In last week’s post [Part 1], I wrote about the first three of the six most common mistakes churches are making with millennials.  Today I’ll unpack the remaining half.  Like the first three, these mistakes come out of an oversimplified and reactionary approach to the extremely complex problem of millennials disengaging from the church.

**Mistake #4: Building the Young Adult Program**

If we’ve been making all these mistakes so far, then we are surely about to focus on an age-segregated, consumer-based experience called a “Young Adult Program.” Believe it or not, this is sure to keep you in a spin-cycle of underperforming ministry with millennials.

A program fits your needs.  Your church likes programs.  Your church might even be good at programs.  But millennials are less interested in your program than you think.

If they’ve grown up in the church, we already turned their Sunday school into “kids ministry” programs and their youth group was one program after another (probably called “RIOT” or “Earthquake” or “NASA” or something).  They already know the program drill.  They want something more.

I’m not saying you should never run a program.  I’m saying that if you start with something that looks like The Amazing Race plus a pizza party, you’re not going to build a long-lasting impact with millennials.

This generation of young adults is deeply passionate about changing the world and wants to engage the church, not sit in a room while it’s served to them.  Millennials everywhere are asking for faith, depth, diversity and meaning, not the socially-oriented events and programs for people just like them.

**Mistake #5 – Waiting Until They Are “Ready” to Lead**

The millennial problem is a leadership development problem.  Unfortunately, many churches approach such a task of equipping young leaders by either sending them off to seminary or just waiting and hoping for the best.

I’m a big believer that the only way to help millennials learn to lead in our churches is to actually let them lead in our churches. We MUST find ways to engage millennials in the life and leadership of every church in America.

But, for many churches, the approach instead is to place them in a leadership holding tank and tell them “we’ll let you out when you’re ready.”

I recently read a story about a church that was in the process of electing the next group of elders to their church board.  As they sat around discussing potential nominees for the position of elder, they spent a lot of time discussing a particular 35-year-old who had been nominated.  They decided that while he had spiritual and leadership qualifications, he was “just too young” to hold such a leadership position as “elder” in their church.  Instead, they elected him an “elder-in-training.”

It’s rather ironic to contemplate that you could be old enough to be elected the President of the United States, but in most of today’s churches, you could not hold a significant leadership position at the same age.

Usually, when we tell young leaders they aren’t ready, we don’t have any kind of plan to help them get to where they need to be in order to lead.  We are simply waiting.  Meanwhile, it’s the millennials who are innovating and leading in our culture while they wonder why the church won’t give them a seat at the “grown-up table.”  No one aspires to the JV squad, and millennials are eager to engage in the leadership of the church. It’s a mistake to push them to the side without a plan to engage them in the leadership of the church.

**Mistake #6 – Giving Up Too Soon**

When it comes to designing ministry for this generation we are just getting started.  But many churches have already called it quits.  Whether they are stymied or mystified by the differences this generation represents or the changes needed to reach them are simply too painful to endure, many churches have sat back and declared, “it simply can’t be done.”  This is the biggest mistake we can make with millennials.

It’s true.  We are in danger.  The crisis on the doorstep of the church is squarely placed in the crosshairs of the millennial generation.  If we don’t figure out how to reach millennials and figure it out soon, we will miss not just a window of opportunity, but a turning point in the entire church in America.  But there is an epidemic of fatalism about the next generation of young adults.  Many are confused by them, confounded by them, frustrated by them and, above all, willing to give up on them.

We simply cannot afford to take a callous approach with this generation – we can’t afford to give up.  Instead, let’s take a measured approach to reaching them. This is a big deal.  This is important.  The future of the church really does swing on this hinge.  Maybe the best place to start is to quit making the biggest mistakes.

**Maybe you’ve made other mistakes? Surely these can’t be the only ones, tell me what you think are mistakes with young adults and college students.**