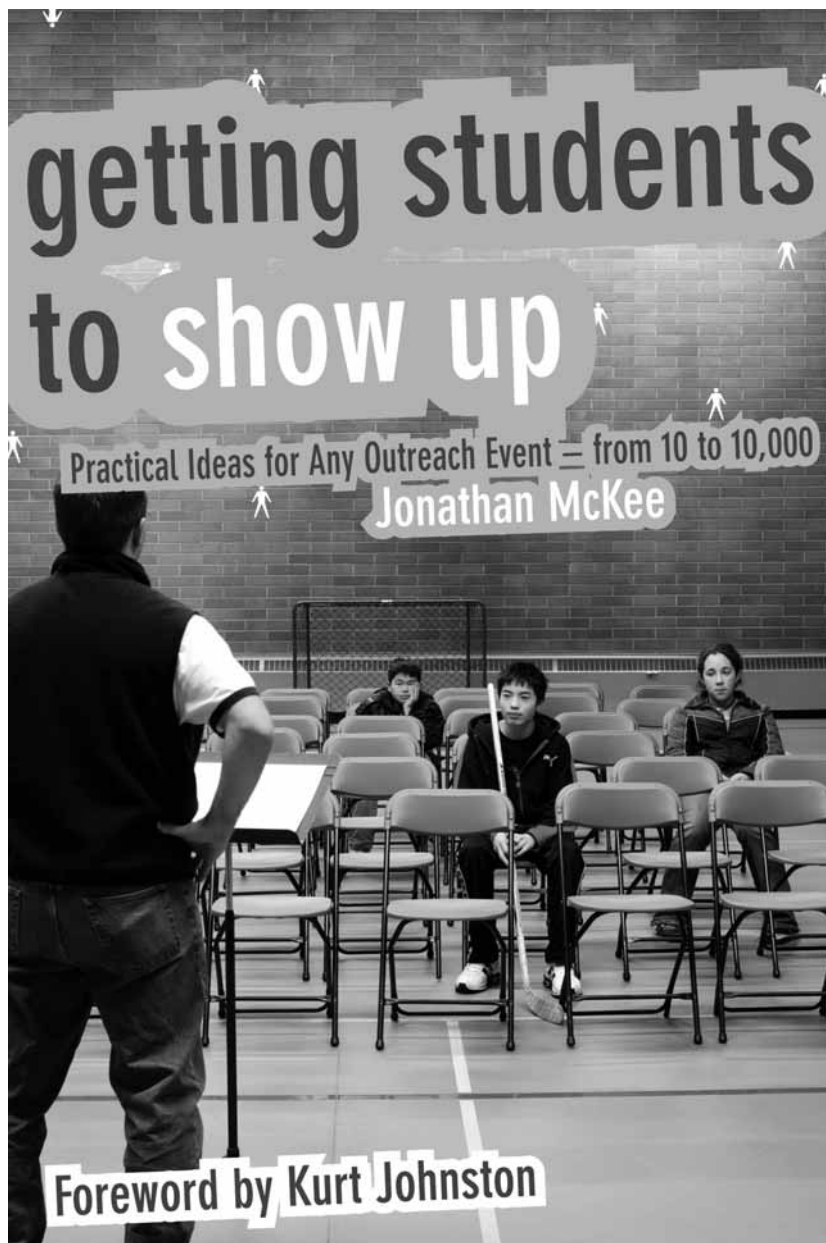


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Getting Students to Show Up: Practical ideas for Any Outreach Event—from 10 to 10,000
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Youth Specialties products, 300 S. Pierce St., El Cajon, CA 92020 are published by
Zondervan, 5300 Patterson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49530.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McKee, Jonathan R. (Jonathan Ray), 1970-

Getting students to show up : practical ideas for any outreach event—
from 10 to 10,000 / Jonathan McKee.

p. cm.

ISBN-10: 0-310-27216-5 (pbk.)

ISBN-13: 0-310-27216-8 (pbk.)

1. Church work with teenagers. 2. Church work with students. 3.
Evangelistic work. 4. Non-church-affiliated people. I. Title.

BV4447.M2377 2007

259'.23—dc22

2007006912

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Web site addresses listed in this book were current at the time of publication. Please contact Youth Specialties via e-mail (YS@YouthSpecialties.com) to report URLs that are no longer operational and provide replacement URLs if available.

Creative Team: Dave Urbanski, SharpSeven Design, Laura Gross, Janie Wilkerson, and Heather Haggerty

Cover Design by Burnkit

Printed in the United States of America

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the field of dreams myth

if you build it, they will come...right?



Many of us remember *Field of Dreams*, the 1989 Kevin Costner film about an Iowa farmer who hears a voice telling him to build a baseball diamond in the middle of his cornfield: *If you build it, he will come.*

Nice movie, bad event-planning philosophy.

During the past decade that I've been a speaker, I've attended literally hundreds of youth ministry events where individuals used the *Field of Dreams* event-planning method. They "feel led" to put on a youth event, and they do so "in faith."

"How many do you expect?" I always ask.

"Thousands," they respond. "We've invited the whole town."

Sounds great.

But fewer than 10 percent of the expected attendees show up.

The intentions were good. And faith can move mountains. So what happened?

What about the suburban youth pastor who plans a youth rally and tells all his students to “bring their friends”? More than 1,000 flyers are passed out at three different high schools. Posters are hung at every school. Hundreds of teenagers are expected. Fewer than 60 show up.

Why?

What went wrong?

Or did anything go wrong? Is “fewer than 60” okay?

A little church in Texas launches a weekly youth program. The youth worker labels it an “outreach program.” The church is in a small town, so they’d be happy having 20 students a week. But on the first Wednesday, only seven show up. The next week—five. The following week, the same five show up again.

“Numbers aren’t important anyway,” the youth worker reasons. “If we can make a difference in just one kid’s life, that would be okay.”

But what if, realistically, there are at least 100 other students in the neighborhood who haven’t even been asked? Is one kid still okay?

It’s September and every school in a certain California district has launched its school clubs. A 16-year-old sophomore girl who really knows her Bible wants to reach her high school campus through a lunchtime Bible club. So she tells her church friends about it and organizes the first meeting. Three of her friends show up, along with a freshman from another church. The girls smile and greet the freshman cordially. They talk amongst themselves for a while and then plan their first activity.

The same five students show up at the next meeting, which lasts only 14 minutes (after all, lunch period is really short); the next meeting is canceled because the leader has an orthodontist appointment; and the final meeting draws three of the original girls (they assume the freshman couldn't make it).

"This campus just isn't interested in Jesus," the leader concludes. "There's nothing we can do but shake the dust off our feet."

What happened?

Can't Bible clubs reach a campus? What about that Bible club we heard about across town—the one that had a ton of students?

Do any of these situations sound familiar? Shouldn't the efforts of those who just attempt to build a program be rewarded? Aren't faith and intentions good enough? If we build it, why *won't* they come?

Field of Dreams was a good movie, but this isn't a dream. It's time to wake up!