the new person take on some leadership within the structure of the program. He/she could co-lead a small group discussion, for example. After day sixty, there should be a second meeting for evaluation and conversation. The youth director and the new person now look at which goals were met and which weren't, or what new goals emerged. Both should be getting a real feel for whether this is going to work out or not. If both agree to continue on, they set goals for the next thirty days and set a meeting date for final evaluation.
- **Days 60-90.** Allow for leadership within the established structure if the new person feels ready to take this on. Also ministry outside the organized program can begin. Each activity should be approved by the director prior to taking place. For example, the new person might request to go to a youth's varsity soccer game, or meet a couple of kids for lunch at school. This request should always be in writing (e-mail is fine). The approval or rejection should always be in writing as well. After ninety days, a final evaluation and decision is made. This is the time that the new person can walk away with no obligation or reason to feel guilty. The youth director also has the right to decide that the new person is not a fit for the youth ministry, or at least not as a volunteer team member.

#### Notes:

- Every activity should be held in accordance with your Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- The new person can walk away before the ninety days, but it is important to encourage him/her to do all he/she can to stick it out for ninety days. So often, the first thirty to sixty days are awkward and difficult. Staying for ninety days helps get past some of that.
- If the director feels the person is not a fit, he/she should get input from the volunteer team members before electing not to add the person to the team. Any volunteers who recommend the person not come aboard should give their opinion in writing for the director to have on file, if needed.
- Background checks are a great way to confirm discernment. They are also a valuable way to minimize mistakes.

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