HOW TO HIRE A CHILDREN’S PASTOR

Legoland® Park is just a short drive from our house here in San Diego. It’s been one of our favorite destinations as our two sons have grown up. Much of the reason for that is because of how they “recruit” kids to join in the fun. You see, we often see commercials on local TV that lead with the tagline “Heroes Wanted.” They describe this approach in the commercials and on their website like this:

“Where else but at a Legoland® Park can the child become the hero? It’s all about active participation ... So whether they’re a brave knight taming dragons in Knights’ Kingdom, a courageous firefighter at the Fire Academy or a skilled construction worker at the Digger Challenge, it’s the child that’s always at the centre of the action and firmly in control!”

What child wouldn’t want to be the hero and actively participate as a dragon tamer? They want to be involved. They want to use their imaginations. They want to be active and fully engaged in the experience. They want to be heroes!

You Need a Hero

My experience with children’s pastors is that they don’t necessarily want to be the hero, but they certainly are the hero. They want to be actively engaged and creative. Most of all, they want to make a difference in the lives of children and their families.

But children’s ministry is a challenging place to lead. There are many dragons to tame! Be it the difficulty of programming a ministry with a diverse age range (birth through preteen) or guiding the group that both John Maxwell and Bill Hybels acknowledge as perhaps the most difficult to lead—volunteers. Children’s ministry presents many challenges, and in many ways, it is the most complex single ministry in the church.

Children’s ministry can also have the deepest and most far-reaching impact in the church. Children are the most spiritually sensitive and receptive age group. (As you read through the Gospels you see that Jesus seemed to understand that very well!) And children’s ministry reaches into every other ministry in the church, perhaps more than any other department. What happens in children’s ministry not only impacts the children, but every sector of the church.

You need a strong leader. You need a hero. Understanding this is the first step in finding and hiring the right person for the job.

Define What Your Hero Looks Like

What does this hero look like? A great way to understand this is to write a job description. What, exactly, do you need in your hero? What will their responsibilities be? How will they fit into the current structure of your church? What specific or unique qualities will you look for in your new leader?

Much of what you define will be unique to your church environment. However, here are five qualities that I believe every children’s ministry leader should possess.

- A genuine love for God and His people. This might seem obvious, but the demands of leading in children’s ministry highlight the need for this characteristic over all others.
- Ability to own and cast a big vision. Children’s ministry is a team sport! Your leader MUST be able to share the big picture in order to bring new members onto the team.
- Ability to lead adults and develop new leaders. Leading children’s ministry effectively is primarily about leading adults, not children. The larger the church, the greater the need for this ability. As the ministry grows, the ability to reproduce new leaders to share the load is absolutely essential.
- An understanding of the spiritual formation process. Children’s ministry is not childcare; it’s investing in those who Jesus said represent what our faith should actually look like (see Mark 10:13-16). Understanding this and how to lead children through this process in the church while equipping parents to do it in the home is vital to accomplishing the bottom line of children’s ministry—making disciples.

BY GREG BAIRD
An ability to administrate. Children’s ministry success is found in the details. Structure and process amidst the controlled chaos is essential. Whether it's the individual's own skill or the ability to work through others, an ability to administrate is a non-negotiable.

Create a Plan to Locate Your Hero
Once you know what you are looking for, it's time to go find them. But how? Where do you find heroes who can teach large groups of kids, recruit fantastic volunteers and keep parents happy? They are not easy to find, but there are many places to look.

Look within the walls of your own domain. You might have a hero apprentice serving in your ministry right now! Are there volunteers or part-time staff who have consistently stepped up and saved the day? Are there lay leaders who have been successful in other professions but have expressed an interest or desire—sensed a calling—for serving in the church? Sometimes hiring from within is optimal because the new hire might already have a great understanding of church dynamics and you’ve been able to observe them in action. However, beware that often hiring from within maintains the status quo. If you are looking for great change, it’s probably better to hire from the outside.

Talk to other heroes that you know. Networking presents fantastic opportunities to do so many things. One of them is getting connected to the right people when you need to. You need a hero and you know other heroes—pastors, ministry leaders and other children's ministry leaders. Tap into and expand your network to let your opportunity be known. Social media is an amazing thing

Get professional help. It’s never been easier or more affordable to retain help to assist in your search process. In fact, you will probably spend less in the search process (because of the time and effort saved) and have a more focused search by hiring outside help. Three companies that have a focus in children’s ministry are: KidMinJobs with Greg Baird, Vanderbloemen Search with Michael Chanley, and Church Team Connections with Jay Hostetler.

Partner with your new hero. Hiring any ministry leader is truly entering into a partnership and hiring a children’s pastor is no different. Once you’ve gone through the process of identifying viable candidates, deciding which one to join forces with is the final step in the process.

Get to know the candidate. What is their personality? Will they fit well with your current team? Do they share the overall philosophy of the church? Do they agree and can they support the doctrine espoused by the church? Do they understand the culture, both of the region and of the church specifically? What is their family like and will they fit well in the church?

Check out the candidate. Have them complete an application. Do reference checks (or make sure the firm you hire does the reference checks). Perform a thorough, professional background check. Interview them extensively (more than once and by more than one leadership staff, if possible). Invite them to teach or do other aspects of ministry to observe them in action. Introduce them to other staff to see how they interact and, later, get feedback from those staff members. Spend enough time with them to get a feel for who they are, and also allow them to get a feel for who you are. Observe how they interact with their spouse and children.

Invite them to join your team. Be fair and generous with your compensation package; it should be comparable to similar leadership positions on the team. Assist them with relocation. Be considerate of their current situation, allowing for appropriate time to provide closure. Welcome them enthusiastically. Orient them thoroughly to their new surroundings. Create a “getting started” plan to help them start successfully. Inquire of their personal and professional needs as they and their family get situated.

Celebrate your new hero. Heroes are hard to come by. That includes good children’s ministry leaders. The best ones won’t consider themselves to be heroes or seek out the spotlight. They just love kids, equip parents and develop leaders. When you find and hire one of these, it’s definitely time to celebrate!

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