

On Mission 2020

Topic Focus: Mobilization

Rory Bonte and Laney Mills - Global Frontier Missions Mobilizing Millennials and Generation Z

[Rory:] Hi, my name is Rory and we're on staff with Global Frontier Missions. As an organization focused on wanting to raise up the next generation and prepare them for cross-culture work with overseas and here stateside. And what we are going to discuss is Mobilizing Millennials and Gen Z.

So, from the start, we would really encourage and challenge you guys to have a positive mindset when it comes to working with these different generations. It's easy to get caught up in some of the negative stereotypes, just the idea of them being noncommittal or even having a sense of entitlement. And while there, yeah, there's probably some truth to that and wanting to grow in that. But if we really want to reach this generation or these generations. We really need to be positive, open-minded, excited about the amazing things that they can bring to our works. We really have to push past those negative stereotypes.

[Laney:] So, before we dive into the distinctive between Millennials and Gen Z they share a lot of stuff in common, one of the things that they share -we'd like to really highlight- is just their need for authenticity. They've grown up being constantly marketed to, everything is a product to be peddled, sometimes they themselves feel like they're product to be consumed and that that's where their value is found. And so there is a huge, huge need for just authenticity in our relationships with them. I've heard it said that Millennials are like crap detectors. So there needs to be a lot of consistency in your message and in your relationship with them. So to make this practical, one thing that we've really tried to embrace as an organization, just within our culture is this idea being Kingdom-minded and not pushing our brand, our name, our programs, but to really know what other people in the Kingdom are doing so that we can be just all in the same team. Because again, we're not trying to push one product, one program, one organization over the other. We want what's best for these individuals. We want what is best for these millennials, for these individuals in Gen Z. And so we really need to be Kingdom-minded and not focus on our own little organizational kingdoms.

[Rory:] Yes. So as we begin to move into some of the distinctions between the different generations, starting with the Millennials, one of the big things for them and they put a high priority on is to- they want to be feeling like they're doing something that they are passionate about, something that is going to be significant, something that's bigger than them. So one of the illustrations that I found to be really helpful is this idea of Ladder versus Lily pad. When you

look at some of the older generations, they put a lot of priority and loyalty in the different organizations or the different churches, the companies that they work for so they would spend all their time, most of their lifetime in that one career and work their way up kind of that ladder. Where with these younger generations, Millennials, is specifically kind of have this idea.

Their loyalty lies with what their passionate about and they have no problem kind of bouncing around from one lily pad to another. As long as they feel like they're doing something they're passionate about, something that has significance. So for us, when it comes to mobilizing them, a practical step is we have to make sure that we're bringing a big vision. That we're talking about a big God and a big mission that He has for His church and how they can be a part of that. And the kind of a next piece is this idea of challenging them. Challenge them to step up into this bigger vision to be part of something that's bigger than themselves now and that will continue on long after they're gone. And then the last key - that would be the idea of we have to ground that in Scripture. And so, as we're talking about the big mission, we have to be bringing in Scripture, helping them ground that in Scripture because that's going to be something that really helps them continue to press on as things get difficult like we all know happens in the mission world.

[Laney:] And as you are challenging Millennials, as you're working with them, they are highly, highly relational. They want mentorship. They want you know, deep connectedness, and mentorship and friendship. And so with that Barna has said it, only one out of every three 18 to 35 year-olds feel like they have someone in their life that deeply cares about them. And we could spend a long time talking about just that statistic and why that is, and how terrible that is, but as mobilizers, church leaders, or as people in missions organizations, what are we doing about that? Are we adding to the problem or are we helping with the problem? 'Coz I think one thing -probably the biggest thing- that we can say that you can offer someone is not your vast amounts of wisdom or even your experiences, it's just your availability. It's your time. It's just you as a friend and as a mentor and someone who does deeply care about them. Not just -do they go with your organization or not- but then as a person, do you care about them? Are you investing in them? And that's going to go along way with them. So, be available. Heads up, that's not going to look like a nine-to-five job. People don't fit that neatly into that kind of time frame. So with being available, you're going to need to just have a mindset that they have access to you, not just through email, that's a very formal way of communication for Millennials. So if your relationship only stays at an email level, you have a very formal relationship with them. Whereas, if you give them your phone number and you let them text you or call you or if you Skype with them or you message with them on Facebook or Instagram or some other way, that's going to take your relationship and little bit deeper and they're going to feel like they have a greater level of access to you.

[Rory:] And along those lines -still kind of in this idea of wanting at mentored be the idea of relational consistency, so whether that's inside the church, inside of different organizations really beginning to move past having all these different departments. And so whether it's as they're growing up through the church - everyone can go from elementary to middle school and they even have like their own missions department and they get new

people along the way, or inside the missions, for all we know we've got the mobilizers that meet them at conferences and then they get pet tag to the missions coaches and then you got all these different steps before they actually make it to the field. And I know, for simplicity sake like those departments are needed and are helpful, but I'd really challenge like, what does it look like to try to find that one person that is within that entire time that would really helped them feel cared for, they will feel like they have that mentor that is walking along with them whose not constantly passing one that on to the next, to the next. So really pressing forward to that relational consistency will be helpful.

[Laney:] Switching gears. Think about how we can mobilize Gen Z - we need to remember that again, they were basically born with a screen in their hand and they're hyper-connected. Wi-Fi is an entitlement for them. And so the the way they interact with people and the way they connect with different individuals is primarily online. They do online gaming, they do online dating, they do Social Media and that's their tribe. That's where their people are. That's where they connect and we can harp on that, we can say that that's terrible and, you know, whatever we want but again, that's where they are. And so we just like challenge everyone, meet them where they're at. You know, we can't change the fact that they are online. But let's meet them online. Let's give them access to us on Social Media, or on different platforms that they use to be able to connect with them. There's nothing wrong with that.

[Rory:] One of the other defining pieces for Gen Z would be just this idea of option fatigue. They were one of the first generations that growing up they're always told you can be whatever you want to be, do whatever you want to do. We look at college degrees alone there are 1800 different degrees that they could choose from. So they have a lot of anxiety when it comes to this idea of making choices. Where do they go to school? What do they do after school? Should they get married? When should they get married? How many kids all of these things create a lot of anxiety. And then, one of the things for us as mobilizers, church leaders that we really need to be able to help them through is this defining, "What is God's will?" What does it mean to have a calling? So that's something that's- as the church leaders, as the mobilizers we really need to make sure that we've spent time kind of understanding that concept. And that we can help them walk through that process, that we can answer questions, that we can sit and listen to them, that we can pray with them. And if anything, I think, really challenge them with the idea that God's will is not a tightrope that we have to be really careful of walking over if we make the wrong decision we fall off. And then the problems - can we get back on, what does that look like, all of that. But really challenging them with some God wants them to be in the middle of His will more than they want to be there. So if they're making decisions with the idea of I want to know God more and make Him known, and they're going to be walking in at right path. And God's going to help them stay there.

[Laney:] But if we could give you one thing to walk away with, just one really practical piece of advice. It would be - have the mindset of a learner. We can't underestimate the power of humility in that. And I mean, if you think about what we tell missionaries, all the time. You're crossing a border, you're going into this different place geographically, the people are different. How can you contextualize your message that it makes the most sense to them? And yet, we need to think through that lens when we're talking about generational boundaries. How do we contextualize

this message of mobilizing people to the Great Commission? How do we contextualize that for these generations? And there's a lot of hard work that needs to be done to flesh that out. It's not easy. A lot of this work has not been done yet. We're blazing trails on this. But it's worth the hard work. So that's something we're pressing into, and we want to encourage you to press into and we're grateful to co-labor with you on that.