

Key Competencies Needed by an Effective Sunday School Director



Who is the Sunday School Director? The Sunday School Director can be any of the following leaders: pastor, minister of education, Sunday School director, and/or outreach-evangelism director. It is the individual who understands the need for someone to take the lead in directing the work of the teachers, workers, and members of the Sunday School as they work to further the mission and vision of the church through the organization of the Sunday School.

As this person leads others through the role of Sunday School Director, here are some key competencies they will be able to utilize:

1. Understand the primary purpose of the Sunday School and how to most effectively convey that purpose to your leaders and members.



A clear understanding of the ***purpose*** of the Sunday School and a strong conviction of its value and importance is foundational to everything a Sunday School Director does.

The functional statement of that purpose is:

Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building on-mission Christians through open Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.

Within this definition there are four key understandings a Sunday School Director needs to have regarding the purpose of the Sunday School:

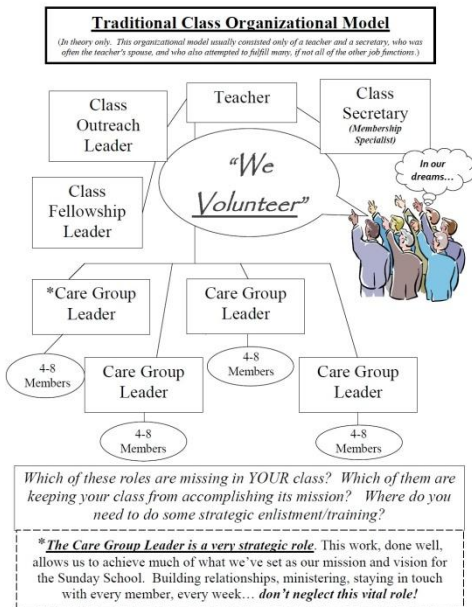
- 1) **Foundational strategy**
- 2) **Dual purposes** – reach for Christ and build on-mission Christians
- 3) **Open group** – characteristics and value of open groups
- 4) **Engage in functions of the church** – how to engage members in the work of the church and Kingdom of God.

Key and very primary to the work of the Sunday School Director is for the Director to not only understand the purpose of the Sunday School, but also how to convey that purpose to leaders and members of the Sunday School. The ability of the Director to rally the Sunday School leaders and members around a central purpose and vision for the Sunday School is the foundation to everything else they do.

The Sunday School Director also needs to know how to interpret the work of the Sunday School from the viewpoint of the Sunday School member. LifeWay has adopted the “3D Sunday School” as a way to interpret this. “3D” stands for 3 **dimensions**. Those three dimensions are:

- **Invite**
- **Discover**
- **Connect**

2. Understand how to organize (or reorganize) the Sunday School.

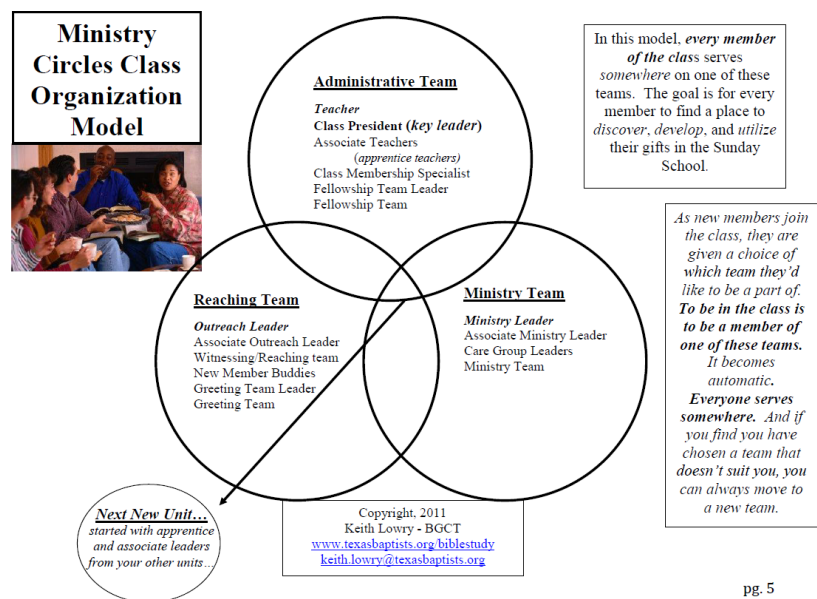


Establishing the correct Sunday School organization and continuing to monitor and improve the organization is a key to effective growth and enhanced teaching. There are four major organizational issues the Sunday School Director needs to continually develop.

- **Leader-learner ratios** – staffing the Sunday School with proper ratio of leaders to those enrolled in each based on the age of the participants in the group.
- **Unit size** – Providing classes that are the optimal size for effective growth, teaching, and ministry. The optimal size is influenced by many things with the chief influence being the age of the participants.
- **Targeting** – Sunday Schools groups should have a clearly defined target for teaching, outreach, ministry, and assimilation. Therefore, the Sunday School Director needs to continually help each group in the Sunday School understand who

is their primary target. In most instances this will be based on the age of individuals but not always.

- **New Units** – A chief principle in growing a Sunday School is to continually *enlarge* the organization to provide for known possibilities. One of the central points to growing a Sunday School and maintaining the proper organization is continually starting new units.* A Sunday School Director needs to understand how to effectively start new units and the steps to take in planning for and implementing new units. *



pg. 5

Not only does the Sunday School Director need to understand how to organize the Sunday School, he also needs to be able to build an understanding among Sunday School leaders of the key principles of an effective Sunday School organization.

3. Understand how to plan the work of the Sunday School.

The Sunday School Director needs to understand the work of the Sunday School Planning Team, who composes that team,* (*Sunday School Council*), and how to lead that team to do its work effectively. "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed." Proverbs 15:22. "Finalize plans through counsel." Proverbs 20:18 (HCSB)

Four key areas of Sunday School plan include:

- **Vision** – The beginning point of strong Sunday School strategy planning is determining the vision God has for the Director's Sunday School. A strong, healthy, clearly understood vision is essential to building successful plans for a Sunday School. Read Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* And *"Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For by it our ancestors were approved."* Hebrews 11:1-2 (HCSB)
- **Annual Planning** – A Sunday School Director needs to know how to guide his Sunday School Planning Team through strong, effective annual planning. The major components of that annual planning will include, 1) vision, 2) evaluation and needs, 3) priorities, 4) improvement desired, and 5) action plans.
- **Monthly Sunday School Planning Team Meetings** – This important meeting is led by the Sunday School Director. It is the opportunity for the Sunday School Planning Team to evaluate where they are in their plans, evaluation past actions, check up on and implement present plans, look forward to upcoming future plans, and problem solve. The Sunday School Director's ability to lead this planning time on an ongoing basis plays a large role in the continual improvement and strength of the Sunday School, especially in churches without a paid age group ministerial staff.
- **Weekly Leadership Meetings** – The weekly leadership meetings include group sessions in which the Sunday School Director will have time with all the leadership, but the key component of effective weekly leadership meetings is the ability of individual units to plan their work effectively including planning for teaching, reaching and ministry, and effective administration of the work. The Sunday School Director is responsible for equipping leaders to lead weekly Sunday School leadership meetings.

Skills in planning will also include skills in effective budgeting.

4. Understand how to enlist and equip leaders for the Sunday School.

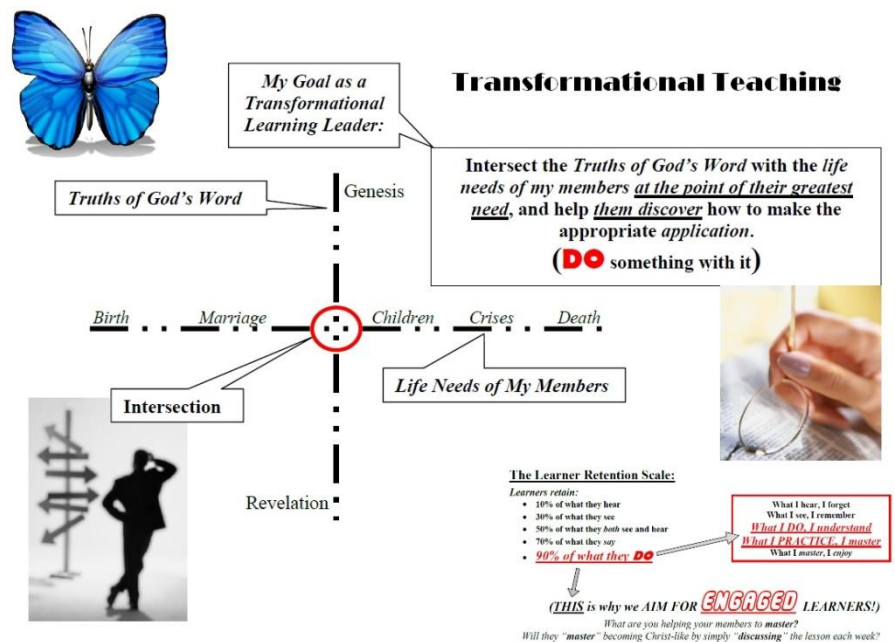
- **Enlisting** – The Sunday School Director needs to understand the leadership needs of the Sunday School and the proper steps in discovering and enlisting the needed leaders. Components of the process include: working with the Sunday School Planning Team, potential leader discovery, determining the proper organization and who will be asked to serve, determining the proper enlistment process, leaders being enlisted by the person to whom they are responsible, training the enlists, and following through with the persons enlisted.
- **Equipping** – The Sunday School Director and the Sunday School Planning Team need to determine the Sunday School leader training needs and develop a plan to meet those training needs. That plan needs to include both group and individual training experiences. Those experiences could include: courses, conferences, apprenticeship, observation, mentoring, online, viewing, listening, reading, and much more.



5. Understand transformational teaching and how to develop transformational teaching in the Sunday School.

The heart of Sunday School teaching is to seek to bring about spiritual transformation in the lives of individuals. (Romans 12:2) Spiritual transformation is God's work of changing a believer into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and by empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience to glorify God. A strong Sunday School Director will seek to be aware of the effectiveness of the teaching place in the Sunday School and whether or not it is impacting the lives of the participants in a way that brings about transformation. In order to do that a Sunday School Director needs to understand the following:

- What spiritual transformation is and how to recognize the results of spiritual transformation in the lives of members.
- The key elements and traits of teaching for spiritual transformation.
- How to know what kind of teaching is taking place and how to evaluate teaching.
- How to help teachers understand what it means to teach for spiritual transformation.
- How to impact (change, or transform) the teaching in the Sunday School.



6. Understand the primary resources for the Sunday School.

It would be almost impossible for the Sunday School Director to be familiar with every resource produced by LifeWay for the Sunday School. However, the Sunday School Director needs to understand:

- Key criteria in evaluating curriculum. *(How to evaluate Adult SS Curriculum)
- How to develop and administer curriculum guidelines.
- Characteristics of key curriculum series.
- How to work with the Sunday School Planning Team to train Sunday School leaders to use their curriculum effectively.
- Where to find information about curriculum offerings for each age group including www.lifeway.com, www.navpress.com, www.texasbaptists.org/biblestudy and brochures.

7. Understand how to work with other Directors – especially pastor, minister of education, age group directors, associational and state leaders.

These key working relationships are very important in developing the work of the Sunday and articulating a clear vision for the work of the Sunday School. The Sunday School Age Group Directors should have regularly scheduled meetings to update one another, plan, and pray together.

8. Develop effective administrative processes.



A major key to effective leadership by the Sunday School Director is establishing and implementing effective administrative processes. The Sunday School Director should lead in defining clear processes and policies on:

- Records
- Enrollment and dropping process
 - Curriculum selection, ordering, and distribution.
- Worker enlistment and training.
- Reports to the church, leadership, and Sunday School membership.

9. Understand how to work with and encourage leaders.

Almost everything a Sunday School Director does is based on **relationships**. Weak relationships hamper communication and trust. Strong relationships build communication and trust. A leader that is encouraged works with greater joy and courage. A Sunday School Director should hone his/her skills in encouraging leaders and do so frequently. Some of the ways to do so include:

- Write lots of short **notes of appreciation**.
- Make **public expressions** of appreciation.
- **Celebrate** the **accomplishments** of leaders.
- Focus on the **needs** of leaders.
- **Write down requests. Respond** to them specifically and **quickly**.
- Use Sunday mornings to **observe** leaders, **determine** needs, and **encourage** leaders.



10. Understand the principles for growing a Sunday School.

The primary growth principles a Sunday School Director needs to understand are articulated in the five step formula developed by Arthur Flake. The Sunday School Director needs to not only know each of these five points, but how to implement each of them in his Sunday School.

A. Know the possibilities.

- Who does God want us to reach?
- What is our primary ministry area?
- Does our Sunday School have plans to reach the people there?
- Where is our Sunday School currently growing?
- Are we prepared organizationally to continue reaching people in that area?
- Where is there potential to reach people that we are **not** currently reaching in our church ministry field?
- What are some of those groups? (*i.e. special education, physically handicapped, single adults, language groups*)
- Is our Sunday School effectively assimilating our own church members?

B. Enlarge the organization. (*Already addressed earlier in this document. Starting New units.*)

C. Enlist and equip leaders. (*Already addressed earlier in this document.*)

D. Provide the space and equipment.

An effective Sunday School Director needs to understand:

- The proper space and equipment needed for each age group.
- How to evaluate the allocation of space.
- How to adjust space in order to bring about the best use of space.
- How to find additional space if the present space used is insufficient.
- How to look ahead at what space needs will be in the future based on growth patterns.
- How to evaluate the equipment and furnishing for each Sunday School group.
- How to plan for and secure the proper equipment and furnishing for each Sunday School group.
- How to project and plan ahead for future Sunday School space and equipment needs.



E. Go after the people.



- An effective Sunday School Directors needs to have skills in leading Sunday School groups to focus outward instead of inward and have a heart for unreached people.
- An effective Sunday School Director needs to work with Sunday School leaders to mobilize their Sunday School groups in reaching people.
- An effective Sunday School Director also needs to understand how to develop an effective outreach organization.

11. Understand how to *implement* the work of the Sunday School.

While this competency sounds rather nebulous it is a very important one. Many Sunday School Directors have wonderful **ideas** and **plan**, but they break down in the **implementation** process. An effective Sunday School Director needs to develop skills in working with the Sunday School Planning Team and others to **implement** ideas and actions. This will include detailed plans and steps to accomplish the end result. ***All planning and no action results in accusations of serving on a Baptist committee!***



12. Respond to the call to be a growing Christian, depend on the Holy Spirit, and live an exemplary life.

The most important competency of an effective Sunday School Director is one that should be a trait of every believer. The true strength and power of a Sunday School Director comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in his life and the lives of the leaders and members of the Sunday School. While it is important that the Sunday School Director have strong administrative skills and other traits already mentioned, it is even more important that he/she works under the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise their work will be powerless.

It has been said that “*you cannot take someone where you have never been.*” A Sunday School Director needs to live a life that demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit in their life and the traits they want other leaders to emulate.

Additional Material:

***How to Evaluate Adult SS Curriculum**

| Choosing Curriculum | |
|---|--|
| <i>9 Questions for Choosing Curriculum for Your Group</i> | |
| 1. | Does it facilitate opportunities for a lost person to study and respond to the gospel? |
| 2. | How does the curriculum address the life needs and life questions of the learners? |
| 3. | Will learners be able to express and understand who they are as a believer? As a Southern Baptist? |
| 4. | Is the curriculum sequenced in a way that makes sense? |
| 5. | Does it support the mission and purpose of the group? Of the church? |
| 6. | Does it teach the group how to study the Bible? |
| 7. | What will learners know, believe, and do as a result of using this curriculum? |
| 8. | What is missing in this curriculum that I feel is important for the teacher? For the learner? |
| 9. | How will my curriculum choices today impact the church over a period of time? |

***Checklist for starting new units**

1. Build awareness of the value of new units

- *Pastor emphasizes value from the pulpit*
- *Articles in church paper*
- *Articles on church Web site*
- *Stories of successful new units*
- *Stories & Testimonies of individuals reached through new units*
- *Celebrate the success of new units*
- *Show statistically the difference new units have made*

2. Study Your Sunday School Organization to identify a target group for new unit(s)

- *Sunday School Planning Team studies the Sunday School organization*
- *Look for needs for new units. Include the following list plus others:*
 - *Classes or departments that exceed suggested enrollment ceilings*
 - *Age ranges, and life transition stages (newly married, recently divorced, widowed, college students, etc.) that are not being reached effectively*
 - *Areas with a significant amount of prospects but little attendance*
 - *Classes where the space is continually filled*
 - *Special needs—mentally handicapped, physically handicapped*
 - *Homebound, shift workers*
 - *Opportunities for new units in other locations—homes, apartments, offices, recreational sites, residential institutions*

3. Enlist and Build the Leadership Team (*denotes core)

- *Teacher** _____
- *Class Administrator** _____
- *Member** _____
- *Member** _____
- *Member* _____
- *Member* _____

4. Provide Needed Space, Equipment, and Resources to the Leadership Team

- *Determine meeting location and room*
- *Determine equipment needed and make arrangements for the equipment*
- *Order curriculum resources for teacher and members*
- *Provide curriculum materials to the teacher*
- *Set up the room and prepare for the first session*

***The Sunday School Planning Team (Sunday School Council)**

The Work of the Sunday School Council

Whether you realize it or not, you **have** a Sunday School council. This is simply a group of Sunday School leaders who provide strategic leadership for the organization, forming a mutual support network to discuss, evaluate, plan, and carry out the work of the Sunday School. In the very smallest situation, the pastor and Sunday School Director can form the Sunday School Council. In a somewhat larger church, the Sunday School director and other general officers are joined by the Sunday School teachers. As the church grows, the department directors or age division directors (the top of the Sunday School organization) form the Sunday School council.

In any case, the Sunday School director needs a group to serve as a sounding board, representing diversity in viewpoint and approach, to provide the most effective leadership. Try to enlist individuals in these leadership positions who have mature spiritual character, a real vision of God's plan for the church and Sunday School, and a real heart for Sunday School work.

Ideally, these representatives should not already be serving as teachers in their respective areas of representation. Rather, enlist persons to serve who have the gift of administration and are good communicators, good listeners. You'll need them to be able to build great relationships with all those who are teaching/working in the age group area they will represent on the council.

For example, a typical Sunday School council in a small to medium sized church might look something like this:

- Sunday School Director
- Assistant Director or records secretary
- Preschool Division Director
- Children's Division Director
- Youth Division Director
- Adult Division Director
- (possibly) Outreach Director
- (possibly) Training & Development Director

These individuals would work on Sunday Morning to ensure the teachers in their respective areas of responsibility were present and accounted for, had all the supplies they needed, were remembering to make any agreed upon announcements to their classes, etc.

5. Promote the Start Date and Location to the Target Group

- *Start date determined _____*
- *Location determined _____*
- *Promotion actions planned*
- *Promotion actions carried out*

6. Visit, Invite, and Enroll Members

- *Names of prospects gathered*
- *Prospective members assigned for contact*
- *Prospective members contacted*
- *Prospective members invited to enroll in class*
- *Other forms of contact made with prospective members:*
 - *Calls*
 - *Cards*
 - *Letters*
 - *E-mails*
 - *Fellowships, dinners*
 - *Informal gatherings*

7. Plan and Conduct the First Session

- *Plan - Well in advance of the first session plan what is going to take place during the session*
- *Praise - Ask some leaders and members to tell how they understand that God is working in their lives, read a Psalm or other Scripture passage that will be part of the Bible study for the day and provide music or brief group singing*
- *Prayer - Prayer time can be a vital group-building experience as well as a meaningful time of worship*
- *Participation in Bible study - Approximately two thirds of the total session should be designed for Bible study*
- *Enlist people for the various parts of the first session*
- *Provide the following for the first session (and other sessions)*
 - *Greeters*
 - *Registration materials*
 - *Name tags*
 - *Member curriculum*
- *Conduct the first session*

8. Continue to Support the New Unit

- *Pray for the new unit*
- *Sponsoring group continues to help build the class by supporting it in visitation, enrolling people, and doing ministry work*
- *Continue to mentor and support the leadership of the new unit*
- *Plan with the leadership of the new unit for the next steps for the new unit and the support that is needed*
- *Communicate with the church about the progress of the new unit*

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