



Hiring Children's Ministry Staff

By Gary Webb,
adapted from
"Answering the Question of When to Hire Staff"
Promiseland Conference workshop

For most churches, the prospect of hiring staff is unsettling. Hiring is a huge financial commitment. It affects vision, leadership, and church culture. It often brings change. How do you know if you're doing the right thing? Examining and applying general church hiring principles to children's ministry will give you confidence you're choosing the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons.

Goal:

To develop a long-term strategy for effective, future children's ministry hiring.



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AND



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How to Use “Hiring Children’s Ministry Staff”

Welcome to BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY. You’ve purchased a resource that draws from the experience of children’s ministry leaders at Willow Creek Community Church. Through these materials, your ministry team will gain insight and practical tips gleaned from years of innovation and experience in children’s ministry.

BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY works when you want, where you want, and the way you want.

Whether you want to inform your ministry’s leadership or train your volunteers, BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY materials are completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings or training huddles with your children’s ministry team.

BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY fits easily into what you’re already doing. Here’s how to use BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY at the beginning of such a meeting:

- 1. Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you want your leadership team to determine if now is a good time to hire your first children’s ministry staff member. Select “Principles for Church Hiring.” Or suppose you’ve chosen to hire, but wonder if it would be better to hire someone from inside the church or someone from outside the church. Select “Hiring from Within Versus Hiring from Without.”
- 2. Print and photocopy the handout.** Let’s say you selected “Principles for Church Hiring.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHILDREN’S MINISTRY (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).
- 3. Prepare for discussion.** We recommend you read the material and any relevant Scripture passages listed on the material.
- 4. Lead the discussion.** Most handouts can be read within five minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions, or move your team through the following questions:
 - “Why are these principles important for successful ministry?”
 - “How well does our ministry currently incorporate these principles?”
 - “What one or two practical things could we do in the next year to improve in this area?”

Pray

Pray for your church and children’s ministry, that God would give you wisdom in making critical hiring decisions.

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Strategic Hiring for the Whole Church

Understand the big picture of church hiring before seeking children's ministry staff.

The Principles Behind the First Hire

Each church hire can be generally classified as either a *task* hire or a *relational* hire. Task hires advance the goals and activities of the church. Relational hires are staff added to address needs for specialized care, attention, or community. For example, a church administrator would be a task hire, while a church that recognizes a large number of singles in attendance might make the relational hire of a singles pastor (unless ministry to singles was a primary goal of the church, in which case you might classify it as a task hire).

In a typical new church or church plant, the first hire is made to provide leadership and oversight to the church's primary ministries; hence, most churches begin with a task hire: the senior pastor.

Phase Two Hiring

When a church (perhaps yours) considers adding a second staff member, it's usually still focused on growing and fulfilling the goals of the ministry. Typically, a church's second hire is also a task hire. The second hire, however, should be someone whose gifts complement the first hire. For example, if your senior pastor is an effective evangelist but poor administrator, you might consider adding a secretary as the second staff member. Or if your senior pastor is an effective shepherd but poor at leading worship, you might consider a worship pastor.

By the time a church has grown to the place where it's ready for a third staff member, however, there are often visible needs that arise within the church community. It's usually time to consider a relational hire. If there are many families struggling in the church, for example, the third hire might be a family life pastor. If there are many young families with children, it may be time to add a children's ministry director.

The third hire should be based on church need, not on what is popular or trendy at the moment. Many churches jump right into hiring a youth pastor, for example, when they may have a larger need elsewhere.

Phase Three Hiring

As a church continues to grow, future hires should alternate between task and relational hires. By the time a church has grown beyond a relational hire, there are often leadership needs that warrant a task hire. By the time a church has grown beyond a task hire, there are often needs that arise to warrant focusing on community health.

Even though growing churches can often see the benefits of adding yet another staff member, realistic ratios of staff to total attendance must nonetheless be respected. A ratio of one full-time hire to every 150 in attendance is a common average.

Discuss:

- Where is your church in this life cycle of church staffing?
- What is the proportion of task hires to relational hires among your current staff?
- Would a children's ministry staff member be a task or relational hire in your church? If relational, do the needs of your particular congregation warrant making a hire in children's ministry, or is there another more pressing need?

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Strategic Hiring for Children's Ministry

Before you bring on staff, plan your hiring for an effective future.

Initial Strategy Guide

Before making any children's ministry hiring decisions, keep in mind five key points of caution and direction:

1. *Involve senior leaders with both the hiring decisions and process.* Often, the pastoral staff will be a good resource or sounding board for the hiring process. And you definitely want the church board's support.
2. *Never hire paid staff to replace volunteers. Hire staff to resource volunteers.* Your current volunteers have a valuable ministry. Hiring should never take that away but always be a step of adding or multiplying ministry.
3. *Strongly consider staff positions be held by volunteer (unpaid) staff.* Often it's wiser to give a current volunteer a desk, phone, computer, and title than to hire someone new. Equip volunteers to serve at a higher level.
4. *Hire to fulfill your mission and vision statements.* Do not create staff positions because they would be "neat," "creative," or "trendy." Only hire people with the gifting and job description to meet your ministry's primary goals.
5. *Develop clear and thorough ministry descriptions.* Anticipate all expectations (such as meeting attendance, conduct, work hours) to create a job description that goes beyond the tasks required.

Mapping the First Two Hires

Before you hire your first children's ministry worker, establish what you will need in your *second* ministry hire. Why?

Often, churches with a growing number of children will find someone creative and passionate about children and bring him or her on staff. While there's nothing wrong with a creative kid-lover as the first hire, it can be problematic if you don't recognize the ministry will soon need a visionary, leader, and administrator to manage the growing ministry. Likewise, a dynamic teacher and administrator may make a great first hire, but he or she will need a complementing shepherd and caregiver, or children will begin to fall through the cracks as the ministry grows. Strategically planning to bring in a second hire that complements the first will build a better foundation for a growing ministry.

Planning Later Hires

While your first two hires should provide general oversight to the ministry, your third hire should focus on a specialized need. For example, you might hire a director and operations administrator as the first two staff. But as the ministry grows to where you're considering a third staff member, you notice the number of young families with infants is overwhelming. Managing the nursery has become a big job. Your third hire should be a nursery coordinator that can free your other staff to continue to focus on the big-picture instead of devoting so much time to one specialized need. From there, as the ministry grows, alternate hires between general oversight and specialized needs.

Discuss:

- Where is our ministry in this growth process? How can we best plan for our next hire? Why is it important to take future growth into account when developing a hiring strategy?

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TRAINING MATERIALS

Hiring from Within Versus Hiring from Without

Your ministry's needs will determine which is best.

Acts 1:24

Hiring from Within Your Ministry

When seeking a new staff person, it is usually to a ministry's benefit to find someone already volunteering within the ministry. Consider the following pros and cons of promoting someone inside the ministry to paid staff:

Pros

1. *An inside hire usually shares the same philosophy of ministry.* Built into your ministry is a set of values and goals that have melded in the community of your current ministry. If you bring in someone from the outside, you risk bringing in someone whose subtle differences of values and vision may create conflict.
2. *An inside hire already understands your church's culture.* Someone inside your church will understand better the ministry's unspoken expectations, how to relate to your current leaders, and how to get things done in your unique church culture.
3. *You've already witnessed an insider's commitment over time.*

Cons

1. *Rarely does an inside hire bring needed changes.* The people inside your ministry are used to doing things the way they've always been done. If you need to change your ministry structure, an inside hire will likely not have the experience in a different system to effectively implement change.
2. *Should circumstances not work out, it is often more painful and difficult to terminate an inside hire.*

Hiring from Outside Your Ministry

In some circumstances, a ministry may recognize a need to bring in someone from the outside. Finding someone whose commitment, skills, and philosophical alignment can be verified, however, will mean additional time, energy, and risk. Consider hiring someone from outside the church when the following conditions are present:

1. *Changes need to be made by someone with a fresh perspective.* If your ministry needs some improvement, or if you've tried yet failed to isolate some problematic areas, a fresh face won't be blinded by familiarity with your system. He or she may be able to see things you've missed.
2. *New ideas need to be introduced.* The old familiar ways just aren't working anymore. The ministry needs a kick-start, but no one inside the ministry knows where to begin. Hiring someone from the outside can bring in new ideas to try, new experiences that build excitement.

Discuss:

- Which of the above pros and cons are significant to our current ministry?
- What are we doing now to develop leaders inside the ministry that could one day become staff?

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HANDOUT #3

Hiring Full-time Versus Hiring Part-time

Both types of positions can be of benefit to your ministry.

Whether you hire full-time or part-time isn't just a matter of how much you can afford. Don't let money dictate the hire, but consider instead what your ministry needs.

Hiring Full-time Staff

When creating a new position, consider the following pros and cons of hiring full-time:

Pros

1. *Full-time staff can be more general in scope of responsibility.* That doesn't mean you can dump more work on full-time staff. It means they can have a broader scope of oversight and authority; they can supervise a wider range of ministry.
2. *Hire full-time if you have one area of great need.* As your ministry grows, you may find one area that consumes a great amount of time and resources. Be sensible in matching the workload to the job description.
3. *Full-time staff are easier to supervise.* Full-time staff are more likely to spend time in the office, be available for meetings, and keep leadership informed.
4. *It's easier to build relationships quicker with full-time staff.* Increased availability and office time means full-time staff interact more with other staff members.

Cons

1. *Full-time staff are more expensive.* By the time you factor in benefits, one full-time staff person can cost as much as three or more part-time staff.
2. *Full-time staff may take longer to find.* Because there's so much committed to a full-time staff member, finding the right fit becomes more important, making the search more exhaustive.

Hiring Part-time Staff

Besides being less expensive, there are other factors that make hiring part-time staff advantageous. Consider the following factors:

1. *Part-time positions can introduce a church to a multiple-staff paradigm.* Most churches haven't seen multiple staff in children's ministry. Part-time staff can provide a living demonstration of the vision for a well-organized ministry.
2. *Part-time positions can be added more quickly.* With less cost and likely less search time for each position, part-time staff can fill out a ministry team in a rapidly growing ministry, then possibly build into full-time staff later.
3. *Part-time staff can provide specialization in an area of focus.* If a limited age group or technical area needs attention, a part-time staff member can focus on meeting a specific need well, freeing other staff to provide general oversight.

Discuss:

- How could a full-time staff member benefit our specific ministry?
- How could one or more part-time staff benefit our specific ministry?
- Why might one be more advantageous than the other for our needs right now?

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Books, downloads, and websites to help you build a children's ministry staff.

Building Children's Ministry: Children's ministry training resources from Christianity Today International and Willow Creek Association

- 📄 www.BuildingChildrensMinistry.com
 - “Interview and Evaluate Volunteers”
 - “Developing Leaders for Children's Ministry”
 - “Grow and Care for Volunteers”

Promiseland: Children's ministry curriculum from Willow Creek Association

- 📄 www.PromiselandOnline.com

Building Church Leaders: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International

- 📄 www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com

Hiring Excellence: Six Steps to Making Good People Decisions by Pat MacMillan (NavPress, 1992; ISBN: 0891096914). A guide to recognizing and selecting quality people for your ministry team.

Leadership Essentials for Children's Ministry by Craig Jutila (Flagship Church Resources, 2001; ISBN: 0764423894). A big-picture look at instilling key values in children's ministry leaders, from the leader of the children's ministry at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California.

Staff Your Church for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century by Gary L. McIntosh (Baker, 2000; ISBN: 0801090954). A practical guide to how, why, who, and when to hire staff.

The Volunteer Revolution by Bill Hybels (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN: 0310252385). Inspiration to unleash the potential of volunteers, using real-life stories at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois.

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