**Rhythmic Week Article**

***Do I have an emotionally healthy schedule?*** Emotional health does not come automatically. What does come automatically is the pursuit of our own compulsions. We don’t naturally step out of the need to be needed, the need to be perfect, the need to be special, the need to win, the need to be wise. Instead we assume our compulsions are allies, and too often we follow them with blind, passionate obedience.

Though there are many things we can do to stay emotionally healthy, one of the most universal among those who lead sustainable youth min- istries is a habit we call the “rhythmic week.” Here’s the way the rhythmic week looks for one of our full-time clients:

**Figure 7**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Sunday** | **Monday** | **Tuesday** | **Wednesday** | **Thursday** | **Friday** | **Saturday** |
| **Morning** | Program time |  | Balcony time | Personal time | Sabbath | Flex time | Flex time |
| **Afternoon** | Flex time |  |  |  | Sabbath |  | Flex time |
| **Evening** | Program time | Personal time | Flex time | Program time | Sabbath | Contract work | Personal time |

The blank sections are the time when the youth worker goes at full speed. Sabbath and personal time are protected times—to be intention- ally away from work. Flex times could be designated either for work or for time off, depending on the demands of the week. (See the description of balcony time in the next chapter.)

The rhythmic week begins with the discipline of the Sabbath. Regard- less of how many hours we pack into a week, the habit of one full day of rest each week makes a huge difference in our emotional health, often preventing us from being emotionally driven or emotionally empty.

Interestingly, the vast majority of youth ministers we’ve worked with were not taking a full Sabbath day each week. Some even laughed at the idea of a day off, as if it were a luxury for someone with less important work to do (this, in spite of the fact that the whole idea of the Sabbath comes just one commandment away from the prohibition against murder).

When we fail to keep our bodies in the rhythm they were designed with, we reveal what we really believe about ministry: that the work of transformation is up to us, not God. Like anxious gardeners trying to force plants out of seeds, instead of cultivating change, we kill the very seeds that were meant to produce change.

I’m not talking about a reactionary legalism. I’m talking about practicing the rhythm God designed for our bodies, the rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest. Those who fail to practice Sabbath or other disciplines of emotional health become victims of their job descriptions rather than architects of them.

Remember the story of the goose who laid the golden eggs? The im- patient owner of the goose decided he simply didn’t have time to wait for the egg to be laid, so he killed the goose to get immediate access to the gold. Reminds me of the way many churches treat their youth workers.

One of the most important lessons I had to learn as a youth pastor was that one of the greatest gifts I can bring to my ministry is myself. If I sacrifice my joy in Christ or my passion for the gospel on the altar of “successful ministry,” everybody loses. As a dear brother in ministry told me just after his divorce, “If you sacrifice your family for your ministry, no one will ever thank you for it.”

If I don’t take care of the goose, no one else will. I’ve tried to manipulate others into taking care of me, sometimes by “sharing” how exhausted I was or how much pres- sure I was under and other times by trying to be so helpful to others that they’d eventually return the favor and take care of me. But those strategies never work for long.

We don’t have to wait until the goose is nearly dead to do something. Every now and then, the emotionally healthy youth worker must do a “goose check,” and if the goose is getting sick, he or she must find help nursing the heart of the goose back to health.

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