

How to Build a Simple Apprenticeship Pipeline

Ephesians 4:11–13 reminds us that one of the church’s essential callings is to equip people to participate in Jesus’ ministry. The goal is not simply to run ministries but to develop people who are growing in maturity and participating in Christ’s work.

Michael Fletcher writes in *Empowering Leadership: How a Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster*, “God didn’t send people to build the church. He sent the church to build people. That’s the job: building people.”

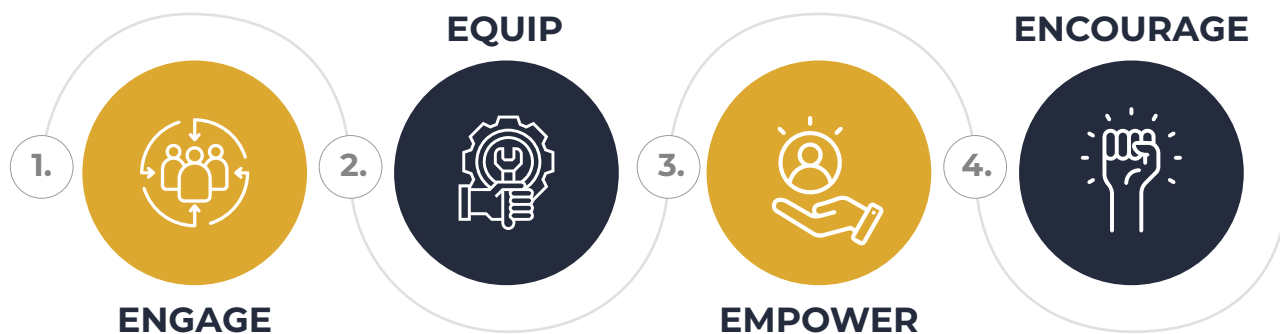
He also notes that pathways into ministry should be easy to find in the local church. Everyone should be able to see what their next step is. A clear leadership development pipeline helps make those next steps visible.

One practical way to do this is through apprenticeship.

An apprentice is someone who learns through hands-on experience while working alongside someone more skilled. In an apprenticeship, the focus is on practical learning, relational development, and shared ministry.

An **apprenticeship pipeline** is simply a clear process that helps move someone from interest to participation and eventually into confident ministry leadership.

The 4Es framework can help churches design a simple apprenticeship pipeline.



ENGAGE



Recognize and Recruit

The first step is recognizing people who may be ready to grow into ministry roles.

Consider people who are:

- New believers
- Not yet participating in ministry
- Interested in leadership development

Look for natural places where apprentices may emerge. These are often your “recruitment grounds.”

Examples include:

- Youth ministry
- Young adult ministry
- Connect groups
- New believer classes

Recruitment into apprenticeship should reflect the relational and experiential nature of ministry.

Consider:

- Personal invitations into apprenticeship
- Opportunities to shadow or observe ministry roles
- Regular encouragement for leaders to bring someone alongside them
- Clear communication about ministry opportunities

EQUIP



Develop and Multiply

Apprenticeship emphasizes learning through experience.

A helpful tool is the **Apprenticeship Square**, which outlines stages of learning and responsibility. [\(See CH9-ApprenticeshipSquare.pdf.\)](#)

Focus on learning through participation rather than classroom instruction alone.

Helpful practices include:

- Learning by doing alongside a ministry leader
- Creating a culture where leaders do not serve alone
- Identifying the skills and knowledge needed for each ministry role
- Using ministry descriptions to create learning checklists for apprentices

A helpful question for leaders is:

How will we know this person has been apprenticed well?

EMPOWER



Create Space and Commission

Apprenticeship is not the final goal. It prepares people to participate more fully in ministry.

Ephesians 4:12–13 describes the purpose clearly: equipping God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ is built up and grows toward maturity.

Once someone has been apprenticed, leaders should create space for them to serve.

Consider:

- Inviting apprentices onto Avenue teams
- Commissioning new leaders in front of the congregation
- Multiplying ministries so new leaders have space to lead

Empowerment communicates trust and helps new leaders step into their calling.

ENCOURAGE



Call Up and Affirm

Encouragement is important throughout the development process. It helps apprentices continue growing and remain engaged in ministry. Leadership development does not end when someone steps into a role. It continues through support, feedback, and relationships.

Encouragement creates a culture where leaders are valued and supported as they develop.

Consider:

- Creating regular check-ins and coaching conversations
- Offering affirmation and constructive feedback
- Creating space for reflection and prayer
- Celebrating growth and milestones in community

Encouragement helps apprentices grow in confidence and faithfulness as they continue participating in the ministry of Jesus.

THE ESSENTIALS

A healthy church develops people, not just programs. A simple apprenticeship pipeline helps members see clear next steps in their growth and ministry participation.

When churches intentionally **engage, equip, and empower apprentices**, they create a culture where leaders are continually developed and ministry is multiplied.