

3 Traits of a Bridge Building Youth Leader

As youth leaders, we make sure to include cross-cultural training when we prepare to go on mission trips to other countries, but rarely do we prepare our students to do cross-cultural ministry in their own communities and schools. In these times of heightened racial tension, it is vital that the church, especially young people in the church, show the boundless love of God to all people in tangible ways. As our country becomes increasingly multi-cultural, opportunities to bring diverse groups together around Christ will grow. With this in mind, what are some keys to being a cross-cultural youth leader?

1. *Empathy* is the ability to enter into someone else's world in order to understand his or her perspective and feelings. In the midst of the racial tension America is experiencing, all of us are prone to default to the point of view that is most familiar to us, based on our personal cultural influences and experiences. In order to empathize with those who do not share our experiences, we need to intentionally seek out relationships that allow us a window into lives that we have not lived. We must move beyond our single story into a plurality of stories that allow us to understand the world through other lenses.
2. *Humility* acknowledges that you are always learning and that those you spend time with have something to teach you. Humility seeks to listen carefully and intently in order to understand another's perspective and feelings regardless of whether we agree. It validates the personhood of the speaker and develops gratitude for her or his experience. The Bible calls us to consider others more important than ourselves. Notice that there are no conditions attached.
3. *Honesty* accepts two essential truths: First, you have biases that have led to cross-cultural assumptions that are not true. Second, you currently or have in the past ascribed to stereotypes about those different from you. When we empathize with others, seek to understand another's perspective, and reflect on that perspective honestly, the doors begin to open for repentance and reconciliation.

Our words are only as valid as our actions. If we want our young people to build bridges, they need to see and experience it in us. Leaders go first.