

DNA Guide: Year Long Planner

Written by *Jesse Criss*

Edited by Michelle Murray-Schlitt

***DNA Guides** are designed specifically to bring in Pastors, Leaders and Experts to provide the foundation (DNA) blocks for you to craft your own program component. The goal is not to sell our method but use practical examples to drive home the foundations.*

When I talk to other Youth Pastors and Leaders, a topic that seems to come up a lot is Planning. Specifically, how to break out of the month to month cycle most people are stuck in. For most of us, it is in the early days of our ministry when we know very little, don't yet have a rhythm or core events that we run month to month, (at least that's what it was like for me when I started out all those years ago.)

We produced a month-long bulletin and newsletter for the church and it would be due a few days before the next month started. My habit at the time was to spend a few days (or the day it was due) scrambling to get information together. There was no dreaming, vision casting, planning or concern about what came the month after. The goal was to get it out ASAP, and it worked ... for a while.

Eventually, during my second year as a part-time pastor and a few years later when I went into full-time ministry, the whole thing caught up to me. Often there were mistakes and double bookings. Once I had an all-nighter in only one room of the church because of a funeral set up and a DEAD BODY (100% TRUTH) being in the other room. I hadn't bothered to look at what the church was planning so when I made my event FOR THE NEXT WEEK I ran into problems.

After that I knew that it was time to sit down and make a plan. But administration was not my skillset at the time and I struggled hard to get my head around a whole years' worth of programming. Fast forward 18 years and things have definitely changed. I know most of my major events a year in advance and work anywhere from 6-9 months ahead. For the most part, the year is planned but I run our program all year round so there is no real END, just the start of the next set of ideas.

DISCLAIMER: *Below is a step-by-step guide to how I plan a calendar. This is my method but I have done my best to stick to the principles of the DNA series. The goal is to offer the fundamental elements so that you can craft your own plan.*

1) Get A Calendar

Print off 12 months' worth of calendar sheets. You can easily do this in outlook and can print them blank. Eventually things will go digital, but I always start with a paper copy because I find it easier to see everything at once and can better mark up the paper.

2) Church Admin / Room Booker

Now you need to contact your Church Administrator or whoever books the church as a whole. Ask them a series of questions....

- What major bookings do you have this year (not just on your night)

- What are regular things that get booked but are not in the system yet
- What is being rumored to be booked but has not yet been finalized.

3) School Calendars

Go online and download your local school district calendar. You want to make down all the important dates that relate to your students.

- Any Pro-D (Professional Development Day) where kids are off school
- Mark the start of School, Christmas, Easter and Spring Break
- If you're a High School Pastor mark down any Grad related dates

4) Annual Youth Events

In every ministry, there are annual events that need to stay annual. Think through some of these possibilities

- Retreats (Fall, Winter, Spring)
- Christmas Party
- Grad Events
- Nights youth is cancelled
- Kick Off Nights
- * Anything that you do that is a MUST.

NOTE: Once you have all this together you now can plug in your program basics. For the most part every group contains one or all of these elements.

- Worship Nights
- Service Opportunities
- Big Events
- Retreat
- Teaching Weeks
- Small Groups
- Leadership Development

Now most of us don't do all these things every week or even every term/semester. What you need to do is figure out how many of each of these nights you want and how close you want them together.

5) Now the Program BASICS

Now you need to plug in all the event elements into your calendar. How this happens is really up to you. This is how I fill my calendar, remember the details are not as important right now as the date and BASIC program element.

- Worship Nights - 4 per year (1 a term)
- Service Opportunities
- Big Events - 1 Event a month (12 events total)
- Retreat - 3 a year (Fall, Winter and Grad)
- Teaching Weeks/Small Groups - We mix them together and they make up most of the weeks. Our one rule is that it's always at least 2 weeks back to back so we can build some continuity with teaching/groups.
- Leadership Development - 3 times a year (Sep, Jan, Spring Break)

5) Filling in the details

Now that you have a full year plan you need to fill in the details. What I love about this method is that it gives you and your leaders, kids and parents dates to save. Your space gets booked in advance and you have something to work towards. The hard part is now over, the fun part is getting to fill in the details. Here are a few things to remember.

- Still try to plan your details at least a term (fall, winter, spring, summer) at a time.
- Look for the opportunities that other things like Pro-D days provide
- Plan out the cost of your ministry to spread out the expensive events
- Plan your events around the BIG stuff. So, when you come back from a retreat make sure it's a lighter week or a guest teacher.
- Take into account your Vision/Mission and make sure your event details line up.

ALWAYS REMEMBER: We are responsible for the students God has put into our care. Our goal and mission should always be lead kids to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and the mission that he has called them to. But don't forget that we are also the architects of the program. That means we are responsible for events either honoring or ignoring Jesus. It's why I believe that planning a yearlong calendar is so important. It forces me to STOP and ask the tough questions.

BONUS: Always write in pencil... because things will change and that is OK.