



The Power of Learner Councils | A How I Lead Interview with Russell Rigby

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Speaker 1 00:00:03 How's your teaching calling going? Have you ever asked a question during the second hour and suddenly everyone is looking at the carpet in silence? There are proven methods to stimulate class discussion that work like a charm. David Farnsworth does a masterful job presenting on this very subject in the Teaching Saints Virtual Library. What questions? Get people talking? How can you effectively listen to the answer they're saying without being distracted of where you want to take the class Next? These are crucial principles to consider, especially in this time of Come Follow Me Sunday School. You can watch David Farnsworth presentation by visiting leading-saints.org/fourteen. There you can gain free access for 14 days to the Teaching Saints Virtual Library, where you'll find hours and hours of content to help you be a better prepared Sunday teacher.

Speaker 1 00:00:57 So, my name is Kurt Francom and I am the founder and executive director of Leading Saints, and obviously the host of the Leading Saints podcast. Now, I started Leading Saints back in 2010. It was just a hobby blog and it grew from there. By the time, uh, 2014 came around, we started the podcast, and that's really when it got some, uh, traction and took off. Uh, 2016, we became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and we've been growing ever since. And now I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now, this is a segment we do on the Leading Saints podcast called How I Lead, and we reach out to everyday leaders. They're not experts, gurus, authors, PhDs. They're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling. And we simply ask them, how is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book that should be behind a PhD. They're usually that good. And, uh, we just talk about, uh, sharing what the other guy's doing. And I remember being a leader just simply

wanting to know, okay, I know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing? What's working for him? And so that's why every Wednesday or so we publish these How I leads segments to share

Speaker 1 00:02:39 It is a how I lead episode. And this week we are focusing on the calling of the Sunday School President. That's right. We're headed to Lin Wood Washington to chat with Russell Rigby and Wowa, some phenomenal groundbreaking <laugh>. I just wanna hype this up, just so good. Just ideas of how to, how to lead as the Sunday School President or the Sunday school presidency. The things that Russell's doing with not just teacher council meetings, but learner council meetings, how he's identifying certain demographics, certain groups, whether it's youth, whether it's empty nesters, uh, these people in the ward, and getting them specifically together to talk about learning and teaching and the ward. And, uh, <laugh>, I'm just so impressed with how this is, um, transforming the ward, how it's stimulating, learning, stimulating safety, opening people up so that they, uh, they show up to that second hour every other week for Sunday school. But really, I, I shouldn't limit it to Sunday school. Every class we're teaching is happening, even in the home. I would say Russell is impacting it through some of his approaches and, uh, a true revelatory, uh, process that's happening here. So let's get into it. This is my interview with Russell Rigby, the Sunday School President in the Olympic View Ward in Linwood, Washington.

Speaker 2 00:04:28 All right, Russell Rigby, welcome to the Leading Saints podcast.

Speaker 3 00:04:31 Good to be here.

Speaker 2 00:04:32 Now you are in, is it Linwood, right? Washington,

Speaker 3 00:04:35 Linwood, Linwood, Washington.

Speaker 2 00:04:36 Linwood, Washington, uh, just north of Seattle. Am I remembering the details?

Speaker 3 00:04:40 That's correct.

Speaker 2 00:04:41 <laugh>. Nice. Now you're A-A-C-P-A by day, A Sunday School President by, uh, weekend.

Speaker 3 00:04:46 Yeah, that, that, that, that sums it up. Yep.

Speaker 2 00:04:48 Any other weird characteristic of, of Russell?

Speaker 3 00:04:53 Um, I love, uh, rock climbing and, and cycling. So I'm a I'm an endurance sport guy. Those are fun activities to do.

Speaker 2 00:05:00 Like are you the, do you do the, the Ironmans or anything like that?

Speaker 3 00:05:03 Nothing like that. I do long events. There's one I call the STP where you, you ride from Seattle to Portland in one day. I did that stuff like that that I've done. And then, you know, we, we even do family vacations where we'll go rock climbing. Last year we went to Las Vegas and Rock Climbed as a family. So we'll do fun stuff like that.

Speaker 2 00:05:20 Love it. Nice. So what's the story of you being called as a Sunday School President?

Speaker 3 00:05:24 Um, nothing spectacular. Um, I had been a financial clerk funny enough for a long, long time. And, um, that was one that came up, um, as a calling that was opened. And, um, I, I was asked and accepted. Um, and so, yeah. Again, nothing fancy, but for

Speaker 2 00:05:45 This, the, the phone rang or the text message came through, you showed up and said, sure, I'll be the president.

Speaker 3 00:05:50 Right, exactly.

Speaker 2 00:05:52 And how, how long ago was that?

Speaker 3 00:05:54 That was about six, seven months ago, I'd say.

Speaker 2 00:05:58 Oh wow. Nice. So you're maybe finding your feet in the calling for the most part.

Speaker 3 00:06:02 Correct. Yeah. Cool.

Speaker 2 00:06:04 And we have to give a shout out to Kent Hendricks, who was the person who originally recommended your name. And so he, he's not in your stake presidency, but used to be, is that right? Used

Speaker 3 00:06:14 To used to be, correct.

Speaker 2 00:06:15 Okay. So how, how did you come become on his radar? Any ideas?

Speaker 3 00:06:18 Um, you, somebody I've talked to over the years, um, you know, no, um, good acquaintance. He's a good guy. So he, he's also an accountant, so gotta stick together. Right. <laugh>,

Speaker 2 00:06:30 I can imagine you're conversations are just full of energy and, uh, you know, spreadsheets. So Yeah. I love the love, love me a good cpa. So, um, alright, so just starting into this calling as the Sunday School President, when you first got called sustained set apart, I mean, where do you begin?

Speaker 3 00:06:47 Well, you know, it's interesting that a lot of it, the success I think is I picked really awesome counselors to work with me. One, one guy had really good teacher for forever, um, a lot of teaching calling, so he was just well versed in teaching. Another one, there was a stake that was dissolved and our award absorbed there, so he was released as a stake

patriarch. So he's an awesome guy. So just having them with me, um, allowed us to do really cool things. 'cause you just had a, a wealth of experience and awesome people. So just made it easier to do what we were wanted to do.

Speaker 2 00:07:24 Yeah. And so you got some great counselors in place and you, you had your, your, uh, your team ready to go?

Speaker 3 00:07:31 Yeah. And then like we, we met initially and we kind of tried to dream up some big things. 'cause you know, from my perspective in, I don't know about most words, but every ward I've ever been, it was almost like the Sunday school president was like, this kush calling. You didn't really do anything much <laugh> and

Speaker 2 00:07:49 Ring the bell. Right? Yeah.

Speaker 3 00:07:51 That was kind of it. You know, your ze bell. Yeah. You know, and it just, it just, there wasn't much. So, but I, I wanted to, I wanted to create an environment where we affected change in, in the lives of board members, and we just did more than that. Um, and so that was kind of a lot of, you know, us, we, we met together and we just tried to dream up some big things. You know, there, there has been an emphasis from the church on doing types of councils. And so we wanted to just take that concept of teacher councils, but expand it and do it more if, and, and so what we kind of dreamed up, we, we dreamed it up on a lot of sides, but, you know, not just meeting with teachers, but also trying to identify specific groups that could use help in certain ways.

Speaker 3 00:08:36 So for example, you, you meet with the young men's presidencies and, and, and advisors, you know, you talk with them about what are your needs, what are your concerns? And, and you, you work with them or, or young women's or primary teachers that, that was a fun one. We, we had like the junior primary teachers and they were excited. Like, oh, cool, somebody's paying attention to us, you know, wants to hear what we have to say. So, um, you just, by, it takes more time and effort, but by trying to do it in more bite-sized pieces, um, the discussion was more relevant and more powerful in, in that way, if that makes sense. Yeah,

Speaker 2 00:09:16 Yeah. And I would imagine, because like you mentioned, the temptation to be called a Sunday school president is like, listen, I mean, let's get ourselves a good group of teachers or Sunday school and use Sunday school or whatever, and make sure that show someone's showing up every other Sunday and that we'll call it a day. Right? Mm-Hmm. The gospels being taught, what more do we need to do? But I, and I appreciate that you sort of identify with being this change maker or having influence of positive change Mm-Hmm. Not that it's, it's definitely needed or whatnot, but, um, was that something you've always felt empowered to do no matter what calling you're in?

Speaker 3 00:09:47 Yeah, I mean, that's just my style, you know, I don't like to, I'm not one to wanna sit on the sidelines, you know, I like to get involved a little bit more. And, you know, I feel like, you know, and I, I, the, the scripture I wrote down that really inspired a lot of this was Alma 31 5, you know, where it talked about the word of God has a more powerful effect on

people than just about anything else, than wars or whatever else could happen. And so felt like we were in a position to do that. And so it's like, use that, you know, if that's what we, you know, we have the scriptures and we have those things, let's try to use those as an influence to, to, to affect positive change in the lives of

Speaker 2 00:10:22 People. Yeah. That's cool. Was there any feeling of, uh, well, you know, before we take two ambitious of, of, uh, steps here, uh, let's make check in with the bishop, or was there's a feeling of like maybe going too radical <laugh>, you know, in your word as opposed to the direction your bishop wanted to

Speaker 3 00:10:38 Go? You know, what's interesting, and this is where I'll give a, a really cool shout out to our bishop and bishop Rick, is they were, they were a hundred percent supportive of anything we wanted to do. It's like, if you guys can dream it up, go for it. And so that was kind of the perfect storm, I guess, if you will, is we had a tremendous, I have a tremendous presidency, so we dreamed up, I remember that first meeting we got together and just dreamed up so much. And it almost seemed overwhelming. Like really, it did. Like, wow, this is big. There's a lot going on here. Um, but at no time was the bishop like, I wanna, trying to think how to describe this. He, he never, never, we never felt micromanaged. We never felt like it was just kind of like a, he won, he encourages go for what you feel good about. And over time there's been adjustments like, oh, well, maybe this didn't work as well as we thought, or whatever it is. But, but he's always been supportive of, of you. If you feel it, go for it. I'm, I'm, I'm on your side kind of thing.

Speaker 2 00:11:28 Nice. And that's so, so empowering that a leader can sort of just give that space and let you have some autonomy to run with. Right.

Speaker 3 00:11:35 It's awesome. You know, I, I think it's something I'd highly recommend for other leaders out there of just trust your people to do good and, and, and you'll be surprised. You know,

Speaker 2 00:11:43 So you, you get called, you get some solid counselors and then you all get in a room together and you're like, all right, let's, let's think, let's brainstorm type of a thing. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, is there anything you would say as far as, as if another, uh, Sunday school president was trying to have a similar presidency meeting? Like how do you stimulate that discussion and get the revelation flowing?

Speaker 3 00:12:02 I'm trying to think. I mean, I, I assume, 'cause I have two awesome counselors who probably did the same thing. I don't know for sure, but I know for me personally, I did a lot of preparation in the buildup, just a lot of prayer and, you know, I, I go into the temple and doing different things so that I could be in tune with what God wanted. 'cause I, I think for me, that's the big thing of like, you know, we've done some pretty cool, you know, what, what I feel is some pretty cool stuff, but a lot of it was just inspiration from God and in terms of how we should approach things. So just trying to be in tune with what God wanted and how he wanted us to approach whatever we were doing, you know? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:12:38 Yeah. And, and I don't mean to like dig into the details, but a lot of like people they don't know. I mean, it was just say, uh, a quick, you know, hallway meeting. Did you set apart, uh, an afternoon and go to your house and, and talk through? Like, how did you structure the meeting?

Speaker 3 00:12:53 I mean, we, we went to the church building, um, and uh, I mean, it was probably like an hour and a half, almost two hours, you know? Okay. Yeah. It, it was while my son was actually at a mutual, so Oh, cool. I took him and we, we, we, we met during that whole time and we had extra time because I think they were playing like dodgeball or something afterwards. So, you know, we had almost two hours, I think. And it's just nice. It was just trying to get those ideas flowing and nice. And if I can pause one sec, I think another way too, I can answer it similar way, but just a different way of saying it is. Sure. I think for, for me, trusting that, you know, because you, you, you know, you don't have to, 'cause somebody might say, what if I don't have a old patriarch to be a counselor? You know, you might not have that as a resource, you know, or whatever it is. You know, I think a lot of it is just realizing and trusting that God has better ideas than I do, or that any of us would uhhuh. And if we can trust in that and trust that God will give us those amazing ideas to execute them. That's k that's kind of the source of all if, if that makes sense. You know?

Speaker 2 00:13:54 That's really helpful. I think that's really helpful. 'cause I, I think we put a lot of the burden on us of being like, well, I'm not creative or, you know, I don't know what to do. And, but you know, at least just create the space, have the meeting and see what comes out of it. You know, regardless of how dynamic your counselors are or the past ideas you've had, but just lean into it.

Speaker 3 00:14:10 Mm-Hmm,

Speaker 2 00:14:10 <affirmative>.

Speaker 3 00:14:11 Yeah. Yeah. And, and, and I can say too, when we did start to implement it, we felt a, we could sense a great need of people who wanted this desire, this type of thing. 'cause it was so funny when we started talking about it, there were groups like, Hey, you know, can we do it? You know, can we do this? You know? So it's just, I think there's a, it's interesting that like, I don't know if I can't pick the right word, almost therapy or like whatever it is, of just when, when you, when you give people an opportunity to talk about what works and what doesn't in, in a setting like that, where you can facilitate those kind of conversations and help them, just good things come out of it, you know, and, and, and they can really, I, I don't know how to put it any rather than that, but just, yeah. You know, people I think have really enjoyed that opportunity to have sessions where they can meet and talk about what's important to them, what they're concerned about, you know? And, and, and we've found that, um, you know, through doing it too, where, you know, maybe it's a teacher who's like, man, this is a concern of mine will, another teacher has that concern. So, so I think people don't feel like they're so alone through callings or whatever they're doing, if that makes sense. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:15:16 So was this initial meeting sort of framed as a kickoff meeting or is this something you regularly do since then is meet for a couple hours?

Speaker 3 00:15:23 Yeah, we, we do, you know, now it's kind of like which groups we're gonna meet with, and I could go more detail on that. But yeah, that was the initial kickoff meeting where we're just like, what do we wanna do? You know, we, we had some guidelines, but it's like, what do we wanna do? How do we wanna approach this? So that's what that one was about, but then once we kind of figured out something, it's more of just executing our, our base plan, if that makes sense.

Speaker 2 00:15:45 Love it. Alright. So you, did you leave with that meeting, like with a, with a plan, like a step by step? Or was just a group of ideas, or?

Speaker 3 00:15:52 It was kind of a group ideas, and that's where things kind of grew quick, because that's where I said like, you could sense a need for this. So we were talking about it and there was one particular group that was like, yeah, we, we wanna do this. And so initially we were like, 'cause you know, we're like, Hey, we have some big plans, big dreams, so let's take a couple months and try to iron this out. But a couple groups were so excited to do it that it kind of almost forced our hands. So I think like the next month we actually went ahead and did one of these, even though we didn't feel ready, you know, just 'cause we felt such a need. It was like one of those, like, we couldn't say no, like, you know, we, we wanted to serve them and help these people even if we didn't feel like we were ready. Um, and so you, you just, we had a couple of those councils. We did, like young men's, young women's, and I think trying to remember the other groups we did, but we just did other isolate, isolated groups and, and, and we just had a very positive experience, you know, so we saw, Hey, this works, people like this, this is gonna work. And then our subsequent meetings were, Hey, what other groups do we wanna meet with? What makes sense? You know?

Speaker 2 00:16:55 Okay. So when you say groups, you're talking about like teacher council meeting groups?

Speaker 3 00:16:59 Yeah, but like outside of teachers. 'cause like I said, you know, you could do just teachers, but it's like we met with the young men's and young women's, you know, um, presidencies. Presidencies and count Yeah. Youth or, you know, and, and that's kind of our big thing is let's break it into like lowest common denominator possible to make it relevant discussion for everybody. Mm-Hmm. So you, you meet with young women's leaders, presidencies and their, their advisors, then young men's and their advisors. We met with primary, but we didn't just meet with primary. It was, okay, let's meet with junior primary teachers, isolate them, and senior primary teachers isolate them because they're gonna experience different things and they're gonna have different concerns and different things they're gonna wanna talk about as a group. So, so by breaking it out into relevant groups, then you can stimulate discussions that's gonna help them the most.

Speaker 2 00:17:49 Yeah. Now with these different groups, it just seems like, uh, I mean, that's a lot to manage as far as the schedule. Was it complicated or over overwhelming? Yeah,

Speaker 3 00:17:57 It, I mean, you, you kinda had the feel. That's why I was like, we, we jumped into it a lot faster because there was just this need. It was like, you know, I, I, I called myself a bleeding heart. I, I just couldn't say no. So we jumped into it, but, but we kind of had a, a feel for it. 'cause we have another sister who's wonderful, who she's kind of with us, you know, we call, we call, we can call her a defacto presidency person. She's, I guess not in name, but she's every bit part of the group. So what we do is we'll split the Sundays. We do what we split into two groups. So myself and one of the people will, will meet with the group and the other counselor and somebody else meets with another group. So we will do two every month.

Speaker 3 00:18:36 So you basically get four groups a month. And that, that, that helps us kind of get everybody, because you're right. If you, if you don't, we found that if we don't do that, it's hard to get to everybody. You know, you, you might get to somebody once a year. And, and, and that, that seemed to us ineffective because the power in trying to do it with, with all these small groups once a quarter is you just, you just keep on, um, making it relevant. People feel like they're, you know, they can present new ideas and it just, it, it just creates better conversation as things go forward with each of these groups.

Speaker 2 00:19:10 Yeah. So I, I would imagine for the most part, you're doing this during the second hour during church?

Speaker 3 00:19:15 That is correct. Okay.

Speaker 2 00:19:16 And maybe when you're doing like junior primary teachers, are you having to find subs for, for those people? For, for those classes?

Speaker 3 00:19:24 Yeah. So that's something we had to kind of work out with the primary president. But the day we did do it, it was like the day of the primary program. So like the kids were doing some, yeah. The kids were doing a celebratory thing. So the teachers kind of had the day off. So we figured, Hey, let's do it that day. So, you know, some, some you gotta find teachers, but some finding opportunities, you know, you, you do things like, okay, well if you're meeting with three young women, you, you, you, you meet with them on the Sunday school week, or if you're meeting with Sunday school people, you meet with them on the Priesthood Relief Society week. So you just try to try to frame it and, and, and schedule it such that everybody gets their opportunity. Mm-Hmm.

Speaker 2 00:20:01 <affirmative>. Gotcha. And, uh, and so, and as you approach these, these council meetings, like for example, when you meet with all the young, the young men's presidencies and whatnot, you're basically walking in there saying, all right, let's council together. How can we improve teaching in, in all the youth classes? Is that the idea?

Speaker 3 00:20:18 That's exactly right. You know, you, you just, so, so we become facilitators is what we're trying to become and facilitators and offering things. Often a Bishop Rick member, you know, will show up just, just to participate. Well, that's really cool. So yeah, you're just, you're just trying to facilitate and stimulate those ideas. And we try to keep a running list of, 'cause you can't get to everything in that hour session. So you try to keep a running list

and then next time we say, well, we talked about this, we've got these other seven things that you talked about being concerned about. What do you wanna talk about this time? And, and you just try to build off of it, you know, so to speak. You

Speaker 2 00:20:52 Know? Yeah. Yeah. I think that's, like, that alone is so intriguing because I think generally, you know, you hear this cons, the idea of the teacher council meetings and you know, you, you do, I forget exactly if the handbook says something, you know, how often, but nonetheless, you sort of, you do your best to get all the teachers there. You know, I've heard of some that, you know, every once in a while they'll find those substitutes for primary, make sure they're in there with the Sunday school pres or with the Sunday school teachers and the youth teachers. Right. And we sort of have this big council meeting, but there's power in like focusing on the niches right. Within the ward. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and just saying like, we're only talking about junior primary, like what's working, what's not, what can we counsel together to discover about teaching really young kids?

Speaker 3 00:21:33 Yeah. Well, and I could tell you that the cool thing is, is some of the Bishop Rick people that have floated around to different ones they've talked about that they're like, it's so crazy because everyone is spiritually impactful, but everyone is so unique. And that's the cool part about it, is that, and what we've learned and why, because like I said, it takes more effort to do what we're doing. But when you make it that lowest common denominator, like you're talking about, it's, it becomes so relevant that it become the discussion's wonderful at

Speaker 2 00:22:02 That point. Yeah, yeah. So, so applicable and so helpful for those, those teachers who are in the room. 'cause if you're in the room with, uh, Sunday school teachers of adults, you're not gonna talk about how do you handle behavior problems in the room? 'cause that's probably not a big issue for the adult teachers, you know? That's cool.

Speaker 3 00:22:16 Yeah. And another thing I, I actually wanna talk about, 'cause we, we flipped this all in its head. 'cause I mean, that's one aspect, you know, your teacher councils. But we flipped this idea in our head because what we did is we did we call, we're calling them learner councils. So what we did is we tried to go the other side of it. Okay, well what do people experience? 'cause I mean, that's a lot of it in the church. Everybody has their challenges, everybody has their concerns. So for example, one week we started doing this where you did parents of junior primary kids, parents of senior primary kids. And we met with them and, and, and the discussion was in, instead of how you're teaching, it was, tell us what worries you. You know, so for example, parents of junior primary kids, a lot of 'em talked about, oh, you know, I don't know what to do with attention span issues.

Speaker 3 00:23:02 You know, that's, that's a big one. Or other things that they could talk about. And we addressed those, you know, or then we also did parents of young teenagers and parents of older teenagers and, and met with those parents and, and heard their concerns. And, and, and that, that was a really powerful thing because it just brought in different discussions. So like one of the parent teenager groups, it was really cool 'cause some of the parents were like, you know, they, they would share insecurities of like, I don't know if I know how to, I'm confident of how I'm studying the gospel, so I don't know how to do that with my kids. And other

families would say, oh yeah, you know, we feel that way, but these are some things we tried. And it just became, you know, it was cool because what we found is that all parents experienced the same concerns and challenges, but sometimes they felt like they were the only ones. And when you put 'em in a room and they all realize, hey, we experienced the same stuff. It, it was really, it built them all up and then they could give each other ideas and build each other up on, Hey, try this, or we do this and this could work. Or, you know, whatever it was. And so those, those were equally as awesome, you know, getting parents in and talking about their needs as well.

Speaker 2 00:24:12 Yeah. Yeah. <laugh>, that's such a powerful concept. Uh, I think generally like the first step is sort of recognizing or, or dismissing the assumption that like, come follow me is going really well. Uh, yeah. 'cause for a lot of people it's not, uh, I, I, uh, talked with a stake Sunday school president just in, you know, offline, uh, last week. And he talked about taking this vulnerable moment, meeting with his counselors about him sharing that come follow me was really difficult in his, in his home with young kids and some mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, you know, budding, uh, teenagers and whatnot. And then one by one his counselors sort of said, yeah, it's not going well in my home either. And so, so just to get that out there, that now we have something to talk about that, that too often in Sunday school, there's this feeling of like, well, I'm the only one in the room that didn't spend a half hour every day, like diving into the book of Revelation, you know, <laugh>. Yeah. When, when, that's not the reality of it. We're all struggling. It's difficult and it's beautiful on paper and we should lean in and, and try and leverage as much as we can in our home, but let's get rid of the idea that it's going well for most people.

Speaker 3 00:25:14 And you have to kind of build into it. You know, like sometimes you start small, I know with my wife and I, we started small years ago where you did a little bit, but then you build on that and you get excited and you do a little bit more where you have to help people start somewhere and encourage them in that, you know? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:25:29 So I'm intrigued by this coun the council of Learners, is that what you call

Speaker 3 00:25:32 It? Yeah, that's what we call it. Learner councils Learn councils. We had to come up with something. We, we were like parent councils, but you wanna be inclusive of everybody. So we, we just started calling 'em learner Councils.

Speaker 2 00:25:41 Nice. And are you focusing on a certain type of demographic like the other ones or

Speaker 3 00:25:45 Same thing, you know, we, we, you know, you, you try to build from there. So we've talked about, hey, maybe you do an empty nester one, talk about what, what, you know, because their, their, their concerns and their challenges of studying the gospel are gonna be different than a parent of a 12-year-old. You know, it's just, that's a fact. And so you, you know, we, we've tried to come up with different cross sections of groups. So what about single adults? You know, what do they experience? You know, do you, do you help them in

different ways? And so, yes, you do try to break that out into, to a lowest common denominator that makes sense. You know? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:26:18 I love that idea, that approach of like, it's so easy to think, well, if we can just get the teachers doing their thing right then mm-Hmm. <affirmative> it, it'll be a great class. But often, you know, the teachers do their best. And I show the clips. I, I juggle at one point, you know, I, I tap dance at another point, but I just can't get, get the class engaging because oftentimes it's not that the teacher doesn't know how to teach, but the learner doesn't necessarily know how to learn in that setting or engage or talk or participate.

Speaker 3 00:26:44 Exactly. So the whole idea is we're working both sides. So you effect change by helping teachers, but you also help the learners and then the whole ward benefits through that process. Exactly. That's what we're thinking.

Speaker 2 00:26:55 Now, do you do a hybrid of like some, you have the young men's teachers in there along with some, some young men learners? Or do you have do those separately?

Speaker 3 00:27:04 So we do it all separately. Okay. Just try to keep different groups so that if, if, 'cause this is, this is kind of an offshoot, but the whole idea of what we try to create is, we call it safe Conversation partners. Hmm. So the whole idea is you just try to make it safe. So if anybody wants to bring up any doubt, any concern, it's, it's safe. So where this came from, and I'll, I'll explain the whole doctrinal thing behind this, but what inspired is we were, look, I was looking at, um, um, the whole restoration thing. You know, it started with James one five, but everybody kind of always frames it as it starts with a question, you know, which, which I think is kind of almost too simplistic of a view. I think really it started, 'cause you read what Joseph Smith said is he read that and he's like, wow, if that's, that's who God is, I might venture, he says in his account. So really with us, we realized that it started with the restoration started with a reassurance that a question could be answered. And so what we try to do is you try to create an environment in all of those is that people can ask anything that there's no, there's no stupid questions, if that makes sense, <laugh>. Sure. And you create that environment and, and that's where the power comes. I, I know that was long-winded, but hopefully that makes sense.

Speaker 2 00:28:13 Does that's phenomenal principle. I love it. So how do you go about gathering, uh, uh, the learner councils? How do you pick the people to be in that room?

Speaker 3 00:28:22 Um, we just do 'em. 'cause you get the lowest common denominator groups. And if everybody in that group showed up, then it's not too many people. So we get parents of, for example, 12, 12 and thir parents of 12 and 13 year olds, and then parents of 14 to 18 year olds. We kind of looked at the demographics, how many people are in there? And we're like, well, if everybody comes in this group, is it too much? Well, if it's too much, then you need to split it further down. So that's kind of what we did is, okay, well what's a group? That makes sense. Okay, well if that's 15 people, then maybe that makes sense. It's like usually 10 to 15 is our target. Um, and, and, and that's worked really well.

Speaker 2 00:28:57 And do you text all of them with an invite? Do you

Speaker 3 00:28:59 Call? No, we, we, we, um, counselors have helped with, we'll, we'll, we'll create a flyer and we'll just hand it out on Sundays and, and they'll announce it, um, as part of Sacra meeting. Like, Hey, this is coming up, these are the dates. So if you're in this group, we want you to show up here in this room and, and we're gonna have a great conversation. And the response has been tremendous. You know, we do that with both the learner councils and the teacher councils. We just make sure everybody knows about it and, and that people show up.

Speaker 2 00:29:25 Yeah, I bet people really walk into there with so some positive energy. Like, this is cool. Like, I, I'd love to have this discussion. Right.

Speaker 3 00:29:31 Yeah. So it's almost like we try to hype it up, you know, I, I know it sounds weird, but you just hype it up as this is the coolest thing. And people, you're right. They get excited, you know? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:29:40 Even a CPA can do some hype. Huh? This is great. Yeah, it's great.
<laugh>

Speaker 3 00:29:44 <laugh>. Nice.

Speaker 2 00:29:45 So, um, I, I, I think we've danced over your, your principles here, but let's just go through and make sure we didn't miss anything. The first one is finding ways to engage with the members of the ward through the scriptures. Expand on that.

Speaker 3 00:29:55 So that one, we, we actually will, in addition to all that, we do a weekly email. Well, there is a weekly email that exists. And as part of that, we put in, okay, let's, let's pick a scripture from the, come follow me and let's talk about it. Do a paragraph and say, Hey, this is what this principle is here and how you can apply it to our life. Because what, what we're trying to do is just get people excited about it. You know, if that's the only thing you know, they're reading and getting excited about in a given week, well maybe they can build on that. So you're just trying to get people excited about what's there. So either learn something new or maybe if they get excited, they read a little bit more. So you try to engage with people that way through a weekly, our weekly ward email just to, to put something out there.

Speaker 2 00:30:36 Yeah. And, and so this is a word email that your Bishoprick sends out every

Speaker 3 00:30:40 Week. Um, it's, it's, uh, some, not a BISHOPRICK member, but somebody, it's their calling to do a weekly email. And so as part of that, we asked permission and, and got approval to just, we send him, Hey, this is our message for the week, and they send it out.

Speaker 2 00:30:55 Nice. Maybe just gimme a quick review of like, what are some other things that are in that, that weekly email?

Speaker 3 00:31:00 Um, just different announcements, activities, um, what's going on in the ward. So it's just kind of a, yeah, a a a number like's a bulletin, right? Yeah. It's basically a bulletin, you know, that's exactly it, but we just do it electronically and email rather than handing it out on Sundays. Um, and so our, usually the last one is, is our message, but, um, people have tended to enjoy it.

Speaker 2 00:31:20 Yeah. Yeah. That's, that's powerful. Love that. Any, anything else as far as getting the ward or what is engaging with the ward members through the scriptures?

Speaker 3 00:31:27 That's kind of it, you know, outside of the, the learner councils and the teacher councils, that was kind of the other thing we've tried to do. Nice.

Speaker 2 00:31:34 So, love it. Uh, second one, finding groups of council discussions where meaningful and relevant discussions can happen. You touched on that a little bit. Anything we've missed?

Speaker 3 00:31:42 No, I don't, I don't think so. It's just, yeah. Trying to find those lowest common denominator groups Yeah. For effective discussion.

Speaker 2 00:31:48 Love it. And I, and I love just the one, like the empty nesters, like that, that's a demographic that we know is there, but we sometimes don't Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, label them as as a thing or, you know, maybe the widows or the widowers or whatever it is. Right?

Speaker 3 00:32:00 Yeah. And so you could see, you could make this a huge thing. I mean, I could get like probably a couple other people along with me in the calling. I mean, you could make this as big as you want, so, yeah.

Speaker 2 00:32:08 Awesome. The third principle is creating an environment of safe conversation partners. You touched on this already. Just, and really that, that safety, that's a powerful thing to be able to do as a teacher. And so if you can model that as a Sunday school president, uh, you know, Sunday school presidency, that that's, uh, you're, you're really helping a lot.

Speaker 3 00:32:25 That's, that's what we try to do, so. Cool.

Speaker 2 00:32:27 Awesome. Um, any other like nuance electronic tool thing you do? Uh, it probably seems normal to you, but for the rest of us,

Speaker 3 00:32:36 Um, the only thing I could think of is one of our counselor kind of started a, a Google Doc thing, so it hasn't taken off yet, but he tried to implement this Google Doc thing of like, okay, here's your group's Google Doc, you know, everybody who is in this group, we've invited you to it. So if they wanted to try to engage in between the sessions, like, oh yeah, I was doing this thing with my kids and it really worked, or this is something I'm doing with my scripture study and it's working, then maybe they can put it on there and other people can leverage that kind of an engage in between. It hasn't taken off yet. So maybe that, that is, um,

not as a successful at a, as an idea as we hoped, but that's something we've talked about and tried.

Speaker 2 00:33:15 Yeah. So I would be put in a group of maybe five people in the ward and we would just, if if the come follow me about the first few chapters of Revelation, then we

Speaker 3 00:33:25 Need, they could put in whatever they want. Yeah, exactly. You could do something like that. You could make it any which way you wanted.

Speaker 2 00:33:30 Yeah. Whether it's a thought I had or maybe, Hey, I found this conference talk, you should listen to it. That connects to that, that block of scripture. Right. Yeah. No, I like that. So you're almost having that, I mean, Sunday school class is sort of going on throughout the week, and then by the time you get to Sunday school class, you've already somewhat have a, had a discussion with a handful of other people.

Speaker 3 00:33:48 Yeah, no, again, that hasn't taken off, but, and maybe in other settings or maybe it will take off, I don't know.

Speaker 2 00:33:53 Yeah, yeah. And you get that, that's one of those things of like on paper, great idea. Maybe the execution isn't like lining up, but it's worth trying. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and, and maybe for, you know, 20 people in the ward, it's a really big blessing. And other people are like, yeah, I just don't engage that way. Right. And that's okay.

Speaker 3 00:34:08 Exactly. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:34:09 Awesome. Cool. Uh, so let me just, uh, understand like the dynamics of, of your ward. Like how many you have. Uh, one, two adult Sunday school classes going on at the time.

Speaker 3 00:34:22 We have two adult Sunday school classes. We became a bigger ward. 'cause when they, they had three stakes and they took from those three stakes and made two. So ours, they just took two wards and combined them together. So previously the ward I was in was pretty small, and the other ward that combined with us was small. But together it's become a pretty big ward. Probably the biggest ward that I've ever been a part of. Um, so there is a lot of resources. That's where you have two adult classes and quite a bit of people. So I think that might be part of why it makes us work. We do have the resources to, you know, dedicate it, you know, to a Sunday school presidency and extra resources there.

Speaker 2 00:34:56 Nice. Very good. And then you got your use, use Sunday school and, but really you've, which I, you know, it's hard to say these days to quote that handbook offhand because it seems like it changes or updates in the middle of the night. We don't expect it. But I mean, you're the Sunday school president in charge of all teaching in the war. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> not just the Sunday School Hour on every other Sunday. Right. So, correct. And that's, this is a great model of what you've done is you're, you're mindful of what's happening in Young Men's in, in Elders Quorum, and you know that you're engaging with those teachers in a way that will really help them and you're covering all the teaching in the work.

Speaker 3 00:35:32 Yeah. And that's kind of the idea. You, you help people know that they're, you know, they're noticed, you know, power in noticing people, you know, Hey, I'm there. And if, if they need something, they know where they can get help always. Yeah. You know?

Speaker 2 00:35:43 So any fresh inspiration that's come of ideas or approaches that you're, you haven't tried yet, but you're maybe gonna experiment with?

Speaker 3 00:35:50 Not so far. I mean, we're relatively in our infancy and we have a lot on our plate as you can probably tell. Yeah. Um, maybe, you know, but so far nothing outside of what we, what I've shared today.

Speaker 2 00:36:01 Yeah. No, this is just such a great example. You know, Sunday school presidency calling at times can feel like, oh, I don't really know what I do. You know, make sure that, you know, like I mentioned earlier, that everything's, you know, the teacher show up and we're good there. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But this really engages you and yeah, it makes you a little bit busier and, and there's a lot more to keep track of, but you're, I, I sense you go home after Sunday or with really feeling like you're contributing to the ward and the teaching that's happening.

Speaker 3 00:36:26 Yeah. And like I said at the beginning, that was what I wanted. Yeah. I wanted that feeling for all of us, you know, to, to have that feeling like you're helping people. You're, you're affecting positive change and that's what you wanna do. You know, that's what church is about.

Speaker 2 00:36:38 Love it. Well, Russell, any other concepts principle that we've missed or we, we covered all?

Speaker 3 00:36:44 No, thank you for your time. Like I said, this is a story we want to share and we want, if people can implement this, this, they'll have a great time. Just like we're having a great time. So we want this story to be shared.

Speaker 2 00:36:53 Alright. Well shout out to the Olympic View Ward in, uh, Lynn Lin Wood, Washington <laugh>. I'll get, I'll get it right sometime. Um, well, Russell, last question I have for you. As you reflect on your time as a leader, as a Sunday school president and other leadership you've, uh, roles that you've had in the church, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 3 00:37:13 It just, you know, when you get in there and you do stuff like this and you really care about people, it just shows you how much it reminds you of how much God and Jesus care about me. And so it just helps me to follow them because you just, you, you just reminded all the time of what, what they've done for you and, and that it's worth following that.

Speaker 1 00:37:41 And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it. And, uh, I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email, on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense, and share it with somebody who could relate to this, this experience. And this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other

guy's doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area. And, uh, that's, that's where great leadership's discovered, right? So we would love to have you, uh, share this with, uh, somebody in this calling or a related calling and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, uh, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, uh, reach out to us. Go to leadingscenes.org/contact. Maybe send this in individual an email letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We will reach out to them and, uh, see if we can line 'em up. So again, go to leading saints.org/contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know, and maybe they will be on a feature How I lead Segment on the Leading Saints podcast. Remember up your teaching game by listening to the David Farnsworth presentation by visiting leading saints.org/fourteen.

Speaker 4 00:38:59 It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of Heaven, who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the Declaration was made concerning the own and only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.