

YOUTH DIRECTORS GUIDE

Maintaining a Great Relationship
with Your Executive Secretary

GO

WITH CLARITY
WITH CREDIBILITY
WITH CONNECTION
WITH COMMUNITY

Youth Directors Guide
Building a Great Relationship with Your Executive Secretary

This Youth Directors Guide is a resource created by the
North American Division Youth and Young Adult Department.

Author: David Salazar

Cover Design and Inside Layout: Claudia C. Pech Moguel

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Introduction

Youth ministry at the conference level carries a unique and wide-ranging influence. Most departments don't touch a variety of constituents like youth ministries does: children, youth, young adults, parents, and grandparents. Through programming, leadership development, providing resources, or vision casting, your work intersects with the life of the entire conference.

Because of this reach, the Youth Department is also among the most noticed in the organization. People see what you're doing, they talk about your decisions, and your leadership influences church culture across age groups, even beyond your target.

Most youth directors will naturally make a point of focusing their relationship with the Conference President and the Conference Treasurer. The President can be considered the heart, while the Treasurer is the wallet. Both are foundational, and those connections are obvious. Yet one of the equally essential partnerships for long-term effectiveness is often overlooked: the relationship with the Executive Secretary.

The role of the Executive Secretary is often reduced to merely policy, reports, and procedures. But having a strong partnership allows the Youth Department, which is often one of the most active, to engage with a strong foundation and move forward with confidence. A successful collaboration will bring clarity into complex dynamics, it will strengthen credibility in delicate decision-making situations, and it will foster connections across entities. It emphasizes a shared sense of community that sustains one's ministry beyond individual events.

Conference-level leadership is not unlike group travel. If you are traveling alone, you can improvise. You can change plans midday, push through delays, or adjust on instinct. It may not be efficient, but you can usually make it work. It's different when you travel in a group. Improvisation becomes dangerous when people rely on you. Decisions are important. Making a mistake costs more than just time and money. It costs trust. When people see leadership as unclear or unstructured, they still may follow, but with hesitation. If you are not that charismatic, navigating the system will earn you people's trust. Even when they are unable to express it, parents, volunteers, and pastors get stressed when there is disorganization and a lack of focus. This is the reality of leadership in youth ministry.

Weather patterns are another helpful lens. Whatever the current weather is, that's indisputable. It won't get better by working harder. Rather, you grow accustomed to it. You get ready for it. You choose schedules and equipment that let you enjoy the journey and finish tasks without becoming overly tired.

Without planning, you can persevere through storms. A lot of leaders do. They just make it work. However, they show up exhausted, agitated, and diminished. With the right tools, leaders can adapt and recover more quickly and maintain their energy.

The Executive Secretary has witnessed the repetition of various seasons of ministry and of multiple departments. They have seen the cycles of these trends. They know how people's goodwill builds, how stress builds, and how the system strains or breaks. Such comprehension is not hypothetical; it has been acquired over time.

1: GO with Clarity

Having clarity is an often-misunderstood quality in leadership. The assumption is that clarity represents having all the answers. In clear terms, clarity represents an understanding of how something works, where one is operating from, and the reason a specific pathway exists. That has nothing to do with absolute certainty; instead, it has everything to do with orientation. This is why a strong collaboration between you and your Executive Secretary is vital, because they operate as the backbone for the body of ministry.

The Secretary understands how policy overlaps with committee work, timelines, and authority. This knowledge does not come from reading or attending seminars, but rather it is firmly grounded in seeing programs succeed, stall, or fail over time. When youth directors lean into this relationship, they gain insights that would otherwise take years and much trial and error.

This is why clarity is vital: very few things about youth ministry are ever self-contained. A single decision gets discussed at churches, schools, by volunteers, parents, and young people alike. When there is a lack of clarity internally, that confusion inevitably manifests externally.

A lack of clarity shows up as

- an inconsistent message
- hesitation when questions arise
- improvised explanations that are void of any direction (*and it is noticed, no matter how clever you think it was*)
- pastors or the Executive Committee sensing uncertainty, even if you are speaking with great enthusiasm

In contrast, when clarity shines through, the Youth Director acts with confidence, explaining not only what is happening but also why it matters and where it fits within the larger mission. This, in turn, gives you confidence and quickly wins trust. The Executive Secretary plays a critical role in helping leaders understand the framework before any decision is made. This is crucial, as it allows ironing-out potential problems before they enter the public arena. This distinction matters more than many leaders would think, because once it's out in public, you cannot take it back.

Clarity also saves relationships. When internal expectations are clear, it minimizes the scope of confusion that may arise. Volunteers now feel supported rather than unprepared; churches feel included rather than kept in the dark; parents feel stability rather than reactivity. Clarity also yields another hidden benefit: reduced emotional fatigue. Leaders without clarity expend much energy defending an unclear vision because it is often ambiguous, even if it is clear in their minds.

Since Youth Directors lead primarily through influence, how do you make your department's vision visible to those outside your immediate circle?

How can you translate your vision into a language that brings clarity about your priorities?

Since your Secretary helps to oversee the broader organizational structure, how can you leverage their experience to better align your vision with the organization's goals?

Credibility is the currency of influence. What specific habits will you implement to ensure you are building credibility as a leader within the organization?

Clarity enables leaders to move swiftly: those who soar with the most confidence are the ones who know exactly where they stand and where they are going, which removes the heavy pressure of making decisions in the dark.

2: GO with Credibility

Clarity shows the way, but credibility is what moves people. Volunteers may put up with a leader they don't trust, but they only truly follow one who is credible. When a leader is credible, the team jumps into action; without it, they stand back and wait to see if the leader will fail.

Youth ministry can thrust leaders into public arenas early and often. Where enthusiasm, creativity, and interpersonal skills can drive one forward rapidly, these qualities can backfire if the pace of life, character, and discipline lag. This is the value of a good relationship with the Executive Secretary.

Your Secretary has seen gifted leaders rise quickly and fall in record time, not because they have no fervor or were not skilled, but rather because their charisma outshone their credibility. Over time, people notice patterns such as missed follow-through, shifting explanations, building your own brand, or decisions that feel more reactive than thoughtful.

Consistency builds credibility. It matures when people do what they promised, communicate honestly when the situation changes, and respect the processes that exists to protect people and the mission.

In real-time, credibility becomes more visible when situations do not go as expected. An event is unproductive; attendance goes down; one receives negative feedback; and it is during such times that character comes into play. The discussions should be about problem-solving rather than finding faults with your team or the local churches.

Wise youth directors respond differently when difficult questions arise. They view the questions from a place of curiosity rather than from a place of suspicion. Discussions on changes are seen not as imposing but refining. Trust allows one to absorb the initial disappointment which often reinforces credible behavior behind the scenes. The more leaders act with consistency and responsibility, the more likely they are to be advocated for by their Executive Secretary when a program falls short of expectations.

Credibility protects a leader from being pigeonholed after a single event; after all, youth ministry is inherently recurring, and not every initiative or program will be a success or meet expectations. A leader who understands this builds credibility over time and uses trajectory rather than isolated outcomes to evaluate their leadership. The doors to ministry leadership are thrown open by your gifts. Credibility, however, determines how long those doors stay open.

When facing complex issues, your Secretary often sees the organizational ripples that you might miss. How does your connection with them help you identify potential blind spots before you commit to a course of action?

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A transactional relationship only survives as long as there is a task to complete. To move toward a true community of leadership, what is one "relational deposit" you can make with your Secretary that has nothing to do with a deadline or a budget request?

Most failures or burnouts in youth ministry leadership are not sudden collapses. Rather, they are slow erosions. They develop quietly as influence grows, pressure increases, and relational grounding is neglected. Most often, leaders are not aware of these patterns while they are still forming. However, it is evident after trust has thinned or fatigue has set in.

These mistakes are not made by careless leaders. They are patterns fallen into by competent, driven leaders when pace runs ahead of partnership. Typically, the relationship with the Executive Secretary distinguishes between leadership that withstands pressure and that which slowly falls apart.

One of the common mistakes youth directors make in the long haul is how they interact with their Executive Secretary. They reduce the relationship into a transactional one: reports submitted, approvals requested, policies acknowledged. These interactions, however mandatory, do not suffice.

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Trust makes conversation feel collaborative rather than corrective. A transactional relationship can mean a speedier process, but it is less sustained in the long run under your leadership.

Relational investment results in stability for leaders. Increasing friction accompanies or develops on a growing scale for leaders who remain purely transactional as responsibilities start to snowball.

Pitfall 2: Waiting Until There Is a Problem to Engage

Low engagement with your Executive Secretary grows costly in the field. More internal conflicts arise, which can lead to lower attendance, which gets followed by critical feedback because of disjointed programming. The more a leader isolates themselves, the more they carry the weight alone. That isolation will start influencing the tone, confidence, and even your decision-making. Even when things aren't going so well, leaders who are constantly communicating seem to be living in another kind of leadership space. Challenges are discussed calmly. Adjustments feel as though they are being co-determined. Strategy-shifts do not leave people questioning your credibility, but rather they admire you in how wisely you are adapting.

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How can you transition from being a solo operator to building a true leadership community with your Secretary?

internal relationships that have not been cultivated by leaders eventually lead to isolation.

First, isolation looks like freedom and empowerment. After some time, it becomes fatigue. You feel heavily weighted down because you sense the pressure of each decision and your own confidence thins. Finally, the end is normally burnout.

A strong connection with your Executive Secretary gives you clarity and mutual responsibility. It is also a constant reminder that you are part of a system established to support you rather than only assess you. Trust is not built in distance, but through shared understanding. It is not worth it to hold back yourself by opting for the short-term pleasure of autonomy versus the long-term sacrifice of vulnerability. A strong relationship with your Executive Secretary anchors you within the structure, allowing autonomy without isolation.

Cultivate well this relationship and you will not be out on the battlefield alone and isolated. In challenging situations, you want to respond with well thought-out responses rather than emotional reactions. Executive secretaries are stable in most situations rather than strained. Isolation has sharp edges that cut down a leader's life span. Partnership with your Executive Secretary will extend it.

Long term Endurance

Freedom without trust feels liberating until the pressure mounts. A leader who runs alone burns out faster. In contrast, those whose leadership is transformed through relationships endure.

Isolation is, first of all, not announcing itself with burnouts. It seduces leaders over time into really believing that they have enough strength to not require a partnership.

Pitfalls – Closing Reflection

To avoid any of these pitfalls is challenging, but it is key to having trust in your leadership remain intact. A leader who is able to recognize such patterns early can respond to them with constructive thought rather than defensively. The relationship with your Executive Secretary determines much about whether pressure becomes destructive or constructive. Long-term sustainability in Youth Ministry is hardly about talent alone; it is about the relationships that sustain you over time.

Anchored Leadership and Longevity

Anchored leadership is not about being unmovable. It is about going forward with confidence on a secure footing. Many youth directors leave because they feel pressure more than they feel the calling. Pressure builds. Expectations level up more each time. Every event must be successful because you don't get a redo the following week.

Leaders may unconsciously define success over time as what moves with positive energy rather than transformation. Anchored leadership provides stability for the fast-paced movement of Youth Ministry. Your Executive Secretary plays a vital part in this anchoring. Having seen cycles repeat, they help the leader pace themselves, anticipate challenges, and avoid burning out by not exerting unnecessary energy. In other words, your Executive Secretary can ensure that momentum is not the driving metric. Your Executive Secretary can tell you when the momentum needs support and when it needs restraint. This perspective helps shift the youth director's focus from merely "making it happen" to "making it last."

Any leader who early on learns the language of leadership-framing decisions, timing, and alignment is in for the long haul. Every time a youth director leads well, the process begins to form resilient, seasoned leaders. Youth Ministry often becomes a leadership incubator. You are forced to learn in the middle of a real, messy ministry that is often quite visible to all. A wise leader will look to recognize what will be sustaining and what will not.

Parents are trusting your leadership with their most treasured possession: their children. Youth are looking at you as they decide who God really is. Local church leaders are seeking to learn from you. You are here because people trust in your leadership and your fruit. When you lean into a coaching relationship with your Executive Secretary, it frees you to lead with clarity. Clarity builds credibility. Credibility strengthens connection. Connection nurtures community. Community sustains the mission of helping young people know Jesus. Use the Go 4-Cs Leadership Framework with your Executive Secretary. This is how leadership lasts.

Momentum creates moments; structure determines whether it is indeed a moment of transitory significance or one of meaningful ministry.

Go (lead) with clarity. Go (lead) with credibility. Go (lead) with connection. Go (lead) in community.

About the Author

David Salazar's experience spans a wide range of ministry and leadership roles, including university residence hall dean, church pastor, conference youth director, and conference administrator. He was born and grew up in the city of San Francisco, California. He has ministered across two world divisions and five conferences. These experiences have led him to serve a variety of environments and cultures.

Having served as a Youth Director himself, Salazar understands the demands, pace, and visibility that accompany conference-level youth ministry. Now serving as an Executive Secretary, he brings a systems-level perspective that bridges vision, policy, and long-term ministry sustainability.

Salazar currently serves in the Idaho Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree with a concentration in Intergenerational Church. He is married to Nitza Salazar, whose academic background is in secondary education and who leads the conference's Children's Ministries department. They live in Boise, Idaho, with their daughter, Jordyn.

“When you lean into a coaching relationship with your Executive Secretary, it frees you to lead with clarity, credibility, connection, and community.”

Youth ministry at the conference level reaches far beyond programs and events. Every decision influences pastors, parents, and the young people entrusted to your care. Most Youth Directors will naturally develop a close working relationship with the Conference President and Treasurer. Yet one of the equally essential partnerships is often overlooked: the relationship with the Executive Secretary.

The Executive Secretary plays a critical role in helping leaders understand the framework before any decision is made. A strong connection with your Executive Secretary is a constant reminder that you are part of a system established to support all the conference’s ministries. Your Executive Secretary anchors you within that structure, allowing autonomy without isolation.

If you want to have the best possible relationship with your Executive Secretary, this book is for you.