

Student Venture Training :: Taking Students to the Next Level

INTRODUCTION

Out of the environment of evangelism and discipleship on your campuses, how can we learn to spot potential leaders? They might be rough and nearly unrecognizable now, but one day perhaps you catch a glimpse of that diamond in the rough, and your heart leaps within you. Knowing how to move students to the next level of faith and ministry opportunity requires the faith of a father, the grit of an athlete, and the wisdom of a farmer. The father must send his children into an unknown future; the athlete embodies the spirit of perseverance; and the farmer knows when to plant and when to harvest. Our primary job in discipleship is to facilitate God's agenda for each of the students He raises up. It takes all three qualities to cut a balance of nurture and challenge so that the student continues of trust God more and more throughout his high school years.

During your first year of training, you were introduced to the Discipled Student Profile, a tool to help you establish qualities you were trusting God to produce in your disciples. The "Looker-to-Leader" model is a similar tool, only it is used to help you decide how to challenge students to the next level of their spiritual and ministry maturity. As you assess your students' maturity level, it will give you a point of reference, and a place to begin an intentional plan of discipleship for them.

◆ FOUR LEVELS OF MATURITY IN STUDENTS

Note: As you read the following, refer to the "Looker-to-Leader Diagram" found on the last page.

1. LOOKERS

This student may attend your meetings on a regular basis, or may come in and out of your radar screen. The looker's primary commitment level is simply to attend the meetings. His motives are mixed. Sometimes he may come because he didn't get dessert at home that evening, and he knows there's plenty of cookies and punch after the meeting. Perhaps she likes one of the guys in the group, and hopes for some casual interaction. They may have a genuine spiritual interest, or even be a Christian. However, right now their relationship with Christ is not the driving motivation in life. This is not atypical- for many students at this age. The emerging adolescent spends a lot of energy coping with new responsibilities, taking every chance they get to give attention to their ever changing physical appearance, and dealing with emotional battles on the home front. This is especially true for eighth and ninth grade students. Of course, students of all ages come in and out of your meetings. The lookers are checking out things, taking mental notes and evaluating whether or not this group will accept them. We demand nothing more than their presence, and rejoice every time we see them come through the door.

Who do you know who may fit into this category?

2. LEARNERS

Students who are learners have a commitment to grow spiritually. They are the ones faithful to attend Bible study, and come with an eagerness to learn. They're the one's who ask questions and give thoughtful

answers. Outside the study time they are reading the Word, and occasionally report to you some nugget of truth that suddenly came alive for them in their own personal study. They show a willingness to be challenged by the truths of Scripture, and eagerly accept assignments where application is needed. Learners are growing in their love for God, and in their understanding of the need others have for knowing Him, too. They have decided to place themselves in an environment of regular spiritual nourishment, where interaction with you and others deepens their faith.

3. LABORERS

At some time in all our lives we cross a line from being spectator to being a participant in the Christian life. The Laborer senses God's desire for him to go into all the world and make disciples, however he still lacks confidence enough to go it alone. He is definitely a doer of the Word, yet he still needs your presence and encouragement to step out in faith. There is a window of time for many students when they have the desire to step up and be counted, but as the Bible says, they are "little souled." One of the best reasons for discipleship is that students who are at this level can come along and minister with you. At this level, you give them delegated tasks that are meant to strengthen their confidence and deepen their faith. For example, you have a student emcee your meetings, or help you lead a portion of your Bible study. When special events come along you ask them to publicize it among friends, and ask them to report back to you the results. You help them come up with a top ten list of friends they would like to share with, and pray together for opportunities to witness to them. This is an exciting level, because the student is getting his sea legs in ministry, yet never too far away from you, in case the seas get choppy. The Laborer identifies with Christ before his world. The only thing missing is self initiative, that special quality which some students possess, because they've reached a point in their spiritual journey where God becomes their primary motivator.

4. LEADERS

The leader is a self-starter. Without anyone telling her, or looking over her shoulder, she senses God's Spirit nudging her into action – and she responds. He's the type of disciple who comes up during Bible study and announces that he's just shared Christ with two of his friends during lunch. She's the one who shares about her burden for her Gospel Choir, and the next thing you know, she's set up an evangelistic party for Friday night. She asks you, "And by the way, can you bring cups for drinks?" You respond, "That's it?" She says, "Yup, everything else is covered!" The leader has come to the place in her own spiritual journey where she's taking her cues from God more and more, and relying upon you less and less. More of the time you'll get the report after the fact, because they've taken the initiative to act when the light was green. Does this mean they don't need you anymore? Not at all. Your role simply adjusts from one of primarily teaching and coaching, to more consulting and mentoring. Your discipleship relationship should not change, however, the way you motivate them must. You've crossed a line from pushing them as learners, pulling them as laborers, to now problem-solving with them as leaders.

◆ PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND

1. NOT ALL STUDENTS WILL BECOME LEADERS DURING HIGH SCHOOL.

Every student follows an individual growth track. Because of their strong family ties and spiritual background, some students will bloom into leaders during their high school years. Others will take a little longer to mature. Our goal in discipleship should not be that our students become leaders. That is simply a by-product of God's work in an individual. If we focus rather on their intimacy with Christ, and their commitment to grow, God will lead and mature them in his time. That takes all the pressure off us, and places it in its rightful spot, the lap of the Holy Spirit.

2. ALWAYS HEAP TONS OF GRACE UPON A STUDENT BEFORE AND AFTER YOU EXPECT THEM TO “PERFORM” A MINISTRY ACTIVITY.

You want the disciples in your care to first know that you’re committed to them, and then to the task at hand. Your unconditional love and willingness to extend grace will be the ingredients God will cause them to want to do those things you’re asking of them.

3. THERE MUST COME A TIME WHEN YOU CHALLENGE STUDENTS TO NEW LEVELS OF COMMITMENT.

During these times relax and understand that God is the one speaking. It’s never an issue between you and them, rather they are responding to the Spirit’s work in them. Knowing this will let you rest in God’s sovereign choice of disciples who want to take the next step, and those content to stay where they are.

4. THE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL IN DISCIPLESHIP IS TO FOSTER A GENUINELY CARING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEN AND WOMEN GOD RAISES UP.

5. DEPENDING ON WHICH LEVEL A PARTICULAR STUDENT IS AT, IT’S HOW YOU MOTIVATE THEM THAT WILL LARGELY DICTATE HOW SUCCESSFUL YOU WILL BE IN BRINGING THEM TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

Here’s the basic rule of thumb:

- ✓ Lookers – Need patience
- ✓ Learners – Need to be pushed
- ✓ Laborers – Need to be pulled (your example is most important!)
- ✓ Leaders – Need your problem solving

6. PRAYER WILL BE A KEY INGREDIENT IN SEEING STUDENTS RISE TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

We often forget that God produces the growth, and that we are all about spiritually sculpting these young men and women into the image of God. Without prayer, we have no tools in hand to shape and mold. God’s Spirit changes hearts, not our programs or discipleship techniques.

7. THE PROCESS OF LEADING STUDENTS TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS NEVER SQUEAKY CLEAN.

The danger lies in thinking that every student will follow this sequence. It’s simply not the case. Stay encouraged even in the middle of spiritual conflict. Sometimes that’s the moment right before the finest hour you’ll ever see in ministry.

◆ **THE FIRST STEP: LOOKER TO LEARNER**

1. APPLY THE “SALT” THEORY.

S Social environment

Kids need time to be together.

A Aggressive love relationship.

Unconditional love for teenagers will win every time.

L Leading them to the salt-lick.

Make your meetings attractive for all, and put the Christian message in a relevant and appealing package.

T Time to respond

Students need time to process and to decide for themselves what they believe.

2. GET THEM TO RETREATS AND CONFERENCES.

Retreats offer opportunities to build relationships, time where you can “float” with them, and the Holy Spirit can “sting” them with truth. Bring a speaker who will help students fall in love with the Lord through loving to study the Word.

3. UNDERSTAND THE GROUP MENTALITY.

Keep relationships in tact. Play off the positive peer pressure. Some students will be pushed through by their friends.

4. GIVE INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION.

A couple hours of hiking, shopping, or competition will go further than six months of casual meeting discussion.

5. REMEMBER TO STAY “TIGHT.”

T TIME

Keep the Bible study portion relatively short (20-30 minutes).

I INTERACTIVE

Allow discussion to run wild at times-they need to talk.

G GUILTLESS VENUE

Young kids don’t know how to process shame; they hide. Let the Word speak for Himself.

H HIT FELT NEEDS

Again kids need to express themselves.

T TAKE THEM WITH YOU

Involve them in your life.

◆ CASE STUDY #1 (LOOKER TO LEARNER)

You consistently get 50 students to your group meetings which include competitions, social interaction and a short talk on a relevant topic. Both new and regular attendees come. Generally, students have a hard time paying attention after five minutes into the Bible. In fact, most don’t even bring their Bibles. You know that at least half who come are Christians, and the other half come for social reasons and parental expectations. You’ve offered small group discipleship opportunities, but few have shown interest.

How will you build spiritual interest in these students?

What are some ideas that you could implement that could begin to surface who in the group might be ready for a discipleship group?

◆ THE SECOND STEP: LEARNER TO LABORER

How you get students to become doers of the Word, applying their faith to real life and beginning to spot ministry opportunities? Here are some suggestions to take them from being learners to becoming laborers.

1. USE RETREATS TO TRAIN AND EQUIP.

The content of retreats for these level students should center around training and equipping. Also the application of the Word to every area of their life ... tongue, lust, time with God. Whatever may be a hurdle for their effective ministry, this should be dealt with here. At the retreat peer influence will play a major role in forming desire, conviction and eventually vision in the students for doing ministry.

2. MINISTER WITH STUDENTS.

Everywhere you go, bring along a student. Just as Jesus did, use real life situations to take the initiative in ministry. For instance at a restaurant, take the initiative to share Christ with the waiter. Stop and help a stranded motorist, and together change the tire or get help. Remember, the student is watching your every move, and taking careful notes.

3. GIVE STUDENTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLO FLIGHTS.

When babies are learning to walk, they tend to get their fair share of bruises. Our disciples will never learn how to walk with Christ without our willingness for them to experience a few "bruises" as well. Brief them regarding a ministry situation. Try not to surprise them with an opportunity without first discussing it. In releasing them, do so within close proximity. A bruise is one thing, but a broken leg is another. Stay especially close for the first several tries at a ministry activity. Your goal for the student is for them to say within their heart, "Hey, I can do this!" Don't forget to have some serious celebration after a student has stepped out in faith.

4. CAREFULLY PREPARE THE MEETING ENVIRONMENT.

Students should be getting a good dose of training in basic ministry skills. The topics of meetings should reinforce a vision for the lost. Staff and leadership students should be encouraged to share about times when they reached out to their friends with the gospel. A good Action Team will meet most of this criteria. Even though students at all levels attend the meeting, breakout training sessions reinforce exactly what each student needs to hear. The interaction at the front end of the meeting should be designed so that students at any level could relate to some aspect of the agenda. Good games, skits, sharing and even singing provide everyone with something to think about and enjoy.

5. APPLY THE LAW OF EXPECTANCY.

When God is working in the life of a student, it's important to be alert for when that student is ready to move up into a higher commitment. Look for those divine moments when either after a meeting, or retreat or ministry experience, the student is particularly responsive to talking about how to apply her faith and deepen her walk with Christ. Reinforce what she is saying by verbally painting a picture of her future, how you see God using her. It may be some time in the distant future, or perhaps next semester.

◆ **CASE STUDY #2 (LEARNER TO LABORER)**

You've just moved to your new assignment. The group that you're inheriting seems like a lively tight-knit bunch. Upon further discovery you see that most students are not campus minded; that is, they are not interested in the least about having a spiritual impact on their school. They do have a heart for God, and have been involved in good solid discipleship in the past. About half of them attended a retreat recently where the topic was evangelism. When you inquire about the subject you get a mixture of sheer fear, skepticism and apathy. One bright eyed teenager said he served his grandmother breakfast in bed. "Does that get my quota in for the month, Sarge?" as he snaps into attention? You're not sure if he's serious. No one is laughing.

- What are the needs of this group?

- How will you get them a step further in spiritual maturity and eventual campus impact?

◆ **THE THIRD STEP: LABORER TO LEADER**

- 1. GIVE YOUR STUDENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO BE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WITH OTHER MOTIVATED STUDENTS.**
- 2. DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY AND NOT TASKS.**

At the laborer level you delegated tasks, but here you need to transition into giving the student a tangible piece of the ministry pie. You know when you have delegated responsibility when if that student doesn't come through, it won't happen. It's a bit nerve-wracking, but the only way to build leaders for the future.

- 3. EQUIP THEM TO BE SELF-FEEDERS IN THE WORD.**

What will follow them through the next several years of college and into early adulthood and beyond? The word of God. A casual reading of the Bible will never change anyone. Every student that graduates from your school of discipleship should be able to know how to study for themselves, and apply what they learn. This is the only way to ensure that this man or woman of God will continue to be molded into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

- 4. MOBILIZE LEADERS!**

Many of your disciples will take the initiative to make ministry happen. Others will need you to scout out the land and report where God is moving. In either case, they need to be reminded why God has placed them at their school. You are their leader, and often times you will find yourself spending time with them helping them figure out how to creatively get the gospel to a friend or group. Often times the only thing that stops a student from reaching out is the confidence they lack in their idea. You will act as a sounding board and a resource of wisdom and direction.

With so many students available to us, how do we decide which ones to invest in, and which one's to let lay fallow? The first place to look is at their heart for God. This assessment is not a judgment of their spirituality on your part, but an honest look at where God has them right now in His perfect time table. Not all students will mature at the same time. Does that mean we neglect the one's who still may be struggling? Obviously not, however you still have only 24 hours in the day, and how you prioritize that time will make or break your discipleship chain. Don't forget to empower mature students to begin discipleship groups of their own. That will be the point of contact for many students who otherwise would not risk association with you.

◆ **CASE STUDY #3 (LABORER TO LEADER)**

Your group has exciting potential. It includes seven seniors and four juniors (with an equal number of guys and girls) who are ready to turn their campus right-side-up. Your group also has 15-20 students who attended a retreat over the summer where the speaker talked about them sharing their faith. Most seem to have an interest, but there are not many self-starters in the group.

- How will you handle the leaders who want to see impact on their campus?

- What approach will you take to the middle group?

- In what ways could you use the leaders to influence the others?

◆ **EVALUATING YOUR TIMBER**

Following are questions to consider as you determine your next steps in developing students.

1. **EVALUATE YOUR GROUP IN LIGHT OF THE LOOKER-TO-LEADER MODEL.**

How would you group them at this time? (This could be individually, or generally as a whole group.)

2. TAKE A GOOD HARD LOOK AT STUDENTS' MATURITY LEVELS.

Are your present activities, challenges and emphasis matching their present spiritual level? What adjustments might you need to make in order to better match your approach with their level of maturity?

3. MAKE A THOROUGH EVALUATION OF YOUR PRESENT MINISTRY ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING THE ACTIVITIES AND MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR STUDENTS.

Will this environment lead to developing students who will eventually take ownership for spiritual impact on their own campuses? What adjustments might you need to make at this time?

4. CAREFULLY CHOOSE THE THEME OF YOUR NEXT RETREAT.

How will you make the most of this opportunity (a retreat) in light of wanting to develop students?

5. INDICATE WHICH STUDENTS YOU NEED TO PERSONALLY MINISTER TO IN THE NEAR FUTURE, OR CHALLENGE TO GROWTH.

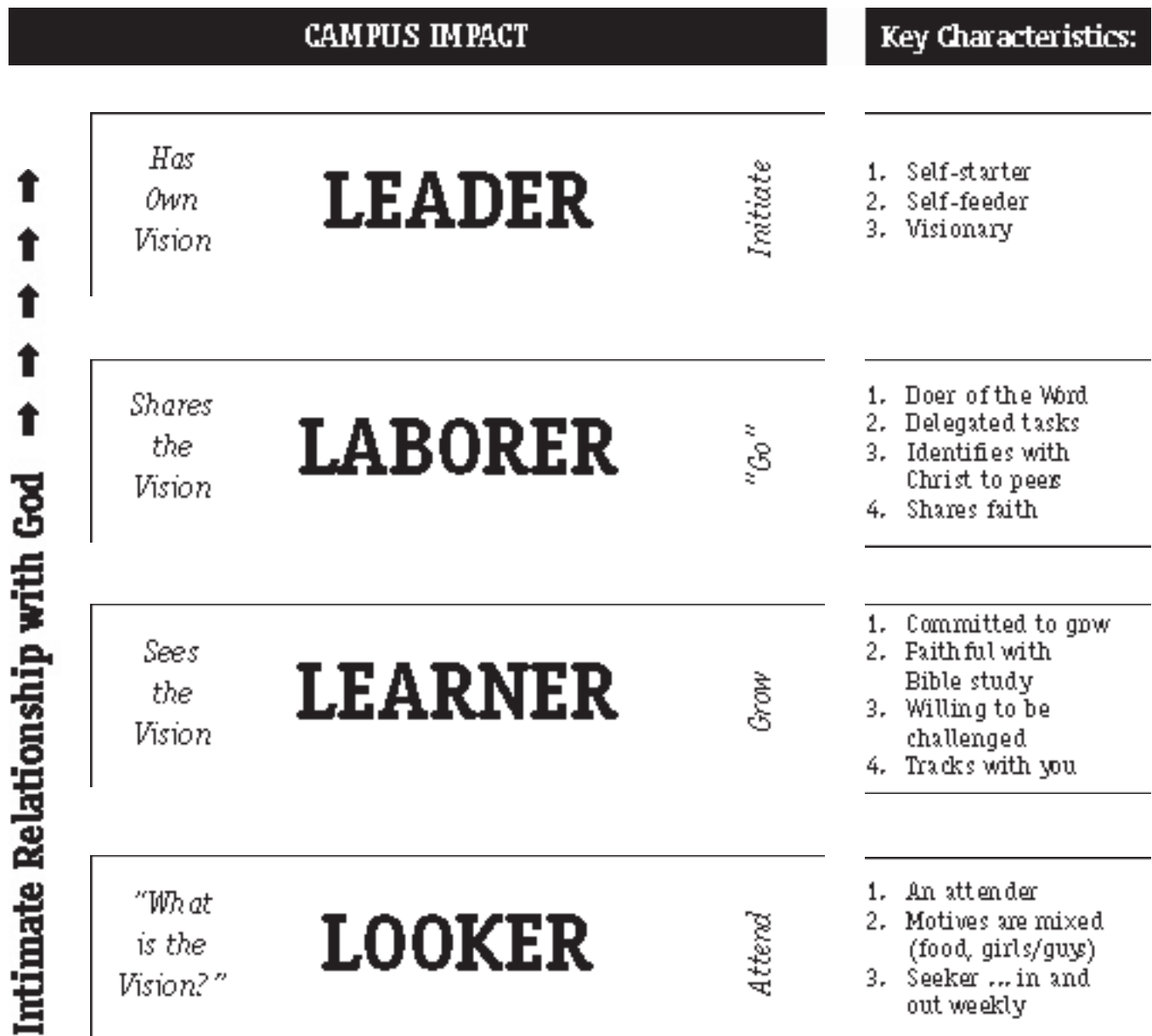
List each student, with an action step. This can serve as your prayer guide as you prepare to lead kids onward toward spiritual maturity.

6. SELECT CANDIDATES IN YOUR GROUP FOR HELPING TO LEAD RIGHT NOW.

What will be your approach to challenging these students to consider leadership of the ongoing movement?

Looker-to-Leader Diagram

As you seek to develop students spiritually, we want them to go from being curious lookers to becoming godly leaders in your movement. This diagram will help you better understand the process.



PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER:

1. Not all students will be leaders.
2. Place grace before expectation.
3. Challenge up, but let God speak and allow students to decide.
4. Keep all in the context of a caring relationship.
5. In your ministry with students, "pull" rather than "push."
6. Maintain prayer at every level.
7. Remember, the process is never squeaky clean.