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5 steps to grow your VBS

By Jerry Wooley

In the early 1900s, a Sunday School leader by the name of Arthur Flake proposed a five-step process for building and growing a Sunday School. Believe it or not, the simple process worked then and continues to work now.

Way back in the late 1970s, I attended my first Sunday School leadership training conference in Nashville. At one point during the three-day event, Sunday School legend Harry Piland walked into the room and said, "Boys, let me tell you how to grow your Sunday School." We furiously captured every word on paper (obviously this was before iPads), and at the conclusion of Dr. Piland's presentation, our notebooks contained Flake's Formula. I remember him saying, "The formula is sound. Work it, and you will grow your Sunday School."

I was innocent and unsophisticated enough to go back to my church and do what Piland (and Flake) said to do. Guess what? It worked. I recently reacquainted myself with Flake's Formula and am convinced it will work for VBS just as it does for Sunday School.

VBS leaders often tell me they wish to grow their Bible schools but do not know how. Arthur Flake knew how. Harry Piland knew how. And with Flake's five simple steps, you, too, will know how.



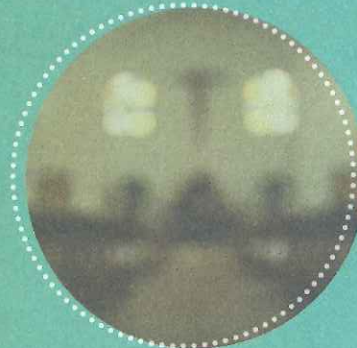
Step 1: Know the possibilities.

Survey your church, neighborhood, and community to determine who is available to attend VBS. Don't forget the preschoolers, kids, students, adults, and those with special needs. Did you know LifeWay produces VBS resources for every age group listed above?



Step 2: Enlarge the organization.

Provide classes for age groups you have not previously tried to reach. Also, instead of providing one class for all first graders, provide two classes. Increase the number of classes, and you make room for more people to attend. Double the number of classes, and you double the potential.



Step 3: Provide the space.

More classes mean more space is needed. Your first thought is most likely, "We don't have any more space." Really? Have you conducted an honest inventory of available space? Have you considered tents, shade trees, a wide spot in a hall, the pastor's office?

I was recently informed there was no more space for additional Sunday School classes. A brief conversation later and a quick walk through the building produced seven large rooms that are not being used during the Sunday School hour. The same is probably true for your VBS as well.



Step 4: Enlist and train the workers.

Obviously enlarging the organization means enlarging the number of workers needed. Just as you thought about additional space, you are probably thinking about additional workers: "We don't have any more workers." Have you personally asked every church member? How about partnering with workers from other churches?

Last summer, as the leader of VBS at the mission church I have been attending, I was struggling to find someone to lead our VBS worship rally. A church member called a friend at another church, and before I knew it, we didn't have a person to lead our worship rally—WE HAD AN ENTIRE TEAM! It was awesome! The worship rally was so high energy that the kids—as well as the workers—didn't want to leave.



Step 5: Go after the people.

A famous line from the classic movie *Field of Dreams* says, "If you build it, they will come." While this wisdom may work for a baseball diamond in the middle of a corn field, it doesn't work for VBS. We have to go after the people and keep going after the people. The most difficult aspect of growing your VBS may be this final step. Getting the word out is a big challenge. You have to tell the people. Let me say it again, you have to tell the people—and in as many different ways as there are people to tell.

Although VBS 2017 is just around the corner, there is still time for most churches to apply Flake's Formula. Get started today: survey the possibilities, create more classes, secure more space and workers, and go after the people.

Jerry Wooley served as the Vacation Bible School Specialist for LifeWay for many years before taking the role of Minister of Mature Adults at First Baptist Hendersonville in Hendersonville, Tenn. He is passionate about taking advantage of opportunities to reach unchurched families with the truth of the gospel.