

How to Drive Real Change  
in Children's Ministry

# Leading KidMin



PAT CIMO

WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH

& MATT MARKINS

AWANA CLUBS INTERNATIONAL

FOREWORD BY ED STETZER



## 5

# How to Be a Student of Your Senior Pastor

**H**ow can you see your senior pastor as someone who can help you?

I (Matt) had just gotten off of a Google Hangout call with Amy, who was telling me about how well her church leadership team works together, when hardly a moment had passed and I got a text from Dave. Dave was expressing genuine concern about wanting to work more closely and more effectively with his lead pastor and senior leadership in his church. In a matter of minutes I was hearing deep expressions of the heart over the very same topic (the health and relationship between the kidmin leader and senior leadership) but from two very different perspectives. Why was it that Amy had such a growing and fruitful relationship with her senior leaders, but Dave was struggling?

What about you? Is your relationship with senior leadership vibrant and growing, filled with trust, favor, and open dialogue where you feel included in the grand vision of the church? Or is your relationship with the senior leadership of your church distant, stuck in a silo, even contentious?

No matter where you are in your relationship with your senior

pastor (or senior leadership, depending upon the context of your church), this chapter aims to fertilize an ongoing, healthy relationship between kidmin leaders who already enjoy a positive relationship with senior leaders, as well as provide a foundation and starting place for those who are building from ground zero.

We realize that the readership of this book is coming from a broad set of local church contexts. Some readers may be part-time kidmin leaders who work closely with the senior pastor. Others may serve on a large staff and report to a senior leader other than the lead pastor. And everything in between! We've tried to take this into account and give you principles, strategies, and ideas that can be leveraged no matter the context as you apply them to your situation.

With that in mind, let's take a look at what we found in our research.

---

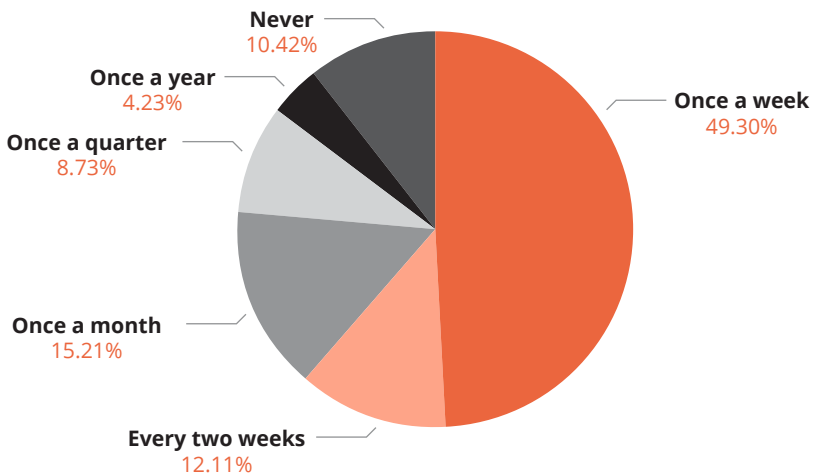
## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

*WHEN PAT AND I conducted our 2015 research project, this particular area of learning was one of our top priorities. We really wanted to get to the bottom of how well we actually know our senior pastors. We asked the following five questions:*

- **How well would you say you know the ministry heart of your senior pastor?**
- **To what degree are you a student (learning how to best serve, understand, and minister with) of your senior pastor?**
- **How often do you meet with your senior pastor?**
- **For what purpose do you meet with your senior pastor?**

- Can you give examples of how you have been a student of your senior pastor?

*WE WERE VERY encouraged that the kidmin community reports that we know the ministry heart of our senior pastor, as over 75% of the respondents rated this question a 4 or a 5 (out of 5) or higher. However, when we asked, “**To what degree are you a student of your senior pastor?**” those who rated this a 5 or 4 fell to just over 62%, meaning that nearly 4 out of 10 children’s ministry leaders are less engaged in getting to know how to best understand how to work with our lead pastors. As we sought to interpret the data, we began to think that many kidmin leaders may be less engaged in understanding the pastor’s heart due to less accessibility. It was quite helpful to understand just how often we are meeting with our senior pastors.*



*SIX OUT OF TEN kidmin leaders (healthy percentage) are meeting with their lead pastors once a week, gaining*

*accessibility to and some level of personal relationship with their senior leader. On the flip side, nearly 4 out of 10 meet with their senior pastor once a month or less, and 1 out of 10 never meet with the senior pastor.*

What about those leaders who rarely meet with their senior staff? Lack of accessibility to the leader(s) who is (are) responsible for the primary vision and direction for the church puts you in a challenging spot when trying to best understand his heart and vision for the church.

Granted, every church staff model can be somewhat different. The larger the church staff, like at Willow Creek, the smaller the percentage of leaders who will have direct access to the senior leader.

But most importantly, *the leader who is responsible for the children's ministry needs some level of accessibility to either the lead pastor or the senior staff pastor who provides strategic direction and vision for the church. Why?* As a member of the overall church leadership team, in order to most effectively align to the grander vision

of the church, you will need to build strong partnerships with the key leaders to fulfill the responsibilities of your ministry. It's incredibly difficult to know your leadership's ministry heart without some level of access to them.

Now, before you freak out, we realize you may be frustrated about

***WE ALSO asked kidmin leaders "For what purpose do you meet with your senior pastor?" To see the results to this question and for more access to the overall research project, go to [Awana.org/LeadingKidmin/Research](http://Awana.org/LeadingKidmin/Research) for the free download.***

now, thinking, “I rarely ever get to meet with my senior leader(s)! How will it ever change?” If this is where you’re at, hang in there. We will equip you with a plan to improve this as we keep reading together.

## I THOUGHT I KNEW WHAT WAS RIGHT

Twice a year, our church set aside a day when each ministry had the opportunity to choose people from their team to stand before church leadership and their peers from other ministry departments to share their next six-month goals and lessons learned from the previous six months. We called this day “Ministry Planning.” After our stories were shared, ministry peers and church leadership had an opportunity to ask questions, challenge us, and then close with praying over the presenters and ministry. Weak knees or not, everyone knew the importance of this meeting. Everyone would make sure they came in prepared, rehearsed, and ready to go.

On this particular day, I (Pat) was partnered with another person from our team to share our children’s ministry plan. Beforehand, we spent time crafting our message and deciding who would share what part of our story. Then, we both took the podium. But instead of our presentation going as planned, the person who was going to “stand with me” said “Pat is going to share our goals with you,” and then walked off the stage!

I thought I was going to faint! Now what do I do? I timidly began speaking, finding myself breathing so fast that I was talking as if I just finished running a marathon! My lips even began to tingle! I remember tossing out a bold prayer to God: *Please, God, help me to breathe!*

When I finished and walked offstage no one really said anything, which was not normal. I felt so inferior that I was relieved nobody asked questions, not then and not later.

As I look back to that day, I now understand why I felt people were avoiding what had happened. I was a leader standing on the stage,

obviously fearful, telling our ministry story. I usually came across to others as someone who could “handle” situations, but this time, the people around me didn’t know how to respond. My fear and timid posture took them by surprise.

A few days later, I received a call from a church elder who was a great man with a huge heart. He shared that he heard what happened in our ministry plan presentation and wanted to see how I was feeling. My immediate thought was, “You heard about it? Who told you? What story did they tell you?”

Because I didn’t take time to work through the emotions of that experience, instead of embracing his heart and intent behind calling me, I felt judged. He wasn’t judging me. I was judging myself.

He continued, sharing he heard about what happened when he met with our senior pastor. When we ended our conversation I remember feeling embarrassed. I believed my leadership was now in question, and wondered what to do, if anything.

I decided to go for a short drive. My tears began as soon as I opened my car door. I went from sadness to fear to anger, back to sadness again. I begged God to help me in knowing what to do. Deep down, I wanted to bring some of my trusted coworkers on the ride with me so that I could get them on my side. You know, misery loves company. God gently showed me that pulling others into something like this would bring only dissension, not unity.

After more prayer and discussion with my husband, I knew my best next step was to ask for a meeting with our senior pastor. I had never done that before, but I put in a phone call to his assistant and found myself sitting with him an hour later.

After thanking him for the way he adjusted his schedule to meet with me that day, I told him I knew he talked with the elder, “probably sharing his concern about my leadership.” As soon as I spoke those words, I saw him move his chair back a little. Was he going to get all

defensive on me now? It didn't matter, because I now knew I was right because of the change in his body language. I saw the signs, so I judged him and went on with full force. I explained our presentation wasn't like we had rehearsed, and if he had a concern about my leadership why didn't he come to me instead of talking about it with someone else?

When I finished, he said something to me that I have never forgotten. "To make sure I understand, can I ask you some questions?" "Sure," I said. Then he said, "You feel I talked with others about your lack of leadership?" "Yes." "Are you wondering what I said or what I was thinking? Because your posture tells me you already made up your mind as to what I am thinking or what I did."

He asked me why I didn't start my ministry presentation with the truth. Something like, "Well, I can see how we planned to share our story with everyone has now changed. Can you give me a few moments to collect my thoughts?" I told him that would never cross my mind because that would make me and the ministry I loved so much look as if we were unraveling.

He leaned forward and with a tender look in his eyes he said, "Pat, without your vulnerability in that moment, you did unravel."

I knew he was right. As he continued talking, do you know what I learned? I learned the reason he had the conversation with the elder was not to talk about my leadership. It was for him to get counsel on how to change the environment of that gathering. He realized the environment wasn't pulling out the best from his leaders. It was causing stress, which only limits ministry moving forward.

It was through his grace and challenge that God showed me I was the one who judged him. In my fear and desire to protect myself and our ministry, I created a story in my mind that was not true.

Friends, if we are ever going to become a change agent from our kidmin leadership seats, we must move from judging our senior leaders



to becoming a true student of them by wanting to do whatever it takes to seek to understand.

## DOES YOUR ATTITUDE OPEN DOORS—OR CLOSE DOORS?

In my journey that I've shared with you, I needed to do the hard work to make sure my actions and my heart were aligned. Gaining this understanding gave me three things. First, it gave me clarity to understand my shortcomings. Second, it gave me responsibility to take away any excuses and become accountable. Third, it opened doors for me to be a student of my senior pastor because this posture brought us both to a place of trust. Want to get through the door to your senior pastor's office (or another senior leader) to have a better relationship or healthier ministry? Consider what it takes.

Craig Groeschel, author and senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv, released a book titled *It*.<sup>1</sup> He describes "it" as something that is electric, an unmistakable camaraderie that cannot be faked. If you find your kidmin team or your relationship with your church leadership resembling different silos only passionate about their ministry area, you don't have "it."

Does your relationship with your senior pastor have "it"? When we enter our relationship with our senior pastor (or the executive pastor—whomever you report to) with a heart to serve and learn so that everyone wins, "it" takes root.

I decided it was time to see if I positively or negatively attracted "it" in my relationship with my senior pastor and other church leaders. This is what I wrote in my journal.

*God, thank you for the way the conversation went today with Bill. I know he cares about the stories of how our ministry fits into our church's bigger picture. His desire, like mine, is for every person on my*

*team to see how their role fits into our church's mission because we want our church to move forward in unity. Help me to continue to see the big picture.*

*Once again, today showed me the beauty of working through conflict. Thank you for the confidence I am learning in knowing how to respectfully say what is on my mind instead of talking behind closed doors with others. I really feel heard!*

*I am embarrassed to say, but I still find myself judging at times. When I get caught up in what I want for our ministry instead of our larger vision, I find I hold back and my heart begins to harden. God please forgive me. When my heart becomes hard, there is no way my relationship with my senior pastor (or anyone else for that matter) will grow. God, please help me to be a Philippians 2:1–4 type of person.*

*I need to lighten up! One of my strengths is responsibility. One of my downsides is responsibility. So many times when I am in a dark place, my strengths become my weakness. I want to grow in my relationship with my senior pastor by coming into that relationship with a sense of joy described in the book of Philippians. I want to stop depending on my circumstances and have joy in all circumstances. Joy will make relationships deeper and stronger.*

*Too many wins go without celebration. I want to grow in being on the lookout for excuses to celebrate my senior pastor, my team, and what God is doing through us as a team. God, help me to see them and celebrate them!*

I had some work to do to bring “it.” You may, too. Being a student of yourself and your senior pastor is at the foundation of making “it” happen. By having the right posture, and laying the groundwork for a good relationship with my lead pastor, doors opened for me to have a great working relationship with my pastor. Over the years, other kidmin

leaders have taken note of this, especially since Pastor Bill Hybels is such a high-profile leader—so I often receive these three questions:

1. How can I be a better student of my senior pastor and better prepare for when we meet?
2. What do I need to do to gain access to my senior leader?
3. How should I use my time when I'm with my senior pastor?

I'll spend the next three sections walking you through these very important areas that will help you open doors with your senior pastor or other senior leaders on your church leadership team.

## **BEFORE I APPROACH THE DOOR: TIPS FOR BEING A BETTER STUDENT OF MY SENIOR PASTOR**

Opening doors is about grace, seeking understanding, and gaining wisdom. That has been the lens I put my agenda through before entering any conversation with senior leadership. I remember a time when budgets were being allocated. I received our kidmin budget hours before meeting with Bill. I was frustrated because I didn't understand why some line items got cut, but bringing that frustration into our conversation wouldn't help move anything forward. So, I began by thanking him for the gracious heart of our church and shared how I know our ministry and the budget we receive is all God's, not mine. I confessed my previous attitude and then asked him this question: What process do you go through when deciding on financial allocations to different ministry needs? How can I do this better within our kidmin area?

That posture allowed us to view each other with grace. I learned his thinking and wisdom as I posed the question for him to speak into it. Before approaching the door, if you want to be a better student of your senior leadership, remember grace, seeking understanding, and gaining wisdom.

***IN OUR RESEARCH we asked the question, “Can you give examples of how you have been a student of your senior pastor?” There were almost three hundred open-ended responses, but below is a short list of our favorites:***

- **By asking formative questions to align the ministry to overall church mission and vision.**
- **I occasionally ask him what books he’s reading, and I go and read the same books. Then I’ll follow up and ask him a question or two about what he thought was most significant about the book.**
- **I regularly ask my senior leader for feedback and apply the changes that make the most sense.**
- **Listening to my pastor’s weekend sermons even if I have to listen to them online (because I’m serving in children’s ministry at that time).**
- **When my pastor speaks and shares his vision, I listen very carefully and take notes.**
- **I asked what his personality style and top strengths were and made notes of what I learned to help me best approach and understand him.**
- **I pay close attention to how he manages difficult situations.**
- **I regularly ask him for his advice and wisdom.**
- **I go to my senior pastor before we implement anything big. We invite him into the discussions at the beginning of any major decision or project. Sometimes he doesn’t have many concerns, but I’ve earned his respect by coming to him on the front end of the major initiatives.**

- **I intentionally ask questions, such as “what are your thoughts about . . .” or “this is how we’ve done it in the past; does it match what you feel is important?”**
- **I pray for him and his family regularly.**
- **I try hard to recognize and understand the “why” behind what he does.**
- **I have asked him whom he looks to for leadership and guidance. I’ve asked him what books he’s reading and what other churches he respects so I can get an understanding of a ministry he appreciates.**

Wow! What an encouraging list of ideas. So much we can learn and apply immediately! Now that we have some ideas on how to be a student of our senior pastor, let’s move toward what we can do to gain the needed access to our senior leader (this isn’t a challenge for everyone, but as we discovered earlier, nearly four out of ten kidmin leaders meet with their senior leader only once a month or less).

### **GETTING TO THE DOOR: HOW CAN I GAIN ACCESS TO MY SENIOR PASTOR?**

If you are one of the fortunate kidmin leaders who have consistent times with your senior pastor, thank them! If you find yourself struggling to get to the door, think of what Darren, a kidmin leader, did at his local church. He made sure he sent more encouragement to his senior pastor than he did requests to get into his office. He chose to view his relationship with his pastor as “equity.” He regularly asked himself, “How much equity do I have with my senior leader?” If he had taken more withdrawals from the relationship than he had been making

deposits, then Darren knew it was time to invest more in the relationship and build up that equity.

Darren shared that once his senior pastor knew his heart was “for him and the bigger vision of the church,” then when he did request a time to meet, not only did he come in very well prepared, but he was given the time needed to help move ministry forward from his kidmin seat. If we are not careful, we can inadvertently communicate that we only come to our senior leaders when we have needs (withdrawals). Darren showed that he was a proven ministry partner.

Does your senior pastor view you as a “ministry partner”? What about a team player? Our experience tells us that if you take on the leadership posture of becoming a ministry partner and a team player (not just an employee), then you will raise the equity in your relationship with your senior leader(s). This investment will help you gain greater favor with your senior pastor.

Pat and I (Matt) have a kidmin friend named Steve who ministers in a church culture where his conversations with senior leadership happen more organically: hallway conversations, pop-in meetings, and weekly gatherings (both formal and informal). But not every leader has this luxury. If you don’t have day-in, day-out access to your lead pastor, you may need to think like Donna and schedule ahead.

Donna has a regular once-a-month meeting with her senior pastor. She honors these meetings and when she does have them, she stewards them responsibly. She shared a recent email to the pastor’s assistant with me where she says, *“Hey Patti! I know I just met with Pastor Dan a week and a half ago, but I have one item where I need to engage him in some strategic discussion and another item I’d like him to help me make a decision on. I can make it quick. Probably 15–20 minutes. Can you help us find a time slot in the next few days? Thank you!”*

Notice Donna’s tone and professionalism. This is an effective little piece of communication.

## ONCE I'VE WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR, WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Agatha, wanting to do more than coordinate her children's ministry, shared she would make sure she came in with a shorter agenda than what she wanted to have so she wouldn't bombard her senior pastor with one thing after another. She called it her critical list.

It's important when meeting with your senior pastor to be prepared, like Agatha. Have an overall objective for your time together. Make sure you come into this meeting organized as a way of showing

**When I enter into a meeting with my senior pastor, I want to always make sure I come in prayed up.**

honor and respect. This means that you need your discussion points and/or questions lined out in an orderly fashion (your critical list). Having a typed-up "agenda" of what you want to discuss is a common best practice (either on your mobile device or a printed piece of

paper). If you begin to sense that your leader's attention is waning, then cut to the chase and only tackle the most important topics, and delay the leftover items for another gathering.

Juan mentioned he knew his senior pastor was known to move very fast in his thinking and was more of a visual learner than an auditory learner. To help his senior pastor stay focused, Juan would have one sheet with a visual explanation of the agenda item and his questions listed. What Juan taught me was to be a true professional. A true professional knows and understands how others learn, and adapts the way they communicate to their audience. Does a missionary to a French-speaking country go in speaking German, expecting the people to understand another language? It's the job of the communicator to adapt their communication style to their audience to be sure the message is clearly understood. Through my friendship with Juan I learned to be a true professional by taking the attitude that "it's my job to adapt

my communication style to speak the language of my senior pastor” . . . not the other way around.

Most succinctly and most importantly, when I enter into a meeting with my senior pastor (or other senior leaders), I want to always make sure I come in prayed up. My senior leaders need my prayers and the prayers of others, and there is no better time to pray than when preparing for our time together.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT MY SENIOR PASTOR?**

First and foremost, believe the best until having the facts to prove otherwise. In Matthew 7:1–6, Jesus forbids us to judge others until we have done two things. First, Jesus wants us to take responsibility for anything we did to contribute to the problem. Second, He wants us to see clearly and understand the motives or intentions of what someone else has done.

Assuming facts, speculating motives, or jumping to conclusions is exactly what I did before and during the meeting with my senior pastor earlier in the chapter. I wasn’t following Jesus’ direction, but my senior pastor was. He believed the best in me and he searched for any facts that told him differently. God calls us to withhold judgment and look for a reasonable explanation. He calls us to never judge a book by its cover. He calls us to be a student of our senior pastor, not one who judges them.

Senior leaders are human. We are all sinners, needing God’s grace. If you have deeper concerns about your pastor, even after going through all the proper channels, or you feel you are in a toxic situation, make sure you follow a modified Matthew 18 strategy, keeping your thoughts (and tongue) in check so you don’t find yourself in a gossip situation. First, talk with your senior pastor. Second, if that doesn’t go well, explain (not threaten) you did not feel heard. Explain it is time to bring



in an objective party you both feel comfortable with to help your relationship get reconciled.

Only you will know if you need to have an exit strategy. Please, don't run. Don't gossip. Don't cause dissension. Ask God for guidance.

## GAINING AND KEEPING TRUST

Trust has taken a hit in many facets of our life. We have trust issues in our relationships, our politicians, the economy, the media, other institutions . . . Should I go on? Trust in a relationship is a gift and it is a critical link for you to strengthen your relationship with your senior pastor.

Trust brings us hope and health. It helps us place our confidence in a person, place, or thing. After studying the life of Joseph found in the book of Genesis, we learn trust takes time to build.

From Exodus 16:2–3, we learn that lack of trust leads to cynicism, withdrawal, doubt, and stress as we read of how the Israelites came to not trust in Moses and Aaron. They began to speak bitterly against them.

Moses speaks of how trust is broken by unkept promises in Numbers 30:1–2: “Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Israel, saying, ‘This is what the Lord has commanded. If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth’ ” (ESV).

Moses reminds us the promises we make to God and others must be kept. In the time of this Scripture, people didn't sign written contracts. Their word was a binding signature. Breaking a vow, your word, meant broken trust, leading to a broken relationship. Trust is still the basis of our relationship with God and others. A broken promise today is just as harmful as it was in Moses's day.

Proverbs 26:25–26 speaks of how our actions show our true colors. “They pretend to be kind, but don't believe them. Their hearts

are full of many evils. While their hatred may be concealed by trickery, their wrongdoing will be exposed in public.”

After thinking through my relationship with my senior pastor, I have identified questions I had to honestly answer to take responsibility for growing our trust. Questions like . . .

- Do I act with integrity in a consistent manner that reassures my senior pastor I can be relied upon?
- Am I being transparent and honest with people at all levels of our organization?
- Am I accountable for my actions?
- Do I follow through?
- Am I open to feedback?
- Do I tell it straight, being open and honest about bad news, or do I spin the story?
- Do I resolve concerns head-on?
- Do I admit mistakes?
- Am I responsive to the needs of others?
- Am I looking to make sure everyone wins?
- Am I a walking example of what our church believes?
- Am I taking credit for someone else’s work?
- How do I react when I am told “no”?
- How do I handle power?

*Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.*

*Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.<sup>2</sup>*

These words from Paul sum up the beauty of trust and how we must go about building it in our relationships. Walking into every conversation with my senior pastor with an open heart and mind; assuming the best and seeking to understand his behavior; and showing my true colors in our relationship will build trust, which opens doors for me to be a change agent from my kidmin leadership seat. Are your intentions clear or foggy with your senior pastor?

Being a student of your senior pastor will require you to keep an open mind. It will require your senior pastor to grow in trust with you as they see your trust in action more than they hear about it. It will require you to do what it takes to have “it” in your relationship—to see your senior pastor as a qualified person to help you make decisions and to have a united front in creating the action steps needed to reach the end together. The outcome? Honoring God through being a true example of humility.

Interested in the whole book?  
Select your preferred book seller:

[\*\*MOODY PUBLISHERS\*\* !\[\]\(dfbd6b3763a6d1d9afaa974f64e2e4b5\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*AMAZON\*\* !\[\]\(e78f798d4ea5c530c9db49e7d26e6b95\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*APPLE BOOKS\*\* !\[\]\(23d9fc146e83b5c3013cfa32c784f8d5\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*GOOGLE PLAY\*\* !\[\]\(c694a3ff3b077d76910920a6a1593ab4\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*BOOKS-A-MILLION\*\* !\[\]\(ec9132f1d27c8919987d92907322654d\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*BARNES & NOBLE\*\* !\[\]\(05be7c7a8995decd503647c99211f7c2\_img.jpg\)](#)[\*\*CHRISTIANBOOK.COM\*\* !\[\]\(aa53ad6fea213b8b2226d3077e30533a\_img.jpg\)](#)

---