



Six Steps to building College ministries ... and ABFs! (Part 1 of 2) - August 05

Steve Shadrach, a veteran of college campus ministry has written “The Fuel and the Flame,” a book about how to build a strong campus ministry with college students. As I read the book, it became more and more obvious that many of his principles apply to building groups of all ages and stages of life. I particularly appreciated his commitment to personal disciple-making. In chapter 5, on “Plot out your strategy,” he shares his six steps to building a ministry. I have listed the first three below (the other three will be given in September) and have included ABF application thoughts for each. These ideas might cause some to rethink how to look at building and sustaining an ABF ministry for the long haul.

Step #1: Always Begin with Prayer

Shadrach quotes nineteenth-century Christian leader and author S.D. Gordon, “Prayer is the real work of the ministry; service is just gathering in the results of prayer.” As with a campus ministry, ABF leaders must pray for the ABF, your leadership team and your group members. Also, pray for those whom God might be leading into this group. Pray that God would do a great work in your midst and build a group that will honor Him and make disciples of Jesus. Prayer must be a vital part of group life and leadership strategies.

Step #2: Concentrate on Building Relationships

Shadrach shares some great personal illustrations. Some were of seekers of Christianity in whom he intentionally invested, student leaders he spiritually invested in, and others involved mature believers who actually disciplined him. He states, “Because God put us on earth to build deep, abiding relationships, we love people more than things and more than tasks.” He goes on to say, “If you want to see your campus ablaze for Christ, purpose-driven, love-filled relationships must permeate your life and ministry.”

Emphasizing relationship-building in ABF ministry is just as important. Leaders of ABFs must be constantly investing in people! Leaders must be purposeful in spending time with leadership team members, regular members and potential members for the community. Even though, in adult ministry, we do not have the “time availability” that usually typifies campus ministry, we can still carve out time to be connecting with people. This requires being more strategic and intentional in planning your life’s daily routines. Some simple suggestions would be: inviting others to our homes or out to dinner, scheduling occasional lunch and breakfast appointments or possibly using your hobby to spend time with targeted individuals (i.e. golf, tennis, attending sporting events).

Step #3: Plan for the Seasons of Ministry (*within a year*)

“Even when I’m an old man, I will probably still be dividing my year up the way students do: fall, spring and summer.” Shadrach goes on to say, “We all get a new lease on life and ministry, come mid-August. As the new school year begins, it’s a prayerful time of planning out our work and then, hopefully, working out our plan! Just as the farmer performs a different function in each season, so, too, the campus worker must know what to do and when to do it!”

ABFs also need to recognize the seasons of ministry in a calendar year by taking into account the seasons of your geographical climate, school schedules (if applicable), overall church projects, events, etc. and finally, any other issues that are distinct to your ABF such as group traditions (i.e. Christmas party, anniversary Sunday, fall outreach golf outing).

I believe planning for the seasons within a year is a neglected mindset of many in ABF leadership. ABFs are in the marathon of life. Most ABFs meet year around, week after week, month after month for 5, 10, 15 years and some up to 50+ years! Many an ABF has slowly drifted within the marathon—losing focus, direction and even motivation for significant time periods. How

do we avoid, or at least minimize, this dilemma? Appreciate the seasons of ministry like the campus ministries do! ABFs like campus ministries, should approach a September through August schedule rather than a calendar year approach (January-December).

The leadership team should be meeting in August to gear up for a solid fall semester start. Perhaps a new teaching series could kick off in September. Search for and utilize strategic ideas to get everyone back on track and also attract newcomers. ABFs should keep the “pedal to the metal” throughout the fall with strong group life involving a balance in creative regular group meetings and other outside activities. These should include serving projects and/or outreach events which climax with a Christmas gathering early in December with everyone in the ABF strongly urged to participate. During Christmas and New Year’s holidays group life will slowdown somewhat.

As the calendar turns over into January, the leadership team should gear up for a super spring semester. This is the second leg or season of the “school year” and it is another great opportunity to see ministry happen – pray, plan and go for it!

As June approaches, groups can prepare to move into the third and final leg, the summer season. During the traditional vacation season, leaders decelerate as they recharge their spiritual batteries. Most groups still plan an activity or two. It is great to hear of some families going on vacation together. Some churches “shift gears” during all or part of the summer and utilize a variety of electives or perhaps a summer lecture series. This changes things up which can be good, but groups can also be searching for missing members when the fall kicks up. This summer my church’s ABFs were integrated with the worship services by doing a further study of our pastor’s sermons—a series on The Ten Commandments. Attendance was definitely up as people enjoyed listening to the sermon and then more thoroughly examining and discussing it in our ABF Communities.

Summary & Discussion Questions:

Some of these steps require a whole different perspective of the ABF ministry. Take some time and reflect on each of these steps. Take your leadership team(s) through them and then create some goals and action steps with a timeline for each. Here are some questions to help:

(Step 1 Questions)

Are your leaders praying for your ABF ministry on a regular basis? Is the leadership praying for specific guidance for strategies to build a strong ABF ministry?

(Step 2 Questions)

Examine the last six months of your ministry in ABF leadership. How many people within your ABF or potential members for your group have you phoned or emailed? How many have you or your leadership team met with in different settings outside of group activities? Is your leadership team purposely reaching out to newer group members? Is the team reaching out regularly to those falling away?

(Step 3 Questions)

Is your ABF leadership team recognizing and appreciating the seasons within a year? Are you using key seasons (or semesters) to help create and/or sustain momentum? Draw a chart with each of the three seasons (fall, spring, summer, if using semester lingo) within a year listed in columns. Write down characteristics of each season in relation to your ABF and then set some goals for what you would like to see your ABF accomplish during each season.

- Based off of a book by Steve Shadrach and ABF application comments from Steve Lizzio