

# ***Youth Worker Interview Assistance Guide For Churches***

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## **Welcome To The Search Process**

Michael Woodruff in his article, “How To Win At The Game Of Hiring”, provides insight into the interview process. He begins by asking the question; “Do you feel like wasting \$40,000 (probably \$50,000 today)? If you make a bad hiring decision, you’re probably out at least that much. What’s worse, if you make a really bad hiring decision – and it happens all the time – losing the money will be the least of your headache.”

Welcome to the exciting, tedious, energy consuming, risky process of hiring a youth worker. Because many churches have never walked this road or have limited professional experience in the hiring process, we have prepared this specialized guide to assist you. Our goal is to help you avoid some of the mistakes and pitfalls commonly made in the youth worker hiring process. Although following this manual will not guarantee success, it should serve as a valuable resource in walking you through several critical steps.

The key is patience. Many churches unintentionally “jump the gun”, bypassing crucial steps in order to fill the position quickly. Typically, that’s a recipe for disaster. We encourage you to begin by reading this guide and charting an initial course of action. Many steps can occur simultaneously. Also, you want to check our website for potential candidates seeking positions. Profiles will be provided, giving you detailed information on available candidates. You may contact any or all the candidates to pursue potential interviews.

You may also post a church profile and position description. We anticipate that several candidates will begin to check our site for position openings. These candidates may specifically contact you in pursuit of a potential interview.

It is our prayer that you’ll find this interview guide very beneficial as you seek to make an effective youth ministry hire. For additional information or resources, contact Duane Smith at [duane@youthministrytools.org](mailto:duane@youthministrytools.org).

## Preparing For A Positive Interview Process

Here are some helpful steps as you prepare for interviewing candidates.

### 1) Forming The Interview Team

Your first step is to build an effective interview team. The ability to effectively interview candidates will be determined by the composition of this team. A well-balanced cross section of the following individuals is recommended. An appropriately balanced team should be comprised of 6-10 individuals.

- 1-2 volunteer leaders. If you have both a middle school and high school group, you'll want to invite at least one leader from each group. These should be individuals who have a solid handle on the current status of the youth ministry and the needs of each group.
- 1-3 parents. These should be carefully selected parents who will provide an objective perspective for the group. Parents with a personal agenda or a subjective view based only on their own children's needs should not be invited.
- 2-3 student leaders. These should be carefully selected students who will provide positive representation for their group. The adults in the group should not easily intimidate these students. They should understand the needs of their group and not be afraid to share their thoughts on prospective candidates.
- 1-2 other church representatives. These should be key individuals who have a heart and passion for youth and the development of the church youth ministry. Older adults or "empty nesters" often serve as quality representatives.
- 1 consistory/counsel representative. This should also be an individual who shares a heart and passion for youth ministry. If this individual has strong leadership skills, he/she could serve as the chairperson/ facilitator for your team.

\*We do not recommend that the pastor be part of this team. The pastor typically has a full work load and does not need to be part of a lengthy interview process. This does not mean that the pastor should take a back seat. Our experience has shown us however that the pastor can be easily woven into the process later, once much of the initial leg work is complete.

## 2) Meet As A Team To Do Your Homework

It's recommended that the interview team meet at least twice prior to your first interview. During these meetings, your team should:

- Get to know each other. Your first meeting could include going for dinner or coffee. Discuss together why you are interested in being part of this process and share your vision for the church's youth ministry.
- Identify the most important qualities you're looking for in a candidate.
- Study your youth ministry mission and vision statement as well as the position description. Cross reference your list of most important qualities with these documents. Affirm that your discussion regarding qualities matches all documentation.
- Determine a process for each interview conducted. Who will lead the process? What questions will be priority? How will questions be asked? How much time will be allotted, etc.?
- Decide on a general dress code for your meetings. In most cases, dress should be casual but appropriate (somewhere between and suit and tie/dress and jeans/ tee shirt). Inform candidates prior to the interview regarding appropriate dress.
- Choose the best meeting environment. This could be at the church or the home of a search team member. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Try to avoid a very structured environment that is not warm or friendly. Comfortable seating in a circle or oval formation is typically best.
- Determine the length for each interview and commit to staying within the time frame. Second interviews are always an option.
- Build an appropriate list of questions to ask each candidate. Use the questions listed as a starting point, but customize to your unique culture. Delegate questions for each team member to engage the process.
- Plan for refreshments. This always adds a nice touch to any interview.
- Determine your interview dates and times. Interviewing two candidates back to back has advantages (do not schedule more than two in one evening, as fatigue will set in after two to three hours).

- Review candidate profiles and/or determine your advertising strategy. We recommend pursuing several avenues for advertising. The internet is one of your best sources.
- Choose a screening team. This should be a group of 2-3 individuals who will screen resumes/profiles as they are received. This group should consider information within these resumes/profiles as it relates to your vision, position description, and list of qualities you're looking for in a youth worker. The screening team should ultimately divide resumes/profiles into two groups, those who potentially may fit the criteria established, and those who clearly do not. You'll discover that this step will save significant time and keep the search team from becoming bogged down in an ocean of paperwork. It's imperative however that the search team trust the screening team to exercise sound judgment in the "weeding out process".
- Choose no more than two candidates for each interview date selected. Should you have multiple candidates you wish to consider, establish additional interview dates as necessary.
- Invest significant time praying as a team. This may be the most important step in the preparation process. Remember that your goal is God's leading and direction. Prayer is your most powerful tool in finding a candidate to provide effective long-term leadership for your church youth ministry. You may even consider forming a separate group of individuals committed to simply praying each week as this process continues.

## **Tips For Engaging A Positive Interview Experience**

An interview typically brings on a wide range of emotions for candidates. They will likely experience butterflies and excitement at the same time. Seeking to place them at ease and following these tips should serve helpful. Here are some thoughts to help make the interview a positive experience.

- **Arrive early.** The chairperson/ facilitator should plan to arrive approximately 20-30 minutes early. This will allow time to set up the interview room and minimize surprises (such as locked rooms, rooms that are already occupied, room temperature issues, etc.). All other interview personnel should arrive at least 15 minutes early. Arriving late sends a negative message to the candidates and often disrupts the process.
- **Greet the candidate with confidence.** Smile and make direct eye contact as you introduce yourself. Team participants should personally introduce themselves with name and some background information (see below).

- **Give the candidate some background information on interview team members.** It's helpful for the candidate to hear reasons why each member is serving on the interviewing team. Team members should share a brief overview of their passion for youth and their vision for future youth ministry development.
- **Don't expect the candidate to remember your name.** The candidates will do their best to remember each name, but this is difficult and does not necessarily reflect the candidate's ability to provide quality youth ministry leadership.
- **Let the team chairperson/ facilitator lead, but be sure to participate.** The team chairperson should facilitate the process, but also engage all team members in the process. Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity. The candidate has limited means of knowing your heart and passion if you don't participate. Following up on a candidate's response with another question is one means of additional participation. This can also lead the candidate deeper into a specific subject. Also, it's important that no team member dominate. Be sensitive to other members and their desire to participate.
- **Take notes.** Record quick thoughts on positive attributes as well as red or yellow flags or concerns. This will provide you a point of reference upon debriefing the interview experience.
- **Make eye contact when asking questions and observe their body language.** Sometimes the candidate will give you a better answer with body language and facial features than their actual verbal response.
- **Close with a season of prayer.** The team chairperson/ facilitator should close the interview by inviting all participants into a season of prayer. Be sure to participate, offering gratitude for the opportunity to interview the candidate and engaging God's continued leading in the process. Upon completion of the prayer, stand and thank the candidate with a positive hand shake and God's blessing.

## Sample Questions

Thinking and praying through the following questions will help you prepare effectively for the interview. Asking the right questions is a key to an effective interview. The following questions are outlined under various categories.

## **Relationship With Jesus Christ / Call To Youth Ministry**

- Tell us about your relationship with Jesus Christ and what he means to you today.
- Describe your devotional and prayer life. Where have you seen answered prayer in your life recently?
- What Bible passages are most meaningful to you and why?
- Do you sense God's call to long-term youth ministry? What evidence in your life affirms this calling?
- What is your vision for youth ministry?
- What is your doctrinal stance on Scripture?

## **Personal Qualifications For Youth Ministry**

- What do you perceive as your strengths for ministry / spiritual gifts?
- In what areas of ministry will you struggle? How will you compensate for these struggles?
- How has your education prepared you for a position such as this?
- How have your past experiences in youth ministry prepared you for a position such as this?
- Are there other "life experiences" you believe have prepared you for youth ministry leadership?

## **Short And Long Range Goals**

- Why are you interested in this specific position?
- What do you know about our church? (Note: in the corporate world, this question is a test to see if the candidate has done their homework. It should be the same in the ministry world. It could serve as a defining question. If the candidate has not done their homework, the interview is over—no matter how strong their resume is. No church wants someone who's just looking for a job. They want someone who will be as committed to the vision and direction established by the church.)

- How will you invest your time within your first six months at our church?
- What would be your ministry goals for the first year?
- What long-term goals would you establish?
- If you could see five years into the future, what would define your life and ministry?
- What do you believe are the greatest issues facing church youth ministry today? How would you address these issues?
- Describe the components of a dynamic youth ministry?

### **Leadership Style / Team Approach To Youth Ministry**

- Describe your style of leadership? Have you participated in any leadership style assessments or testing?
- Where would volunteer leaders fit into your style of youth ministry leadership?
- Where do you see student leaders fitting into your style of youth ministry leadership?
- How would missions and service be incorporated into your leadership approach?
- How would worship be incorporated into your leadership approach?
- Where do you see evangelism and outreach fitting into your approach?
- How do you feel about working within a multiple staff ministry?
- What makes a ministry team work? What destroys a ministry team? How would you contribute to building a strong ministry team?
- How would you seek to deal with conflict within a ministry team?
- How would you seek to include parents in your youth ministry?
- Are you familiar with “family-based” youth ministry? How do you feel about this approach?

## **Accountability**

- How important is accountability in youth ministry? How would you seek to build accountability into your life and ministry?
- In a ministry profession with a high burnout rate, how do you see yourself staying spiritually fueled for ministry?

## **Family And Personal Relationships**

- Tell us about your family?
- How would you seek to protect quality time each week with your family and friends?
- What do you enjoy doing for fun?

## **Miscellaneous**

- What would you do in this situation—(fill in the blank)?
- What are your views on (fill in the blank)? (Keep this specifically related to your church and church youth ministry?)
- What will most challenge you about a position like this?
- In what types of conditions do you work best?
- What expectations would you have for us as a church?
- How would one of your best friends describe you?
- What are some of the trends occurring in youth ministry today? How would you seek to keep current on youth ministry culture?
- Do you think a hired youth worker should become a member of the church they serve?
- What boundaries would you establish around your relationships with youth group members of the opposite sex?
- Do you have a mentor or coach? Would you be open to further mentoring or coaching?

## Sample Questions Candidates May Ask Your Team

As equally important as the questions you ask are the ones the candidate asks you. Keep in mind that they are interviewing you as well, seeking to determine if your church is one they could serve effectively. Here's a list of questions a candidate may ask you.

- Describe your church? What is the church's mission/vision? What does this church do well?
- What are the church's goals for the next three to five years?
- What challenges will this church face in the next three to five years?
- What is this church known for in this community?
- If our ministry is to be considered successful, what will that look like?
- Why did the last youth worker leave? or Who are some former staff members who didn't make it here and why? or Tell me who has been a staff hero in the past and why?"
- Are you hiring me to be the pastor to every student or to train and equip lay leaders to invest in the lives of youth?
- What is the budget for youth ministry? How do you see that changing in the future?
- What are the church's expectations for numerical and spiritual growth?
- Who would I report to and how much time per week will I spend with that individual / team?
- If someone asked you about me one year from now and you would respond that I have exceeded expectations, what would I be doing well?
- If someone asked you about me one year from now and you would respond that I am barely surviving, what would I have done or not done?
- What's the process for determining and approving what youth ministry goals and plans? a) Does a youth team approve everything? b) Does the senior pastor approve everything? c) Do I have sole authority to decide what we do?

- What other expectations are there for me outside of youth ministry? Does the church expect me to preach occasionally? Make hospital calls? Perform weddings and funerals? Attend consistory/council meetings?
- If I make a mistake, how do you perceive that being handled?
- What happens when the church is behind budget? Do you perceive the youth ministry department being cut if the church is behind on budget?
- How would you perceive me using my time each week? Are there expectations of typical office hours? Visiting schools?
- What is the policy for taking a day off? Vacation time?
- Would I be allowed occasional outside speaking engagements? (Find out what your church's policy is for staff speaking to groups and camps outside the church. Are they allowed a certain number of days per year for that? Does it come out of their vacation time? What about honorariums—can they keep them or do you need to turn them over to the church?)
- Where will my office be located? (This isn't about having a corner office with huge windows. It's about having a place that is easily accessible to the public and that does not isolate them from people. Because of the amount of counseling that goes on, their office should be in a central location with a window in the door, not tucked under the basement stairs where people need a map to find it.)
- What equipment will I have at my disposal (computer, LCD projector, etc.)? Who handles equipment reservations?
- Will I have access to an administrative assistant? How many hours a week? With whom will I be sharing his or her time? Who has priority on their time? What is their base of computer knowledge?
- What are the three most important qualities for a staff member to possess at this church?
- If a conflict arises between another staff member and me, how would that be handled?
- Are there any expectations such as teaching a Sunday school class, participating in worship, etc., that are not outlined in the job description?
- Who are the current adult volunteers? How long have they been involved in the youth ministry? How do they feel about the church hiring a youth worker?

- If I determined that an adult volunteer was not a team player and, after consulting with my advisors, asked this person to step down from the team, how would that be perceived?
- How do you feel about student involvement in Sunday worship roles and/or other leadership roles within the church? Is the pastor open to this?
- Tell me about your pastor(s)?
- Do the students have a voice at this church? Is the church open to styles of worship and leadership that connect with youth? What evidence exists to support this?
- Is there a support/advocacy team in place for youth ministry?

## **Avoiding Illegal Or Inappropriate Questions**

It's very possible that your interview team may ask a question that is illegal or inappropriate (often as a result of not understanding or know legalities in this area). Questions related to a candidate's participation in a moral sin, use of illegal substances, ethnic heritage, age, what year they graduated from high school, who's going to care for their children if they are hired, etc., are all illegal questions. Since members of the interview team may not know this information, be sure to discuss this area prior to the first interview. We'll do our best to alert you to changing issues. Should a team member ask a question that may be illegal or inappropriate, it's the responsibility of the chairperson redirect the process. Should the candidate feel that the question is illegal or inappropriate, they may choose not to answer. Be sensitive to protecting boundaries.

## **Processing The Interview**

Interviews typically should occur within 60-90 minutes. This means that all your questions will not be addressed in a single interview. Therefore, be sure to allow adequate time for the candidate to ask questions. Questions not addressed in the first interview can be covered at a later time.

After the first interview, follow up with a brief debriefing process. The following questions may be asked in a debriefing session:

- What did you appreciate about this candidate?
- What concerns would you have about this candidate?

- ❑ What would you like to know more about this candidate?
- ❑ Based on what we know about this candidate, does he/she initially appear to be a good fit with this church?
- ❑ Based on what we know about this candidate, do we wish to pursue this candidate further?

It's also helpful to engage a green/yellow/red process. After debriefing, simply ask each team member to place the candidate in a green, yellow, or red category. Green indicates that you are definitely interested in pursuing this candidate further. Yellow means that you're not ruling the candidate out, but that you have some reservations (that may need further discussion or dialog). A red vote means that you are not interested in pursuing the candidate further.

### **Should You Choose Not To Pursue A Candidate**

If after the first interview, the interview team has determined that a specific candidate would not be a good fit, contact the candidate with your decision. Candidates are usually eager to determine where they stand with a particular church. Knowing that a door has closed with a church helps them move on, seeking God's further leading. Sending a thank you card or letter is often a nice gesture.

### **Should You Choose To Pursue A Candidate**

As with the step above, seek to contact the candidate within 48 hours. Before calling however, decide on a date(s) for a follow up interview. It's also helpful to discuss with your interview team (during the debriefing process) how follow-up interviews/meetings should occur. Should both parties agree to further discussions, these meeting should occur within a relatively short time frame (one to two weeks). If you're interested in further pursuing the candidate, but you'd like to interview other candidates (in the first round) before setting second interview dates, clearly communicate this to the candidate.

Second interviews/meetings tend to be less formal and provide all participants an opportunity to probe deeper into specific issues. Both the interview team and candidate will find this process helpful in confirming whether God is opening a door for a working relationship to exist. Be sure to discuss key follow-up questions as an interview team. Also, don't hesitate to follow up on reference and background checks prior to this second meeting.

In addition to follow-up interviews, we encourage candidates to consider the following steps.

- To worship at the church preferably twice, but at least once
- To meet with the pastor(s) for coffee or lunch
- To meet with the youth in an informal arrangement. Churches are encouraged not to forget their youth in this process. Giving them ownership in the decision will serve very helpful. As an interview team, you may ask the candidate to join a youth group meeting or an informal pizza gathering. Be sure to schedule this in advance with the volunteer leaders. Discuss in detail ways to keep this meeting from becoming awkward. After the gathering, be sure to listen carefully for student perceptions of the candidate. They are typically very in-tune as to whether a candidate will work or not.

Your church should also consider reimbursement of travel and lodging costs for any candidate invited to this second stage.

### **Should You Decide To Offer A Call**

A formal call should be offered two ways. First, a telephone call should be made by the chairperson/ facilitator expressing the church's desire to offer a call. Initial details may be discussed during this conversation, as well as a time table for accepting or rejecting the call. Second, a written letter outlining the details of the call, along with detailed compensation information should be mailed within one day of the telephone conversation. Typically, the candidate should be given one week to pray and think through a decision. In some cases, the candidate may have already decided. Other times, more additional time may be needed, if unusual circumstances exist. A specific date should be determined and agreed upon for an answer.

### **Should The Candidate Accept The Call**

The following steps should be put in motion should the candidate accept the call.

- A start date is discussed and confirmed with all parties.
- A meeting is set with key personnel from the church. Typically, the pastor, chairperson of the Youth Ministries Team, and sometimes the treasurer or chairperson of the deacons attend this meeting. A "Youth Ministry Agreement" (contract), W-4, insurance forms, etc., are discussed and signed. This assures that all parties are on the same page (check our website for possible sample contract/ agreement).

## **Other Recommendations**

Here are some other ideas to assist with a positive start:

- ❑ Set up a lunch or dinner for the new youth worker to meet and get to know the rest of the staff and volunteer youth leaders.
- ❑ Set up a commissioning or installation service within the first month of their employment.
- ❑ Set up a reception (possibly after the commissioning service) for church members and students to meet the new youth worker.
- ❑ Be sure that necessary office equipment, keys to the office, etc., are ready to go prior to the start date. A desk, file cabinet, bookcase, and an up-to-date computer and printer are non-options.
- ❑ Within the first week of employment, meetings should occur between the new youth worker and administrative assistants, custodians, and other key staff personnel. This is designed to discuss expectations and avoid surprises or unnecessary confrontations. It's helpful for a pastor or team chairperson to assist with these meetings.
- ❑ Also within the first week or even prior to the start date, a meeting should occur between the new youth worker and all current adult volunteers serving in the youth ministry. The agenda should include discussion about initial roles and responsibilities, lines of authority, etc. It's vitally important that friction does not occur between these parties early on. The chairperson of the Youth Ministries Team or a pastor should direct this initial meeting.
- ❑ Don't expect too much too soon. It's a false assumption to think that any new youth worker will make significant positive change within a few months. Space and time should be given for the new youth worker to build relationships, establish trust with students, and get a feel for how the church operates. It's not untypical for this to take up to a year.

## **Should You Have Further Questions**

Don't hesitate to contact our office. Our commitment is to serve you and your new youth worker, assisting with building an effective long-term relationship. We will gladly spend additional time, providing assistance wherever needed. Additional tools, such as a Salary Guide, may also serve as helpful resources.

Thanks for taking time to fully consider this guide. Although not fail proof, we hope you found this helpful in moving through significant steps. May God's guidance go before you as you consider taking your youth ministry to the next level.