Years ago, I recall being “challenged” to start a college ministry. “It’s easy,” I was told.  “Just put them in a room with each other, add a guitar, and you’re good to go!” That’s partly true, but I’ve found that isn’t enough and it misses an absolutely essential component to working with millennials.

In many churches where I’ve worked or consulted, I’ve noticed a similar pattern:

* Once the babies get out of the nursery, let’s create great programming for them on Sunday morning.
* When they get out of elementary school, let’s give them a great middle school experience on Sunday morning.
* As soon as they are out of 8th grade let’s give them a high school worship service.
* And when they graduate from high school, let’s say goodbye forever.

Sadly, in many churches, it’s perfectly normal for someone to spend their entire life growing up in a church where they’ve never actually worshipped corporately. They possibly never experience an intergenerational worship experience with parents, grandparents, teenagers, children, etc. because we have developed “age-appropriate” programs from birth to high school graduation.

That is the storyline of the millennials

And today they are asking for something different, something that sounds revolutionary to those of us who have perfected the “age group” programming.  Millennials actually want to engage with other generations. And if we want to engage them in the life and leadership of our ministries, we have to first connect them to the lives of our leaders.

It can’t be an afterthought or an incidental outcome. One of our primary strategies has to be creating and sustaining a significant relational culture across generational lines. It’s time we move out of the “age segregating programming” model of ministry.  And time to begin moving into methods of building intentional relationships between generations.

Create more cheerleaders

Cheerleading is a fascinating sport in today’s high school and college athletic landscape. Now, I’m not much for pom-poms, but my wife was a cheerleading coach when she was in college, and she has taught me all the reasons why I should actually respect a sport that I felt was little more than standing along the sidelines, shouting and smiling.

Apparently, cheerleading is really, really hard.

There was a *Sports Illustrated* article a few years ago that talked about the dangers of teenagers getting involved in youth sports and cited cheerleading as the sport with the most occurrences of dangerous injuries. That’s right.  Cheerleading is the most dangerous sport you can sign your child up for.  Cheerleading.

That’s because cheerleading is not just about memorizing catchy phrases and shouting them in cadence while waving pom-poms in the air. Cheerleading involves incredible amounts of athleticism, strength, coordination and skill. I mean, you are literally throwing human beings 20 feet in the air and catching them. Say what you want about cheerleading, about whether it’s a “real” sport or not, but I’d like to see Lebron and Kevin Love successfully execute a basket toss with Kyrie Irving.

If we are truly interested in reaching the millennial generation, we MUST engage our older generations in the incredibly difficult task of cheerleading. We must train them to cheerlead, coach and encourage them in it and corporately uphold the value that cheerleading is not just interesting or mildly helpful, but is fundamentally necessary. We must show them that, believe it or not, cheerleading by older generations was mandated in the Bible in Numbers 8 (minus the pom-poms).

#### **The Lord said to Moses:**

“This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites.”

As Levites were called into service, they started as young men at the age of 25. David later added a 5-year “internship” to this and included Levites as young as 20 years old. The really interesting thing is that their service in the tabernacle stopped at 50. But it wasn’t the end of their ministry. They weren’t “put out to pasture” or forced into early retirement. At age 50, their role became that of a coach, a mentor, and a cheerleader.

They themselves must not do the work

I love the explicit statement, “they themselves must not do the work.” God knows that the best way for young Levites to learn how to lead in the tabernacle is actually to lead in the tabernacle.

Is this Biblical mandate lived out in our churches?  Do we find ourselves giving leadership away to 25-year-olds because we know that’s the best way to ensure the future leadership of our churches? Or do we hold on to our leadership positions because we feel like we have more to contribute or that we can’t trust the younger generation? Or even worse, are we still viewing 29-year-olds as children that can’t possibly care for the church we’ve built?