

Nine Steps for Blending

Excerpt from *One Church, Four Generations* by Gary McIntosh. Reprinted with permission of the author. *Printing 2002 (paperback) by Baker.*

The following are vital steps that should be taken by church leaders who desire to blend Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers into one church.

1. Get senior pastor's support.

It is often said that what is endorsed from the pulpit will succeed, and what is not will fail. The pastor must play the key role in planning, educating, and leading the church toward a blended ministry. For such a different emphasis to take place, the senior pastor must be committed to it and work to make it happen. No matter how strong the pressure, it is wise never to attempt to build a blended ministry without the senior pastor's full involvement.

Going beyond simple endorsement of the strategy, a pastor must be comfortable with and able to mesh two differing philosophies of ministry into a single new form. If the pastor's ministry has been geared to only one generation, he must be willing to communicate to a blended audience, find and use new illustrations, change his wardrobe (perhaps wearing a sweater and tie on Sunday morning), develop a relational style, adapt his vocabulary to be meaningful to all members, accept criticism, support the musicians and staff both publicly and privately, share creative leadership with a worship team, and patiently give the process time. A blended service that is well done is complex and difficult to do. It takes a lot of planning, and a pastor must be willing to prepare sermons and plan worship services two or three months in advance.

2. Get support of lay leaders.

Lay leaders in the congregation must be willing to follow the pastor's lead. Their personal and group commitment to disciple making must cause them to see the needs and opportunities available in a blended church. They must team with the pastor in a strategic, long-term plan to bring the generations together.

A solid commitment to outreach and assimilation will undergird their willingness to try a blending approach to worship. Criticism will come from saints who feel that they are being neglected. As this occurs, the leaders' commitment to finding and keeping the lost one will need to outweigh the pressure to minister to the ninety-and-nine who are already in the church (see Luke 15:4-7).

3. Help the congregation see the opportunities and needs.

Existing congregations must develop a desire to reach those of other generations; usually it's a congregation of Builders and Boomers who must reach out to Busters and Bridgers. Church leaders should plan to spend a minimum of six to twelve months creating such a consciousness before many changes or new strategies are implemented. Take the time to build a solid biblical foundation, share the vision for a new style of ministry, listen to people's concerns, adjust the proposed strategy, and pray.

4. Stress biblical concepts of love and acceptance.

Diversity and variety are two words that characterize the Builder, Boomer, Buster, and Bridger generations. The divergent views, desires, and expectations of members of the four generations will require acceptance and love. Sermons, classes, and small groups should focus on these divergent ideas during the blending period. In particular, stress the "one another" commands found in the New Testament and structure opportunities for people from different generations to practice them in small group settings. For example, instruct one another (Romans 15:14), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), and submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).

5. Establish an alternate worship service or a new class in which blending can be

practiced.

It could be an evening worship service, a Sunday school class, or a small group. If this is not possible, an occasional praise or celebration service where new styles of music can be introduced will gradually introduce the congregation to blending. The gradual approach will help people accept new ideas, which can eventually be introduced on a regular basis.

The model service ought to reflect a balance of traditional and contemporary styles in music, participation, relationships, and dialogue. It works best if the organizations, transitions, feel, and flow of the new blended serve are well thought out and developed before you go public with the service. The best resource for learning how to do this is other churches that have already traveled this path.

6. Educate the generations so they understand each other.

A common term used in the 1960s to describe the gulf between Builders and Boomers was "generation gap." Generation gaps had been relatively unknown in earlier times since the slowness of change created very little difference in viewpoints between generations. The rapid pace of change since 1950 has made generation gaps real.

How each generation views the gap is different. Younger generations tend to focus on the intrinsic differences in values, and older generations tend to focus on the immaturity seen in the personal habits and styles of the younger. Teaching from the pulpit must be geared to help each group see the value of the other. Key areas of concern are music, expression of worship, relational values, institutional values, and commitment levels. Everyone who speaks from the platform should take great care to affirm and hold up each generation. In no case should a generation ever be criticized publicly. The congregation gets its cues from its leaders. What is said and done during the worship service will flow down into the rest of the church.

Meet with Sunday school classes and small groups to teach about the strengths and values of each generation. These smaller forums allow for questions and answers as well as providing a safe place for people to vent their frustrations. By using these smaller forums, you will circumvent the possibility of an explosion of frustration in a large setting, which may damage the entire body. As needed, meet with individuals over breakfast or lunch to hear their concerns.

In many cases the use of outside speakers or church consultants can prove to be a powerful change motivator. Being from the outside, they have several advantages, such as being able to say things that could not be said by a member of the church family, having a more objective outlook, and being viewed as an expert on the issue.

7. Foster common-ground experiences.

Generations tend to drift apart in churches. Scheduling classes, small groups, and activities around life stages is a natural process, but it tends to segregate the generations and limit their communication. Offering age-graded activities is proper; and there is no need to blend every ministry in a church. It does help generations to understand and love each other, however, when they spend time together. Leading up to and during the initial stages of developing a blended worship service, it is wise for church leaders to provide common-ground experiences for the generations.

A new-members class could introduce people to the values, goals, and history of all four generations. A parenting class might be attended by a mix of Builders, Busters, and Busters. The Builders could share the struggles they went through raising young children and answer questions. Since many Busters, in particular, may have come from homes where parenting skills were not well modeled, this could provide a solid opportunity to build bridges between the generations. An effort should be made to make small groups intergenerational.

Many Builders, Boomers, and Busters enjoy being around people of the other generations. Of course, as Busters begin having children, they should also be added to this class.

8. Organize a new-members task force.

The responsibility of this task force would be to help new people develop several friends in the group where they would feel comfortable. Representatives from each generation should serve on the task force. It is crucial that the task force include people who are recent newcomers to the church (within one or two years), so they remember what it was like to have been a new member. They can help new people understand and fit into the existing church structure with a minimum of frustration.

9. Encourage Boomers and Busters to take leadership.

If Builders have been the main leaders of your church, qualified Boomers and Busters must gradually be allowed and encouraged to assume key positions of leadership throughout the church structure. These would include the worship team, new-members committee, the worship committee, the music committee, the small-group committee, the activities (social/sports) committee, as well as regular boards, such as elders, deacons, or trustees. While members of the Bridger generation are still a little young for most leadership positions, they must be used where appropriate, such as on a worship team, teaching children, serving at camps, and so on.

It is crucial that the worship team be intergenerational. The leaders who are seen on the platform influence the people who will attend the service. When people come to a church, one of the first things they do is look around to find people like themselves. The people on the platform communicate a tacit message about who attends the church, so, in a blended worship service, care must be taken to have people of all ages up front. If the members of the worship team on the platform are only from the Builder generation, then the service will naturally attract Builders but not Boomers, Busters, or Bridgers. If a church wishes to attract and hold Busters, then it must have Busters on the platform. If the senior pastor comes from the Builder generation, then it is even more important that Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers be visibly present before the congregation.