

The Signature of Young Life – Part II

(Adapted from articles by Neil Atkinson, Dick Langford and various other Young Life veterans)

The three levels of contact work

1. *Being seen* at school affairs and wherever teens are. It is important for the leader seeking to build friendships to express his/her interest by attending events that are important to the teenager. This could be a school play, athletic event or practice session, or some other activity in which they are engaged. It could be a shopping centre, or street corner, or park. The leader might not say anything to anyone, but his or her presence there speaks of interest. It is good to remember the words of St. Francis of Assisi: "We preach Jesus Christ and, when necessary, we use words."

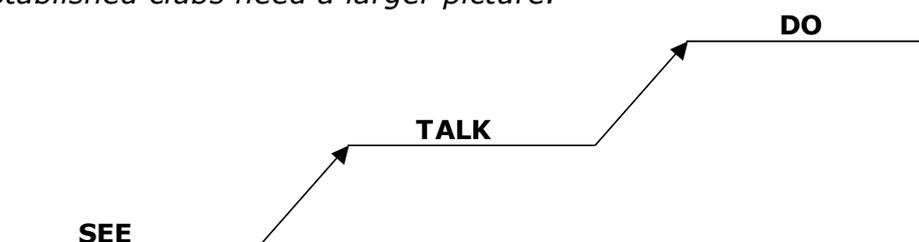
2. *Conversing* with a young person. Before long the leader must step up to this second level and actually talk with someone. If he goes on just hanging around, suspicions will grow about his purposes. Real friendships can be built only through communication, and this communication must be more than an occasional "Hi!" We must remember to look at things from a young person's point of view and learn to speak about things which are of interest to him or her.

3. *Enjoying activities* with young people. Of course, this is the finest way to get to know a young person. Fast friendships are built when we live one of life's experiences with him or her. Suggestions follow:

Water and snow ski trips, fishing trips, college and professional athletic events, golf, having young people over for lunch or after a game, telephone visits, working on school projects or decorations, slumber parties, parade float building, touch football and pickup athletic events, weekend trips to the beach or mountains or cities, bicycling, handball, swimming, bowling, weight lifting, chaperoning school events, athletic officiating, visiting a college or university, music (give guitar lessons or take lessons from teens, listen to their group practice), arts.

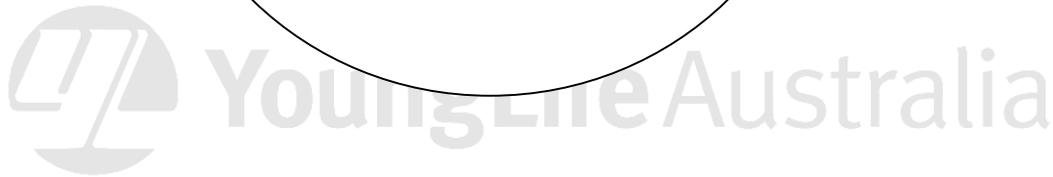
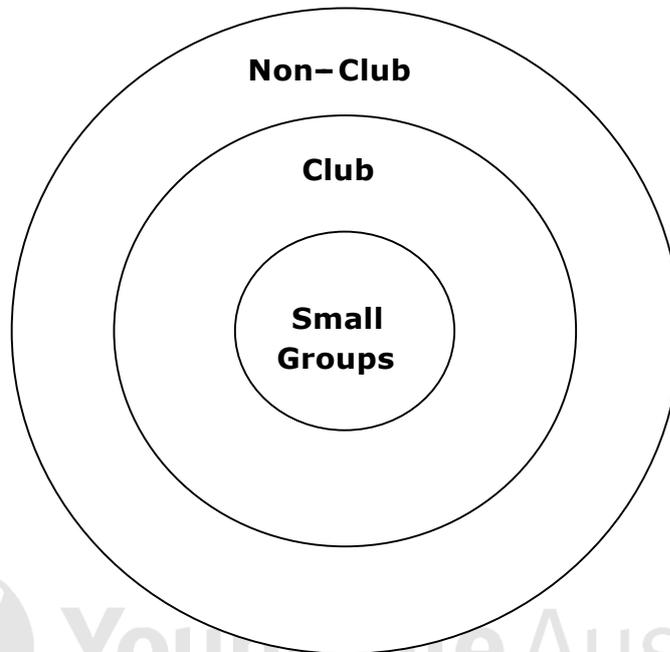
Leaders should use their imaginations and be constantly on the lookout for activities, which they may share with young people.

Established clubs need a larger picture.



Besides the three levels, we need to have in mind three categories of high school people. Think of it as a series of circles. The small circle consists of Campaigners. The

Campaigners are the smallest segment of a high school population. A larger circle surrounding the Campaigners is the circle of club attendees. Club attendees make up the next largest segment with which we have contact. The last group of young people, by far the largest, is the non-club attendees. These are individuals, who for one reason or another, don't come to Young Life.



As Young Life leaders, we need to intentionally make contact with teens in each of the three categories: Campaigners, club attendees and non-club young people. What frequently happens is that contact work is done with Campaigners and club attendees and is not done with non-club kids *on a regular basis*. Seldom, if ever, do we get to level three contact work. Many Young Life leaders do nothing with non-club attendees, not even converse. No wonder clubs don't expand! We need to go back to relationship development and get to non-club kids at level three. We have to do *something* with them.

When do we do contact?

In order to be effective, we must be regular in our approach to teens. It might mean going when we don't feel like it. It is essential that a leader do contact weekly. Vary the time and type of your contacts. Do not give the young people the idea that you are there to build your own ministry or event. On the other hand, consistent attendance for a certain sport you are targeting can help provide the trust needed to develop relationships.