

Now Is the Time (To Plan Next Summer's Mission Trip)

Fall is right around the corner. School is ready to start. Another year of youth ministry is ready to launch. Sports teams are starting up. Only a few months till Christmas. And it's time to plan for your 2011 mission trip.

Um, is that last sentence supposed to be there?

Yes it is. While next summer seems like a whole year away - the value of a mission trip to your group, and your ability as a leader to make the most of it - means that now is the time to plan for your summer adventure of 2011. And here's why...

1. Prepare more now. Panic less later. Mission trips are a big deal. They require lots of preparation--fundraising, recruiting, cultural training, spiritual preparation, skills training...the list goes on. If you don't get going with all that stuff until late fall or even after Christmas, there's a TON of work to cram into just a few months, and you can risk burning out your leaders and students before they even get in the van. Starting your plans now gives you and your group the full school year to prepare for something that can be truly life-changing. Why not give that level of trip the time and attention that it deserves?

2. Build your team. Build unstoppable momentum. Imagine a giant boulder in front of you that you have to roll down a mountain. You work, and struggle, and push and push, and finally - it moves. But to your disappointment you find that the boulder just didn't have any momentum and creaked to a halt five feet later in front of an old log. You did all that work to see it roll for five seconds and stop. Disappointing, and a lot of work for not much movement.

What would happen if you surrounded yourself with strong people and had plenty of time to not only get the boulder moving, but could also make sure that it would *stay* moving? That is momentum. Given a good start, that boulder would be unstoppable, roaring down the mountain, changing things in its path.

Get the point? If you start now to plan for next year's mission trip, you can invite a group of amazing people to help you. They can be students, youth ministry staff, parents, local business partners, prayer people, and the list goes on. Right now would be a relatively easy time to assemble that team, and they would have plenty of time to go crazy with their skills and abilities. However, asking that same group of people to help in March isn't only exhausting, but also robs them of their ability to really help the trip succeed.

So figure out what help you need to make your trip and unbelievable success, and invite people who excel in those areas to join the 2011 mission planning team - right now.

3. Claim your place on the calendar. Now. Your kids and families are ridiculously busy. For every month that you wait to announce your summer plans, a growing percentage of your potential group will have made conflicting plans. Some of those conflicts will probably affect key

people... the student that makes all the new kids feel welcome, or the adult who you couldn't do a mission trip without. So do your youth ministry and your mission trip a big favor by getting it on the calendar **early**. You'll get better participation and your trip will receive the priority that it deserves. Plus, you'll score some serious points with parents who will be impressed with this year's level of organization!

4. Go where you want to go – not where you're stuck going. If you want to get the location and type of trip you want, you'd be wise to nail that down now. The back-to-school season is when mission trip providers are very busy with registrations. In our world at Group Mission Trips, many locations are full or nearly full by the end of September. So when a youth leader calls in December, it becomes a huge disappointment to their group to hear that their desired destination isn't available. That often results in another meeting to choose another location, which further delays your planning. See the ripple effect?

All that to say, planning now means you'll be able to calmly choose the details of your trip – including location – and will have a much higher change of success. And that's good for everyone!

It's probably not a secret that most youth leader types don't get super excited talking about long term planning and administration. Relational stuff and being with students is way more appealing. As a result, planning now for your mission trip might seem like a relatively small thing to do when there's always *next* week or *next* month to plan. But getting the trip on the map and off the ground now will pay huge dividends later.

Those same students that you love hanging out with are about 11 months away from a potentially life and faith changing mission experience. That's not just a fable or hype, either. In all our research at Group, we consistently find that retreats and mission trips – where students get away from their regular routine and can be immersed in Jesus – are key times when students truly make significant spiritual decisions that affect the rest of their life.

So thanks for serving God by pouring your life into students. What you do truly, truly matters. And if you – like many, many other youth workers – make a mission trip a central part of your youth ministry plan, then give that trip and your students the best chance for success by starting to plan right now. You'll be glad you did.