

5 Questions for Ministry Planning

Question 3 - Where are the Guardrails?

When it comes to leading your team, it's important to remember how members feel. Most want to give input that will make your ministry better, but they also want to understand where the boundaries are. When leaders create guardrails, instead of just rules, then team members can feel supported and empowered.

Before creating a list of ministry guardrails, consider these four areas:

1. Non-negotiables - These are your rules, yes rules, that are set in stone. These will be things like safety policies, church policies, and things that you know you are not willing to budge on. Don't assume everyone will know these. Write them down.

2. Core Values - Core values define what makes your organization unique and are the cornerstone of guardrails. Ask yourself if you know yours offhand and if your team does too? If not, start here. Protecting your core values protects your unique identity. It will also help you know when an idea is a good one, but not a fit for your ministry. Core values do more than just make pretty break room posters. Memorize and share.

3. Protecting Resources - Understanding where your resources are needed most will protect your organization from a good idea that replaces a great idea! Know what you have and what you need before inviting input.

4. Consider Others - Remember that your ministry decisions can affect other ministries. Before setting your ministry boundaries ask yourself how certain decisions affect the rest of the church. Your colleagues will be glad you did!

Once you understand your guardrails, invite your team to bring in their own ideas. By giving your team freedom within structure you help your members (and your ministry) grow!

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Question 3 - Free Rein vs Rules vs Guardrails

Wondering what the difference really is between free rein, rules, and guardrails?
And why it even matters? Check out this example below.

Problem: A student struggles to sit quietly and engage in the Bible lesson. This often ends with the student running out of class, having a melt down, or disrupting others. Previous volunteers have left the ministry, and his current Buddy would like to find a new way to help him engage. As a leader, you have three options:

1. Free Rein - You tell the Buddy to solve the problem however they think is best.

This does not give the Buddy enough parameters to know how to handle the situation without creating a new issue. For example, the Buddy may engage the student by taking him out to the playground during class. Now the student is happy. However, two new problems have emerged. Safety policies may be broken, setting the church up for liability. In addition, the rest of the kids in the class may want to go out to the playground too. Now, no one is engaging in the lesson. Ouch.

2. Set a Rule - You tell the Buddy that the rule is that if the student is having a hard time, then the student may go get a drink of water in the hallway to stretch his legs. Then he has to return to his seat and do the lesson.

This does not give the Buddy any other options if this plan does not fix the problem. It may result in the student continuing to do poorly because his needs are still not being met. It could also cause the Buddy to feel frustrated, especially if they have some ideas they would like to try. This may lead to the Buddy feeling like a failure and quitting the team in frustration.

3. Give the Guardrails - You tell the Buddy that they can try engaging the student in the lesson differently. But the guardrails are that the student must either stay in the classroom or in the break area, and that the activity should not disrupt the rest of the class. Then ask them what ideas they may have. Talk the options through and form a plan together.

This gives boundaries that keep the student safe and the class happy, and it gives the Buddy some freedom to pour into the student in a way that they feel excited about. This may result in the Buddy teaching the lesson through drawing, acting it out, walking around the room while discussing the story, or anything else that fits within the boundaries. This can result in the student finally connecting with the Bible and the volunteer feeling like they are so lucky to be able to serve in the ministry. And once they start sharing their experience with others, you may even end up with some new volunteers.

