

## the seven-word secret to effective ministry

BY JEANNE MAYO

I just slipped away from our church gym to finish this column. It's the sixth time today I've shuttled back and forth from my office to the gym, where we're in the middle of our first-ever Dodge Ball tournament. Tomorrow I'm leaving on vacation, so I'm attempting to get a little office work done while simultaneously bellowing encouragement from the sidelines. Sure, I'd be much more productive with my paperwork if I stayed at my desk, but today that option is simply unthinkable.

Long ago I learned the seven-word secret to effective youth ministry: "Those who spend the most time win." Sounds simple, doesn't it? It's so simple that cults and gangs have become master practitioners of "the big seven." They have no problem recruiting new members because they make sure they spend a lot of time with their targeted young people. Sometimes we lose sight of this truth in youth ministry. There's no substitute

for "being there" in a teenager's life. Your ability to influence your teenagers depends on your commitment to establishing relational connections with them, and that takes time.

But here's the good news—the person building those connections doesn't always have to be you. Today's teenagers don't have a Messiah Complex. They're hungry for connection with any caring adult or student leader—anyone who's at the core of your ministry.

Here's how I've learned to multiply my youth ministry time so I can live out "the big seven" every day:

**1. Create an SIP ("system in place") that mobilizes volunteer adults, college students, and key teenage influencers as youth group "connectors."** Just divide the kids on your roll into sections and ask your leaders to call or hang out with "their kids" on a personal basis at least once every week (or every other week). Meet with your leadership group at least once a month to encourage them and offer them simple accountability.

**2. Make the telephone your friend.** The phone can't replace face-to-face interactions, but it's important for your kids to hear your voice. Be prepared for sporadic (and sometimes unrelenting) silence on the other end. No matter what the response, know that all kids appreciate a personal call, even if all you hear is a grunt.

**3. Give young people a "focused 60 seconds."** I used to think all kids need large blocks of time to feel a real connection with me. Some do. But I'm amazed at how much genuine friendship I can weave with teenagers in 60 seconds if I just focus all my energy and attention on them. It boils down to the old principle, "Wherever you are, be all the way there."

**4. Practice "on the way" ministry.** The New Testament is full of stories that start, "And while Jesus was on the way..." I think Jesus had way more people who wanted to connect with him than he had hours in the day. So he spent his time strategically by connecting with people while he was on the way to doing something. I try to follow Jesus' example by doing "on the way" ministry as I walk from one side of the building to the other. And I rarely run an errand without a teenager or adult leader in the car with me. Make use of your in-between time—you'll be surprised