

Elmore's GOALS and Widjaya's R Approach to Christian Leadership Relevant for Mentoring the Strawberry Generation

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ABSTRACT

In an era of rapid change, the Church faces significant challenges to remain relevant in accompanying Generation Z, often referred to as the "Strawberry Generation" a creative yet pressure-sensitive generation. This study aims to examine how relevant Christian leadership can address the spiritual needs of Gen Z through an authentic, relational, and contextual mentoring approach. Using a descriptive qualitative method based on literature review, this research analyzes generational characteristics, patterns of worship engagement among Gen Z, and shifts in spiritual values both in Indonesia and globally. The findings reveal that while Generation Z continues to long for a relationship with God and meaningful community, they require a new approach that is more relevant, personal, and rooted in love. This approach emphasizes the importance of living example, providing space for expression, empathetic communication, and the ability to connect Biblical teachings with the realities of Gen Z's modern life. By applying these principles, Christian leaders can shape a young generation that is strong in faith, resilient, and capable of being impactful witnesses for Christ in a constantly changing world.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid change, the Church is faced with the great challenge of remaining relevant in accompanying the younger generation, especially **Generation Z**. **Generation Z** is a group born around **1997 to 2012**. They grew up in the era of the internet, social media, and globalization. Gen Z's worship involvement in several Western countries tends to decrease compared to previous generations. In the United States, for example, a Barna survey showed only 22% of Gen Z attended weekly services in 2020, and that figure slumped to 16% in 2023. In contrast, the portion of Gen Z who have never been to church rose from 28% (2020) to 37% (2023). Historically, about 59% of U.S. Christian youth ages 18–29 have stopped coming to church regularly after previously being active. However, on a global level there is still a spiritual "openness" where 60% of the world's youth are interested in learning more about Jesus, and 52% of global youth aged 13–17 identify as Christians. However, only 30% of Gen Z teens in the U.S. (13–17 years old) regularly worship each week, and this percentage drops to ~20% among young adult Gen Z. This indicates a decline in engagement after school graduation, in line with the trend of younger generations being less attached to formal religion.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, BPS data shows that in 2024, the Gen Z population in Indonesia will reach around 74.93 million people or 27.94% of the total population. The data shows a much higher participation in worship among Christian youth. A 2018 survey by the Research Center (BRC) on 4,095 young generations of Christians (ages 15–25) found that 91.8% of Indonesian Christian adolescents still regularly worship (at least 2–3 times a month), both in public worship and youth worship. Although this figure is high, the BRC notes a downward trend with age: at the age of 15–18 years, 7.7% do not regularly worship; rising to 10.2% at ages 19–22; and 13.7% at 23–25 years old. This means that the closer you get to young adulthood, the more people start to go to church less. The BRC also identified the motivational factors of those who were still diligent in worship, only 33.3% came because **they loved Jesus**, and 19.4% because they needed "spiritual food" and wanted to worship God. On the other hand, 29.0% admitted to attending because of mere habits or obligations. This means that some young people see worship as a social routine, so they are vulnerable to quitting when the habit stops. The BRC estimates that 1 in 3 Christian teenagers who were once routine may no longer go to church regularly, especially those whose motivation is just duty.

Based on the age range, Gen Z is currently in the *youth* community and young professionals. There is a phenomenon where the majority of them like to gather just to eat together and *hang* out at cafes. No matter how busy they are, they will try to get together. As for worship, *the effort* or effort to gather is less than just eating or *hanging* out. The background of *hanging* out for Gen Z varies between individuals, including establishing friendships, looking for inspiration, experience, productivity and recreational facilities. Gen Z remains within the scope of the Church community, but is not really militant. Many Gen Z feel that the church does not answer their life's questions or struggles in a real way, is

rigid and not open to dialogue, and does not present a close, open and exemplary leader figure.

Gen Z tends to judge faith by how *authentic* and *useful* it is in daily life. They are critical of hypocrisy (remember 11.2% left the church because they felt a lot of pretense) and did not hesitate to abandon a formal religious identity if it was perceived as contrary to personal values. However, many also hold the core values of faith (love, honesty, justice) even though they are not always bound by ritual. In one interview, a young man said he still believed in God and Christian moral principles, but he sorted out which teachings "didn't fit" with his views and left them out. It challenges the church to explain doctrine in a relevant and loving way. In essence, faith for Gen Z should be felt to be functionally important, not just normative. If they feel faith helps with stress, gives them a purpose in life, and a welcoming community, they will find it important. Global data shows a glimmer of hope: "*our young people are open and curious about spirituality – the rumours that this generation is anti-religious are exaggerated*", says David Kinnaman (CEO of Barna). With the right mentoring, Generation Z has the potential to become a generation that finds deep meaning in faith and applies it in creative new ways.

These data give an idea that even though the challenges of modern times are different, Gen Z's basic longing for a relationship with God, meaningful community, and relevant faith is still there – it's just a matter of how the church and all of us embrace them in that journey of faith growth. In this context, relevant and contextual Christian leadership becomes essential in meeting their needs, particularly through an in-depth and relational mentoring process. Effective mentoring requires relevant, relational, and authentic Christian leadership.

Previous research on *the strawberry* generation linked to Christian leadership has focused on how the presence of church leaders can embrace and maximize the potential of Gen Z. Research by Lafau, Waruw and Siahaan highlights Christian leadership in guiding Generation Z and Alpha in today's digital age. Meanwhile, this research focuses on how Christian leadership is relevant for mentoring Generation Z or Generation which is often labeled as *the strawberry generation*.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, namely a literature or literature study that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words or from the form of policy actions. This research is an exploratory research that focuses on extracting data from the literature, relevant Christian leadership theories and analysis of leadership practices in the scope of churches in Indonesia and the world globally. In addition, this research is library *research*, which is the collection of data from various books, journal articles, and other relevant literature.

Data analysis was carried out with a thematic approach to the collected data. Identify key themes gleaned from the literature on Christian leadership, mentoring and Generation Z or the strawberry generation. The stages of data

analysis include reading, grouping and summarizing data according to the necessary themes. The results of the analysis were then compared with Christian leadership theories and the characteristics of Gen Z or the strawberry generation to ascertain the relevance and validity of the findings. The data analysis aims to produce comprehensive conclusions so that the recommendations can be used as practical guidelines for church leaders in encouraging the growth of the faith of the majority of Gen Z or the current generation of strawberries.

METHODOLOGY

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A generation is an aggregation of a group of people who have similar historical and cultural experiences and are shaped by those experiences. Usually in a span of about 15-20 years who have the same historical, cultural, social and economic experience so that characteristics of values, attitudes and behaviors are formed that are distinctive compared to other generations. The change of generations will reflect social changes over time and create *a generation gap*. *Generation gap* is the difference in attitudes, values, lifestyles, and views between one generation and another, especially between parents and children, or between older and younger generations in society. For example, older generations may value physical hard work and long-term loyalty more, while younger generations (like Gen Z) value flexibility, innovation, and technological speed more. This often results in misunderstandings, value conflicts, and differences in priorities in the family, education, the world of work, and the church. The types and characteristics of generation are given in the table below.

Table 1. Types of Generations and Their Characteristics

Generation	Year of Birth (Approximate)	General Characteristics
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	Focus on hard work, stability, high loyalty, highly value hierarchy
Generation X	1965–1980	Adaptive, independent, skeptical of authority, work-life balance
Generation Y (Millennials)	1981–1996	Tech-savvy, love collaboration, find meaning in work, appreciate work-life balance
Generation Z	1997–2012	True digital native, tolerant, open to change, respectful of diversity, caring about mental health
Generation Alpha	2013–present	The most tech-savvy generation since birth, highly exposed to AI, gadgets, and digital-based education

Disagreements about generational stereotypes are very likely to occur in the world of work, politics, and even in the Church environment, especially against Gen Z. Gen Z has only entered the professional world in recent years. This generation is often labeled as a group that lacks discipline and relies too much on technology. However, the data shows that Gen Z has a high level of *openness to experience*, reflecting their readiness to innovate, as well as an increasing level of *conscientiousness* along with higher levels of education.

Christian leaders need to understand this *generation gap* by recognizing the characteristics of each generation that will help understand across generations and strengthen relationships in the family, work and church. Open communication, empathy and value adaptation without sacrificing core principles are important in Christian leadership, especially when there is a *generational gap* between the leader and the person being led.

Christian leadership

Leadership in general can be seen in three levels, namely leadership that only makes an impression, gives influence and leadership that makes an impact. This leadership that only gives the impression is done in little or no relationship at all. In this case, it only takes the will of the leaders involved. Leadership that influences its followers is carried out with a fairly close relationship between the two parties. This requires the willingness of the leaders and followers involved. Meanwhile, the level of leadership that has an impact is carried out through close relationships. This requires the will of the leaders and followers involved. Leadership that just gives an impression can be done in a mass context, leadership that gives influence requires greater relationships and commitment, while leadership that makes an impact can only happen if there is a close agreement that is agreed and carried out by both parties. In this case, mentoring is needed for leadership to have an impact on its followers.

Leadership is the ability to influence, direct, and coordinate individuals or groups to achieve a common goal. According to Bass and Stogdill, leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group of people to achieve a goal. John C. Maxwell in Widjaja explains that leading means helping others become what God intended for them. From these definitions, it is explained that leadership always involves influence, direction, goals, and cooperation. Leadership is also not only a matter of position, but the ability to move others.

Mentoring

Mentoring directly or indirectly carries out the leadership function itself. Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton in Tim Elmore's book *Mentoring* define mentoring as a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources. The process of mentoring and mentoring in mentoring is carried out by someone who is more experienced (called a mentor) to someone who is younger or still in the process of learning and developing (called a mentee). The goal is to help mentees reach their best potential in various aspects of life, such as career, education, spirituality, or personal development.

Mentoring has been going on since the days of the prophets from Eli to Samuel, Elijah to Elisha and leaders in Old Testament times from Moses to Joshua, as well as leaders in the New Testament from Barnabas to Paul and from Paul to Timothy. In human history, mentoring has been a key means of passing on knowledge and skills in every field, from Greek philosophers to sailors and in every culture.

Paul in 1 Timothy 2:2 wrote to his mentee, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust it to trustworthy men, who are also able to teach." Paul and Barnabas provide a number of specific ways for mentors to help their mentees, including the ability to see potential, tolerance for mistakes, shortcomings, and rudeness to see them grow, flexibility in responding to people and circumstances, patience for the time and experience needed to grow, perspective seeing the mentee's vision and abilities, gifts and the ability to build and encourage others to grow and develop. words of advice and timely insights, as well as other supportive resources.

Paul Stanley in Elmore explains that mentoring is an empowering experience that requires a relationship between two people (mentor and mentee). Factors that affect the relationship are time, proximity, needs, common values and goals. The drivers for an effective mentoring relationship include interest, responsiveness, and accountability. Attraction is the starting point for the start of a relationship. Responsiveness is a very important attitude for the mentee in the willingness and readiness to learn from the mentor, on the other hand, there is an attitude of attention from the mentor to the mentee. Mutual accountability is also required between the mentor and mentee which guarantees good progress and endings.

Some of the personality qualities that a mentor must have, according to Elmore, include having a commitment and developing the right qualities of self. Commitment to the human person who becomes a mentee, commitment to be

willing to process and commitment to goals. Meanwhile, the qualities that must be continuously developed by a mentor are *initiative, intimacy, influence, integrity, identity, and inner character*. The characteristics of a mentor are closely related to the leadership characteristics that a mentor must have.

Clinton and Stanley in their book *Connecting* provide 7 (seven) types of mentors that are often present in our lives, namely the disciple (helping with the basics of the Word to follow Christ), spiritual guides (accountability, direction towards maturity), coaches (motivation, skills needed to perform tasks or face challenges), counselors (timely advice, perspective on oneself, others, etc.). service), teacher (knowledge, understanding of a particular subject), sponsor (career guidance, protection, networking with people contacted), and role model (real personal examples for life, ministry and career).

Elmore explained the elements of the criteria for potential mentors, which are abbreviated as GOALS, namely *goodliness, objectivity, authenticity, loyalty, and servanthood*. These five elements of mentor criteria are a very big foundation for producing healthy relationships, in addition to some other qualities that a mentor may have.

Strawberry Generation

The term strawberry generation refers to the younger generation – typically born between the late 1990s and 2010s – who are considered soft on the outside, fragile on the inside, like strawberries. They are often perceived as creative, full of ideas, and *technologically literate* but are also considered irritable, stressed, and less resistant to pressure than previous generations.

The term first became popular in Taiwan to describe young people who look attractive and talented, but are considered less capable of facing tough challenges in the real world – for example, the challenges of hard work, criticism, or the difficulties of life. Of course, this is a stereotype – many young people from the "strawberry generation" are also very resilient and innovative, it's just that their work style and way of dealing with their problems are different from previous generations.

Gen Z is currently between the ages of 8-27 and has great potential to drive the economy through digital technology. They are also important in political participation because their number on the voter list is quite dominant. The characteristics of Gen Z include *true digital natives*, critical and selective consumers, committed social activists, high interest in entrepreneurship, active, creative and innovative social media users. Gen Z is an independent, critical, and eager person to be heard, hungry for meaning, authenticity and real connection. However, this generation has higher mental challenges, stress and anxiety than previous generations. Challenges for Gen Z include unemployment, lack of job opportunities, and fierce competition.

In their social life, the Strawberry Generation is very active on social media: Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and other platforms where they build their own identity and community, Think global: Connect with international cultures, trends, and issues faster than previous generations, care

about social issues: For example, environmental issues, social justice, mental health, and human rights, looking for a supportive community. They need a friendship environment that is accepting, supportive, and free from *toxic behavior*, and sensitive to differences. They are more open to diversity, but are also more easily offended if they feel that there is injustice or discrimination.

Christian Leadership Strategies in Mentoring Gen Z

Quoting the statement of Handi Irawan (Chairman of BRC) in the seminar "Expression of Gen Z Spirituality" The church, parents, and coaches in Indonesia are encouraged to become mentors or "spiritual brothers" for Gen Z, this generation must have a spiritual mentor as a guide for spiritual growth. With personal mentoring, Gen Z's faith struggles (who are often confronted with secular culture and individualism) can be addressed. Many churches have run *mentorship* programs or small group mentoring (e.g., prayer groups, youth committees). Intergenerational engagement is also important: Gen Z tends to be open to the advice of adults who are willing to listen. Barna's global survey confirms teens still put their trust in family (60%) and church leaders (52%) as sources of spiritual guidance after the Bible. So, a close-knit and caring church community plays a big role in maintaining the growth of Gen Z's faith.

A close-knit and caring community is a typical form of mentoring. Leadership in the family and church is the key to success for Gen Z, which is synonymous with the term Strawberry Generation . Especially when it comes to Christian leadership in the church, how effective leadership strategies can be embraced by Gen Z is very important to know.

Seno Widjaja in his book *You are a Leader* explains how the lifestyle of a leader, namely being responsible for oneself and doing one's best, remembering our era or time period, managing life well, having a vision, living in obedience, self-reflection and always asking for God's guidance. A leader must know the specificity of the time period of the people he leads. Times are always changing with the characteristics of generations according to the times. In responding to these changes, Rhenald Kasali in his book *Strawberry Generation* explained the opinion of behavioral expert Carol Dweck that there are two types of *mindsets* in responding to change, namely a *growth mindset* that is ready to change and a *fix mindset* that feels finished.

Christian leaders need to have a *growth mindset* that is quick to adapt, accept new things that can be applied relevant according to the needs of the generation, but remain firmly rooted in the purity of God's Word itself. Develop thinking intelligence and train yourself to be open to inputs and criticism. The Church can maximize the strength of Gen Z for the fulfillment of God's plan for each individual and the church as an organization and embodiment of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Through mentoring, it is hoped that Gen Z will become a person who grows and is resistant to tests, able to find a way out, adaptive to change but still firmly rooted in the basics of the truth of God's Word.

Facing the Strawberry generation cannot be managed in the old ways. Building their mentality and making them a resilient person is the key to success. Build awareness that they are not *passengers* who only follow where *the driver* takes them, but they are the *drivers* who determine the direction and make

decisions. Give them confidence that makes them learn and *upgrade* themselves so that they contribute to the success of the organization. They still need to be accompanied in decision-making and when things get out of control, they are allowed to learn from their destruction and defeat. In the end, the winner is for those who are resilient and have *self-discipline*.

Based on the various explanations above, researchers can group the needs of Gen Z or the strawberry generation in supporting the growth of their faith in the Church environment, namely: a) need an authentic relationship; b) approach with relevant discussions and methods; c) need space for expression; d) requires personnel discipleship (mentoring); e) looking for examples; f) the need to be heard and supported, especially when falling; g) faith in the context of real life; h) need a safe community.

Gen Z needs to be approached with a sincerity that not only "teaches", but also is willing to listen to their life stories. Leaders who become friends and mentors, not just leaders who give orders. God's Word is delivered in language that *is relatable* to their daily lives and can use creative media such as short videos, dramas, *podcasts*, or *visual storytelling*. They also need to be given the opportunity to actively participate in service, for example in the fields of media, music, social, or other creativity. Appreciate their new ideas, even if they are sometimes unusual according to previous generations. In building faith in Gen Z, mentoring one by one or a small group is more effective than just a mass sermon and fostering closeness through sharing life that is not just a theory.

Christian leaders should be leaders who are honest about failure and the process of growing, not pretending to be perfect because Gen Z generally values authenticity over the perfection of spiritual appearance. Give them support when they are experiencing failure (in faith, studies, or relationships), accompany them with love rather than judgment. Understand that God's grace outweighs their faults. Gen Z needs to be helped to understand how the Christian faith connects to social issues, mental health, the environment, and justice — things they care about and build a community that values diversity, prioritizes empathy, and encourages growth, not spiritual competition. The key values that must be emphasized in the mentoring process are: a) *acceptance* (they are accepted as they are); b) *authenticity* (there is no need to pretend); c) *empowerment* (they are equipped to make an impact); and d) *grace* (mistakes are opportunities to grow).

The characteristics of Christian leadership that need to be continuously developed in mentoring Gen Z (strawberry generation) are quoted from Elmore with the slogans GOALS and R from Seno Widjaja. The slogan GOALS + R can be explained as follows: a) *goodliness*; b) *objectivity*; c) *authenticity*; d) *loyalty*; e) *servanthood*; and f) *relevance*. Through his piety, a mentor keeps a life in obedience so that he becomes an example for his mentee. Whereas in objectivity, the mentor views the mentee as God sees him, guiding based on God's Word and not personal opinions and providing appreciation and correction in a balanced manner. So that in terms of creativity, mentees feel heard and supported. When it comes to being authentic, the mentor accompanies the mentee with honesty, openness, and real love — without pretense, without putting forward an image, but rather being genuinely present to help the mentee's spiritual growth follow

Christ's example. *Loyalty* in church mentoring means a loyal commitment from mentor to mentee (and vice versa) in the process of spiritual growth regardless of the condition faced. This is not just a "good season friend," but a Christlike commitment that remains faithful to accompany us in our joys and sorrows. The implementation of *servanthood* means placing oneself as a servant instead of the boss in a mentoring relationship. The mentor does not lead to "master" the mentee, but to help the mentee grow in God's plan, with humility, love, and sacrifice—just like Jesus' example. Whereas relevant *leadership* will answer the need for an approach with relevant discussions and methods and space for expression for Gen Z. Lead in a way that suits their challenges and needs today, without losing sight of the core of biblical truth and always asking for guidance from God Himself for every thing that needs to be done. Gen Z lives in a fast-changing world, full of information, identity challenges, and social pressures. Therefore, relevant leadership must connect God's word with their real lives.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Christian leadership in mentoring the Strawberry Generation requires leaders to combine love, authenticity, patience, and relevance in mentoring this creative yet vulnerable young generation. The Strawberry Generation, known to be soft on the outside and fragile on the inside, requires a leadership approach that prioritizes *servanthood*, exemplarity, authenticity, objectivity, loyalty, inclusion, and relevance to their rapidly changing world. According to the founders of effective Christian leaders for the Strawberry Generation with the slogan GOALS + R, namely *a) goodliness; b) objectivity; c) authenticity; d) loyalty; e) servanthood; and f) relevant* (relevant). A Spiritual Leader who demonstrates the authenticity of a real, not an imagery, inclusive spiritual life who accepts the mentee as he is, without discrimination or judgment. Relevant leaders are able to connect the teachings of God's Word with real challenges such as *mental health*, self-identity, and digital media and provide a space for expression that opens up opportunities for mentees to process, question, and even fail, without fear of rejection. Above all it is leadership based on love and truth that guides patiently, not only demanding results, but accompanying in growth. This kind of leadership emulates Christ who served humbly (John 13:14-15), loved unconditionally (John 13:34) and guided patiently and faithfully (Mark 10:45). With this kind of leadership, the Strawberry Generation will not be broken by the harshness of the world, but will be shaped into a strong in the love and truth of Christ, and will be a generation that is also ready to serve the world.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research could explore how Elmore's GOALS framework and Widjaya's R Approach can be synergistically applied in mentoring strategies tailored to the Strawberry Generation—a cohort often perceived as emotionally fragile and averse to hardship. A comparative study involving Christian youth mentorship programs that implement these models may yield insights into their effectiveness in cultivating resilience, purpose-driven leadership, and spiritual maturity. Additionally, future studies can investigate the contextual adaptability of both frameworks within multicultural Christian settings, particularly in

Southeast Asia, where generational values and socio-religious dynamics intersect uniquely.

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