STAR Series

For Congregational Leaders

CREATING TRUST

COMPETENCY: Creating trust in America has fundamentally shifted. What once felt like a high-trust society has become increasingly skeptical and fragmented. For Gen Z, who grew up witnessing institutional failures and online misinformation, trust isn't inherited; it's earned through transparency, authenticity, and consistent action.

Trust Fall: Why Gen Z Needs Churches to Earn What was Previously Given

1 UNDERSTANDING THE TRUST LANDSCAPE

Gen Z approaches trust differently than previous generations. They're naturally skeptical of traditional authority due to formative experiences like the 2008 financial crisis, COVID-19 misinformation, and social justice movements revealing systemic issues. Instead of trusting institutions, they place faith in individuals, peer networks, and decentralized communities. Having grown up online, they've become skilled critical thinkers who demand "receipts"—proof and evidence behind claims. Churches can no longer rely on inherited trust; they must actively earn it.

2 BUILDING TRUST THROUGH AUTHENTICITY

To connect with Gen Z, churches must prioritize authenticity over perfection. This generation has a keen "fake detector" and values vulnerable leadership over polished performances. Churches should share real struggles and failures from the pulpit, avoid overproduced messaging that feels like marketing, and be willing to say "I don't know" about complex issues. A pastor admitting mistakes builds credibility; pretending to have all the answers breaks trust.



3 CREATE DIALOGUE, NOT JUST DOCTRINE

Gen Z wants conversation, not just lectures. Churches should host open forums on challenging topics, foster environments where disagreement is welcomed, and equip leaders to listen more than they speak. Let young adults shape conversations rather than simply receive them. Dismissing honest questions as rebellion destroys trust.

4 MATCH WORDS WITH ACTION

This generation judges credibility by deeds, not declarations. Churches must visibly engage social issues like racial justice, mental health, and poverty. Support marginalized groups within the church, not just outside it. Align sermons with tangible action. Prayers without corresponding action break trust.

5 FOSTER PEER-TO-PEER TRUST

Help Gen Z build trust with each other by creating safe spaces for vulnerability, promoting shared leadership opportunities, and facilitating honest conversations about real issues. Trust grows when people build something together rather than just attending events. Model healthy conflict resolution and normalize apologizing when mistakes happen.

Gen Z doesn't want an authoritative church that claims to have all the answers—they want a real one where they're seen, heard, and invited to shape the future.

s.t.a.r. FOR YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

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ROADMAP

Curriculum Domain, Competency and Task Constellations

STAR Domain:	Listening
Associated Competency:	Relationship building and Compassion
Associated Task:	Equanimity

STAR Domain:	Young Adult Leadership
Associated Competency:	Resourcefulness and Communication
Associated Task:	Enroll: Recruiting

STAR Domain:	Faith Journey
Associated Competency:	**Create Trust**
Associated Task:	Engagement: Spiritual formation

STAR Domain:	Culture
Associated Competency:	Adaptability
Associated Task:	Engagement: Embracing failure

STAR Domain:	Intergenerational Connections
Associated Competency:	Mentorship
Associated Task:	Engagement: Generational literacy and Digital literacy

STAR Domain:	Community
Associated Competency:	Authenticity and Inclusiveness
Associated Task:	Engagement: Conflict

STAR Domain:	Church Leadership
Associated Competency:	Influence and Purpose
Associated Task:	Enroll: Creating buy-in

STAR Domain:	Frameworks, Programs, & Events
Associated Competency:	Learner
Associated Task:	Engagement: Sticky program design and Measure and assess