

## No Reliable Boundaries

Reno Luaro is the Director of Digital Learning at Princeton Theological Seminary. He isn't a youth minister, nor does he have any expertise in that area, but he DOES understand everything digital. His main point in this workshop was to show us how digital is a place or an environment to Generation Z (defined as those ages 12 – 20 years old), not a type of media.

Digital creates a brain hack or an anatomical relationship of sorts, even more than a snapshot or a picture does. Even a picture can trick us to remember the smell of a perfume or feel the feelings with our heart racing or tears welling up in our eyes. Humans are meant to heal by having memories fade with time or forget them altogether. Video creates memories that are replayed over and over again. And then there is virtual reality...

Generation Zers live IN technology; they don't just use it. Think of Face Time or Skype. It feels REAL, but it is only a picture of the likeness of a person. Isn't an actual face-to-face visit really REAL – with hugs, with shared experiences, with more time to reflect and talk and visit? How many times have we heard that “the picture doesn't do it justice?” Think of a picture you have taken on vacation, say of the Grand Canyon. Without being in the space, the grandeur, the immenseness of it all, does the picture do the experience any justice at all?

The problem is that GenZers spend so much time living in digital, and have ever since birth, the real thing isn't as satisfying. An example of this could be thinking of a dish your mother used to make, not having the recipe, but searching for a substitute. My father has searched for the cheesecake his mother made for decades in vain. He realizes that the memory of it could never possibly taste as good as the real thing, but his quest continues nonetheless.

This example affects GenZers all the time. The things they experience digitally spur on physiological reactions in their bodies, however the experience isn't REAL since there isn't any connection with another human being. The problem comes when the first real-time encounter occurs. It might not live up to the digital excitement. (An example was a teen going to the ocean for the first time and not liking it, since it didn't live up to the digital version. It was gritty, salty and there were creatures scurrying everywhere. It wasn't only the serene calm the teen had envisioned.)

Let's face it, reality can be messy, smelly and is not always pleasant.

What does this have to do with the church and youth ministry? We need to be aware of how we are engaging youngsters in our churches. We are in competition with award-winning videographers and marketers. How will a 2-week camping trip with no digital be perceived by a youth? The main way they experience the world has been banned and the ground is much harder in person than it seems online. The saving grace is that we can offer real human connection and the sharing of who God is and how He has been involved in our lives. We need to share ourselves with youth, messy as we are, so they have real experiences that created memories of smells, sounds, and feelings.