



A GATHERING PLACE  
FOR SHORT-TERM MISSION ARTICLES,  
RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Preparing Next Gen Short-Term Missionaries for Success

By Jolene Erlacher, Founder Leading Tomorrow, SOE Board Member

Generation Z (b. 1996-2010) is the first generation of Americans to grow up in what many are calling a [post-Christian](#) context. As worldviews continue to change in the midst of a significant cultural shift in our country, it is critical for leaders, mentors, and teachers to understand some of the challenges facing young people today, especially as we seek to encourage them and help them identify God's calling in their lives.

Leaders preparing next gen short-term missionaries have unique opportunities to inspire a new generation to engage in God's global work. Here are a few of the generational traits and challenges to be aware of as we do so:

- Gen Z values individualization and personalization in a world where they can upload, post, and choose in a variety of ways.
- Barna reports that only [4% of Gen Z](#) has a biblical worldview and teens are twice as likely as adults to [say they are atheist](#) as adults (13% vs. 6%).
- Many young people struggle to articulate and [share their faith](#) in a culture that is increasingly pluralistic and relativistic.
- Jean Twenge reports that in 2016, the majority of entering college students described their mental health as "below average" and that 1 in 9 teens and 1 in 11 young adults suffers from major depression.
- Generation Z (adults ages 18-22) is the [loneliest generation](#) and claims to be in worse health than older generations.
- Young people today spend 8-12 hours a day on devices and often struggle to disengage from technology.

As we note some of the challenges that exist for young generations, it is important to remember that they did not raise themselves. They have inherited a world where trends in culture and technology can be confusing and overwhelming. Young people today encounter many perspectives and values that are antagonistic toward faith and God. As we seek to engage them in short-term missions, we have an opportunity to help young people grow in their faith, understand God's purpose for their lives and the world, and identify how God might want to use them. Here are a few strategies to consider as you look at preparing the next generation to be successful in short-term missions:

- Make the effort to personally invite a young person to join you in short-term mission. Explain the gifts and talents you see in their lives and encourage them that God wants to use them.
- Lead with the understanding that this is not only about the mission of the team, but also the young people who can learn about God, His Word, and His purpose for their lives while participating.
- Adopt a mentor mentality that seeks to encourage, teach, and inspire young people on your team who need faith and hope in a world that seems overwhelming.
- Build trust and invest in relationships with young people on your team. This is an opportunity to help a young person develop relationships that can counter loneliness, depression, or fear.
- Give them a task that fits their skills and gives them a purpose beyond themselves and the distractions of technology and culture.
- Model love, humility, and faithfulness that can inspire them to serve well.

[Drew Dyck shares](#) that intergenerational relationships are crucial in ministry contexts. The number one predictive factor as to whether or not a young Christian will retain their faith is whether that person has a meaningful relationship with an older Christian. STMs provide a unique opportunity for teams where older Christians are engaging with teens and young adults in a way that can encourage them in their faith and help equip a new generation for ministry!

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#### Bio:

Jolene Erlacher, Ed.D grew up as a missionary kid. She has been teaching and equipping the next generation for ministry for over 15 years. Check out her books, blog, podcast, or website for more resources on equipping young people today to thrive in their faith and mission. [www.leadingtomorrow.org](http://www.leadingtomorrow.org)