

From Five Essentials to Engage Today's Men

*A Barna Report
Produced in
Partnership with
BetterMan*

WHY INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION MATTERS FOR MEN AND HOW TO FACILITATE IT

A Q&A WITH ROBERT LEWIS

Why does intergenerational connection matter when it comes to men's ministry?

The research we did with Barna pointed out that young Christian men really DO desire intergenerational relationships. They're not just wanting to be among themselves. This creates a huge opportunity for the Church to connect older men to younger men in friendship and in mentoring relationships.

Why do you think intergenerational connection is especially important for young men today?

As the Barna survey pointed out, one-third of Christian men report experiencing real feelings of loneliness. We've got a whole generation that has come up through broken homes, with absent dads and so on. I think that has left a huge void in the lives of many men.

Why do you think there is value in these relationships for young men? What is that value?

I think men are trying to figure out who they are. They aren't just trying to have a good career and a family. There is a deeper identity issue the research pointed out. At their core, men are asking, "What does it mean to be a man?"

I have found that young men want to hear older men share their experiences of what it means to be a man—good and bad. When you combine the subject of masculinity with learnings from the life experiences of older men, an unbelievable power develops.



Robert Lewis
Founder of BetterMan

How have you facilitated intergenerational relationships at BetterMan?

We adopted a strategy of having older men take initiative and invite younger men from their work, neighborhoods, families, etc. This allowed us to establish a relational connection before actual events. Through that experience, we found the young men really wanted to come because they received a personal invitation. Additionally, they would show up earlier and stay longer after an event—compared to when they would just come to listen to a speaker. Having relationships proved to be more powerful than the actual information that was given at the event! In the 21st century, across the board, we are seeing that relationships trump information in men's ministry.

And how do you get older men to participate in intergenerational relationships and extend these invitations to the younger men?

Older men need to be affirmed; they often don't think young men want to be with them. There is a natural hesitancy there. We have found that older men need to be coached on how to extend intergenerational invitations.

So, at BetterMan, we offer older men examples of where they could go "fishing" for younger men and script out an event invitation for them. We intentionally give them a good lead time—typically a month or two of advanced notice—before an event to go fishing. And the results have been great! The young men often express surprise when they learn that older men want to spend time with them. And in turn, the value of the older man is naturally affirmed in the relationship.

Where could local churches improve when it comes to reaching men?

I learned a long time ago that men are hungry to talk about masculinity and what it means to be a man. It's an unbelievable hook in any community today. Men of all kinds—churched, unchurched and dechurched alike—will come and say, "I would like to talk about that." The hunger to discuss the subject is huge, and many times the Church doesn't take advantage of that hunger.