

**Everyone's**

**Called To**

**Youth**

**Ministry**

**...they just don't  
know it yet**



**LeaderTreks**

**By: Darren Sutton**



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Developing Leaders to Fulfill the Great Commission

*Everyone's Called To Youth Ministry - They Just Don't Know It Yet*

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Thank you.

To Jesus, for rescuing me when I thought no one was looking.

To all the adults who impact teenagers –

I am one who benefitted from your sacrifice.

To Katie, the most amazing volunteer youth leader  
and best friend I have ever had. I am blessed.

-Darren

*You got me when I was an unformed youth, God, and taught me  
everything I know. Now I'm telling the world your wonders;  
I'll keep at it until I'm old and gray. Psalm 71:17 TM*

## **About the Author**

Darren Sutton has served in youth ministry for over 20 years. He has a passion for students and the adults who influence them. Together with his wife, Katie, he co-founded Millennial Influence and produces a weekly podcast reaching parents of teenagers. Darren and Katie have three teenagers of their own and Darren currently serves a student ministry in Texas.

Find him online at:

[www.facebook.com/darrenandkatiesutton](http://www.facebook.com/darrenandkatiesutton)

[www.twitter.com/darrensutton](http://www.twitter.com/darrensutton)

[www.minfluence.com](http://www.minfluence.com)

[www.everyonescaledtoyouthministry.com](http://www.everyonescaledtoyouthministry.com)



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## 🌀 Introduction

“I will never work with teenagers!” And with that, the gauntlet had been thrown...

Unbeknownst to Belle, she had just issued me the challenge of a lifetime. I had slowly, but surely, been moving my church to a culture of ‘everyone’s called to student ministry; some people just don’t know it yet.’ It was my goal – no, my calling – to have every single person in my church serve in the student ministry in some way.

Many tried to dissuade me. Many said I was crazy. Some even said there would not be a place in the student ministry for some people. Balderdash!! I had no doubt that I had heard a very clear – albeit insane – word from the Lord. “Darren, everyone’s called to youth ministry, some people just don’t know it yet. You need to tell them.”

You would have thought I said I was taking my first-born son, Isaac, into the wilderness to make a sacrifice to the Lord. People were dumbstruck, awestruck, or griefstruck.

I had many responses like Belle’s. “No way, no how, no chance.” There was laughter – the laughter that comes from someone who doesn’t really know how to respond when a crazy person is in their midst.

Now I don’t know why Belle’s response came as such a throw-down to me. Maybe because Belle and I butt heads on lots of issues, not just youth ministry. But when she made her anti-youth-ministry declaration, I just knew that I had to have her, that our students needed to have her, that God wanted her involved in our youth ministry.

So right then I began to hatch the plan: I was going to get Belle serving in the youth ministry by the end of the next year...and she was.



## 🕒 PROLOGUE

It's the kiss-of-death phrase in youth ministry. "If I want something done right, I have to do it myself."

None of us set out to be the arrogant-know-it-all-save-the-youth-ministry-world-carry-all-the-load person we see staring back at us in the mirror. It happens by accident usually.

We have a specific vision about the way something should be done, so we'll just do it ourselves to make sure 'the ministry stays consistent.' Or maybe we're control freaks, so we do it ourselves to ensure that it gets done the way we want it done. Or maybe we just don't trust anyone else. After all everyone else are all lightweights when it comes to youth ministry. We know how it should be done so we're gonna do it. Or maybe we just simply cannot find anyone who will help.

What a lonely way to lead. What an exhausting way to lead. Ministry is a never-ending job with never ending interruption on a never ending calendar of never ending demands...that never ends. That's exactly why it can be so devastating, even though well intentioned, when a youth worker rides on as a Lone Ranger.

There's another kiss of death phrase that might be surprising. It's the sinister evil twin of "I'll do it myself"...only she's all dressed up for the prom. No one would ever guess she's a murderous harlot dressed in her homecoming finest! "Delegate – Delegate – Delegate."

But delegating is good, right? It brings people in. It lightens our loads. It broadens the ministry. Right??

Wrong!! Delegating is what people do to ensure the job gets done. It's the 'there's-not-enough-of-me-or-hours-in-the-day-to-do-all-this-I-

need-help' mindset.

Again, this is a difficult place from which to lead. People drop the ball. Others question why the youth pastor isn't doing some of this stuff. Over time the volunteers can become jaded, dissuaded, and generally disgusted by the dump-load of stuff falling on them from on-high.

And it can sometimes lead pastors back to 'I'll just do it myself.' It's a never-ending cycle of ministry disillusionment.

But there IS an answer. It might be a phrase not as familiar. Or maybe it's very familiar, but without the structure to implement. That all changes with this book!

Everyone's called to youth ministry – they just don't know it yet!! It's my job to help them figure that out and then equip them for MINISTRY – not to volunteer, not to fill a spot, not to teach a class, not to run my errands.

It's my job to EQUIP them to DO ministry and to BE ministers. It's my job to help them catch a vision for how they are ministering – even if what they do seems small or insignificant. It's my job to meet them where they are and bring them to where God wants them to be – serving in the highest place of honor in the church: Student Ministry. And together, we weave a net in student ministry that catches everyone: students, parents, leaders...even me.

I also believe all people ought to have a hand in youth ministry because – in my youth minister way of translating Scripture – I believe the Bible commands it.

Psalm 78:4 says, *We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders* (New Living).

It goes on to report that THIS is how generational faith will happen. It's not really the youth pastor who is going to propagate faith in the younger generation. The church, in all her youth-fearing glory, has a faith story to tell. Each person in your congregation who has had the wonderfully transforming and defining moment with Christ has a glorious deed or a mighty wonder to share with the next generation. King David, with his magnificent flaws, continued to know the value of the story of a defective, entirely human, man redeemed and loved by a glorious God. That story, he assures us in this Psalm, is not wasted on the young. Yet so many people try to hide those parts of the story from students. The truth is, those parts of our story, those ugly, problematic, less than perfect parts provide the perfect backdrop for bringing the glorious deeds of the Lord to center stage! The life-on-life example imbeds itself in the soul-site of our students, like a favorite YouTube video or a perfect blog page. The code is lengthy, but once imbedded, it provides story AND context for the ones hearing it. Our students are DYING to know the glorious deeds of the Lord...but they want it from beginning to end. Don't provide them a happy platitude about how good God is; give them the nitty-gritty, grimy, slimy story of redemption God enacted on your behalf. They eat that UP!! And all of the adults have a story to share – some stories are still in process, some are just beginning, and some are the well-read classics of the faith. Regardless – the stories are available. Make sure they are never, ever hidden!

Now I know what you're thinking...you don't know the people in MY church. Their stories don't really run that deep. Or maybe you're thinking, "Dude, my church is right next to the seminary –those profs could never relate Jesus in a relevant way to teenagers." Or maybe you're even thinking, "Someone in my church has had a defining moment with Jesus??...please, PLEASE raise your hand!"

Remember this – every story – EVERY STORY!! – every single story of faith has value and use in the capable hands of the Holy Spirit. I became a Christ-follower at seven years old. It sounds like the pretext

for a 'raised-in-church' kind of story. It isn't. I grew up in a home that was about as far from Jesus as Pluto is from becoming a planet again! My folks weren't anti-religion or anti-Jesus...they just didn't make room for Him in their solar system. It probably was difficult with the drinking, fighting, making up, and chasing the almighty dollar that defined our home. God, in His sovereignty, raised me on a family compound of sorts though. My grandmother lived just a five-minute walk up the gravel road from my house – and if we're sticking with the science lesson, Jesus was her sun! And she was mine. I spent most of my young life at her house – climbing trees, eating homemade cookies, playing in the barn, and escaping the insanity of an abusive dad and a mother who was stuck in a defeated situation. She took me to church with her and I loved it. It was a little country church – no indoor plumbing, no playground, no children's ministry – just some singing with some old ladies who thought I was the cutest thing they'd ever seen...and fried chicken after! Somewhere amidst The Old Rugged Cross and Kentucky Fried Chicken, I found my need of a Savior. As I grew older, the abuse in our house grew more consistent. I was trying to reconcile a life of faith amidst the lies and excuses for the monster my dad was and my doormat mother. I couldn't understand how praise could continually be on my lips while plotting my father's murder and my mother's escape was in my heart. As I plunged headlong into adolescence, I knew I needed more than a Savior. I needed a Lord, a coach, a life-line, a 'walk-with-me-on-Earth-not-just-in-heaven' Jesus. And though He didn't whisk me away on a white horse, He rescued me from myself. And wow, the rest of that story could fill the remaining pages of this book (and just might a little later on).

It took me years to be able to articulate that story, yet God has used my story to bring others into his family, and he can use every story. We must help others see this. God can take what we would see as the worst testimony ever conveyed and bring people into a saving relationship with Christ. He can take a wonderfully simple message and penetrate the heart of the most calculated minds. He can take the most calculated

story and penetrate even the simplest soul. As we think about those stories just waiting to be told to the next generation, we must never ever lose sight of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of the skill of the storyteller, the story can be received by those hearing it. And I know if you are remotely good at remembering scripture, you'll recognize this verse, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). God can use every story of His grace to bring more people into a relationship with Him. We, as youth ministers, have an unprecedented opportunity to watch God work His good in the lives of those we enlist to minister alongside us. They may not be as good at telling stories or relating Scripture as we are. Who cares? Do we really short-change God's holy work that much – believing someone has to be able to speak fo-shizzle and wear the right T-shirt brand and have the right age listed on their driver's license in order to be usable and effective for the spiritual work of service in our student ministries? I pray it isn't so.

I know in the heart of most youth workers there is a fervent desire to see as many people involved in youth ministry as possible, and that's just what this book is all about.





# **CHAPTER 1**

## **FINDING LEADERS**

Let's get something straight from the get go – most people are not leaders when they're first enlisted. They're volunteers, spot-fillers, chaperones, security, drivers – but not leaders.

How do they become leaders? Well that's totally dependent on the one who does the enlisting. You see everyone has the potential to lead. But it takes some intentional development from the very beginning for them to realize their potential. That's where you come in. Recognizing that “everyone's called to youth ministry, they just don't know it yet,” helps you define how they come into your team or organization and where they go from there.

## ① **Recognizing Everyone As A Potential Leader**

She's old, cranky, not too agile and pretty critical. He's quiet, unassuming, kinda dorky and a little boring. She's busy, high-maintenance, super-organized, and involved in two other ministries at church. He's sporadic in attendance, disinterested in kids, impulsive and funny.

If you can find potential leaders in the people above, then you can find a leader anywhere!

Each description above represents multiple people who have served with me in student ministry over the past 20 years. Had it not been for the God-imposed philosophy of ‘everyone's called to youth ministry’ I would have passed right over them. But God had another plan. They found a place in the student ministry, began to grow in leadership, and became invaluable to students and their families over the years.

Each person above was initially resistant to serving with teenagers. People are resistant to youth ministry because they fear the unknown.

‘What if I can’t relate to the teenagers?’ ‘What if they don’t care what I have to say?’ ‘What if I’m not spiritual enough?’ ‘What if the youth leader abandons me?’ It’s new. It’s unknown. It’s scary. But God’s heart for kids is that we pass by that fear as we pass on our faith stories. Part of my calling as the lead youth pastor/worker is helping people push through their fear to find their faith voice in the lives of students. They all have that voice – but sometimes the fear screaming in their ears is louder than their own chronicle of faith and hope in Jesus. As the point person for our youth ministry, it’s NOT my job to scream more loudly than their fears; it’s simply to help them find enough footing not to fall while they navigate their own fears and faith stories.

Leaders are everywhere. They all have an important story to share with the next generation. It just takes a trained, intentional eye to find them.

Intentionally look...at everyone! All too often we discount people before we even take the first look, much less a second one. She’s too old, too young, too single, too married, too many kids, too busy, too hippie, too straight-laced, too (insert excuse here). But God has sleeper-leaders just waiting for His awakening touch in their lives. If we count them out before they’re ever counted in, we might miss something wonderful.

Let me tell you about Luberta. Luberta was probably 110 years old when I met her. So maybe not 110, but she was elderly. She had been retired for years and widowed nearly as long. She was part of the Dorcas Sunday School class and went faithfully to the Golden Agers luncheons. She obviously had osteoporosis (before Sally Field was talking about it) and a heart of gold. She never asked me about the student ministry. She never indicated the slightest interest. But one day I happened to be talking to a group of ladies about a youth event that we had planned for our students that was unfortunately cancelled due to inclement weather. That event was date specific, so I was trying to come up with a new plan for our students that was fresh and exciting.

And while I wasn't really asking for thoughts – we were just conversing – Luberta came up with an idea for an event that would combine fun with missions (an instant winner), and our friendship was born! I was able to pick Luberta's brain about the event, had her help me with the planning, execution, and evaluation, and asked her if she might be willing to help with future youth ministry. By the time God called me away from that ministry, Luberta was teaching youth Sunday school, driving the van for our upcoming mission trip, and regularly engaging in the lives of our students. Her age and bent (literally) would have counted her out before she was even considered by most – and she ended up being one of the most faithful leaders I've ever had. But I had to look!

Pete was a quiet guy, with a gentle humor and involved in the worship ministry at our church. As we began to build a friendship, I realized that Pete had a serious heart for students, but had never been asked to serve. As a teenager and young adult, he had been involved in a para-church organization in his high school. Following college though, he had wandered from the Lord and his faith. Because of those dark years, he had counted himself out of student ministry. But his love for teenagers and Jesus was so clear; I knew we had to have him. Pete was reluctant, but agreed to 'chaperone' a little on Wednesday nights. He started as a 'figure in the back of the room' on Wednesdays and eventually became a small group leader who impacted his guys so powerfully that each of those students, now grown men, still seek out Pete's godly wisdom and friendship from all over the country. But I had to look!

Don't count them out! Open your eyes. They're leaders. Oh, maybe not yet. And maybe they don't even know it yet. But if you're intentional about your ministry with the adults in your church, they'll discover just what amazing leaders they truly are!



## WHERE ARE ALL THE LEADERS?

Youth ministry is a lot of work and you can't do it alone. You need a team, but often building that team seems impossible. Finding key people who are willing to give of their time and volunteer with students is crucial, but who do you recruit and where are they hiding?

In this bold new look at recruiting and training adult staff, Darren Sutton challenges our thinking on who is called to serve in the youth ministry. Darren's humor will draw you in, while his wisdom and experience in youth ministry will challenge your perspectives in this area. This book will help you look everywhere for adults who can passionately serve in youth ministry. After all, everyone's called to youth ministry...they just don't know it yet.



Darren Sutton has served in youth ministry for over 20 years. He has a passion for students and the adults who influence them. Together with his wife, Katie, he co-founded Millennial Influence and produces a weekly podcast reaching parents of teenagers. Darren and Katie have three teenagers of their own and Darren currently serves a student ministry in Texas. Find him online at [www.everyonescalledtoyouthministry.com](http://www.everyonescalledtoyouthministry.com)