

“I am convinced that impact happens person-to-person.”

As a fifteen-year veteran of student ministry, I'll admit that I love the big events. I love planning them with my team and working out the details. I love the excitement of seeing a ton of students having a blast – *in church*. I love the crazy games, the loud music, and the free t-shirts. Throw in a Christian band and I'm in heaven.

However, in recent years there's been a movement to shift away from the big events, and “programming” has become a dirty word. Youth pastors have been told to abandon the program and “just hang out with kids.” When you talk with youth workers, it does not take long before the conversation turns to the “program vs. relationship” debate.

Before we go and split the church over this philosophy of ministry (don't laugh, it's been split over far less important issues), let's agree that both sides of this conversation have valid points. We have all seen the benefits of the big event, and I believe there will always be a place for them. But, I am convinced that impact happens person-to-person. So here are a few things I do to make an impact.

1. Get Out of the Office

I have two offices at my church – I have the “official office” which is really just a cubicle right outside my Senior Pastor's office, and I also have a “secret office” which is in our student ministry area. Truthfully, I love my “secret office.” I can listen to Thousand Foot Krutch as loud as I want, search YouTube for the latest viral video, and even catch the latest episode of Duck Dynasty, all while getting my work done.

But as cool as my secret office is and as funny as it may be to watch Uncle Si's crazy shenanigans, the truth is – before long, I want out. I want to be at the school helping out with the Bible Club, or eating lunch with students, or just hanging out. I want to live life with them. And I can't do that when I'm in my office all the time.

2. Unplug

If you've been in student ministry for more than fifteen minutes, someone has “encouraged” you to unplug. We all know that students are on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook – well, some



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homeschoolers are still on Facebook. (Just kidding, I love both homeschoolers and Facebook!) But, we need real human interaction and so do our students. We need to sit down knee-to-knee and eye-to-eye with them. Buy them a coffee, milkshake, or smoothie and put the phone away. You'll be surprised how much better you'll get to know them!

3. Know the Calendar

Here in the north we have "snow days." I love snow days because they provide me with an excellent opportunity to grab some students and do something fun. But if I know the calendar, I can be even more intentional when students have a day off from school. Let's be honest – we know they already forgot what you spoke about last Wednesday. So use those off days to create memories that will last a lifetime.

4. Plan Better

Sometimes I'm not as prepared as I should be. (That's probably not a big surprise, since I just admitted to watching Duck Dynasty in my office!) I can't tell you how many Sunday mornings roll around and I'm adding that last-minute video to the media presentation or making copies of permission slips instead of engaging students as they walk into the room. Instead of having the time to ask them how their week was – and REALLY listen, I'm running around doing tasks that should have been done during the week.

I know I need to do a better job organizing my week. I know I need to use my office time to plan and prepare. I know that when I am better prepared, real ministry can happen. And when real ministry happens, impact happens.

Back in November my family and I went back to Pennsylvania for a friend's wedding. On our way home to Ohio we stopped and visited our "home church." I was the youth pastor at First Baptist Church in Milton, PA for five years and we are still very close with the people there. After church we went out for lunch with some of the "students" who are now adults. We laughed for over two hours retelling stories and reliving memories. (Here's a photo of that gathering. That's me in the back on the right.)



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