

Reclaiming the Formative Years

A College Minister's Manifesto

By Guy Chmielecki

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RIPE WITH POTENTIAL

There's no place in the world
like the university campus.

It's a colorful conglomeration of:

- highly educated individuals
- young, formidable minds
- and rich diversity in
 - backgrounds
 - ethnicities
 - religious beliefs
 - priorities
 - and more!

It's a season **thick** with potential.

Potential for *transition*...

Potential for *change*...

Potential for *transformation!*

Students are coming from
homes, churches
and social constructs...

where they've spent much
of the first 18 years of life...

And entering a *new* place
filled with much that is *new*,

different,

catalytic!

Our students are encountering new people,
new places,
and having new experiences...

All of which have the *potential*
to *shape* them
and *mold* them

during this highly **formative** season.

And whether they realize it

or not,

whether they understand it

or not...

There is a *tension* growing within them.

It has to do with what they've brought
with them
to campus...

Their beliefs,
habits,
and practices.

Those things that were instilled in them
over the course of the first 18 years
of their lives.

Instilled by (mostly)
well-intentioned people -- like
their parents and grandparents,

pastors and youth pastors,

teachers, coaches, mentors, neighbors,

directors, volunteer leaders, and friends.

Our students are bringing a lifetime of conditioning with them to campus...

Where it's being challenged to hold shape,
morph into something new,
or simply go away.

As this **tension** grows --

-- and it's a good **tension** --

-- our students are *supposed* to
start asking questions *and*
earnestly pursuing truth.

Especially when it comes
to matters of *faith*.

This tension is *supposed* to launch our students into a new season of exploration and formation.

A new season of **growth**.

A new season of learning,
understanding
and change.

But increasingly that's not the case.

More and more of our young
Christian students are choosing to
“shelve” their faith, *or*
walk away from it altogether...

during this significant time
in their development.

And this doesn't take into account
the growing number of
faithless students

who are growing up in a
post-Christian culture.

That's a problem.

Because there's no season of life quite like the university years.

A season *ripe* with potential...

A season that requires a
growing and
honest faith.

FAILING TO LAUNCH

A growing percentage of our students are entering college without a clue of why they are coming...

... or what they are to do once they get here.

Not only that...

they're leaving
after four years on campus
with little more than a diploma
to show for their efforts.

With no *faith* to guide them,
no clear sense of direction
or purpose...

And many of the same poor habits, attitudes, and low levels of responsibility that were present during their high school years...

... too many of our students are
wasting their *formative*
university years.

They're enjoying all of the
newfound freedoms
that come along with
moving off to college...

... but they're failing to step into many of the corresponding *responsibilities* that are intended to help them grow, develop, *and* mature.

They are not being
shaped and formed
in the ways that
God desires for them,

because they're *choosing* to **not**
include God
in *their* experience.

This being the case,
these highly *formative* years --

-- these years *pregnant*

with *possibility* --

-- are being squandered.

And it's not solely their own doing.

Many of our students are coming from
homes where

(as well-intentioned as it might sound)

their parents wanted to see
them succeed...

... at all costs.

Failure was (and is) not an option,

and so it was eliminated
from the equation.

Parents made life easy for their students.

Too easy.

They've paved the way
and did not make *(or allow)*
their students do much *(if any)*
of the work.

Parents fought the battles
their students were
supposed to fight.

Parents took on the responsibility
that was due their students.

No, not all parents.

But many --

maybe even most.

And their students are suffering
as a result.

Likewise, our culture has made it hard

(but not impossible)

for students to be “pushed”
by other mentor-types
during these critical years.

Pastors,
teachers,
coaches, and the like

have seen how “pushing” a student
can land them in “*hot water*”

with the student’s parents

(and potentially their
own employer)...

... so most don't choose to go there.

And students are suffering
as a result.

And honestly,

we might be just as guilty
at the collegiate level

of allowing the cultural dynamics of
young adults and
their parents

to deter us from the
true work
we've been called to.

We've been called to
prepare them --

-- to walk alongside them during these
highly *formative* years --

-- in ways that challenge,
encourage,
give responsibility to,

call to task,

hold accountable,

and love

in all the right ways.

I think too many of us assume,

or at best -- hope,

that it will either just happen...

or that someone else will step up
and help these young people
transition into adulthood.

But that's *our* job.

That's what *we've* been called to do.

Whether we're college pastors
or volunteers,

parents

or

professors,

mentors,
coaches,
directors, or
peer leaders...

We are being called to *step up*
and *extend a hand* of service
and direction to the students
we've been entrusted with.

EXTENDING A HAND

In order for young adults to grow
and mature,

they need to be mentored,
discipled,
and shown *how* to work
with God

in order to make the most of their
formative
university years.

They also need to be able to look at,
lean on, and
learn from...

their parents,

pastors,

professors, and

mentors

that God brings into their lives.

People like you.

People like me.

We'll need to serve as guides --

at least initially --

while our students gain their bearings...

... and begin to better understand *how*
to live into these
critical years.

Some students will need us
more than others...

And for varying reasons
during varying seasons...

We can't force ourselves on anyone...
but we definitely need to be a *consistent*
and *persistent* **voice** in their lives.

Over the course of time,
our role(s) will change --

-- while still functioning as mentors

(of sorts),

we'll need to create

increasing amounts of *space*...

and *opportunity*...

for our students to take on
more responsibility
within their *own* lives.

I don't want to oversell the *potential*
or *power*
of our role.

But I don't want to
undersell it
either.

These students need someone.

These students need you.

You.

YOU!

It's about the rest of their lives

and best utilizing some of the most
formative years they'll ever have
available to them.

Let's **stop** making excuses.

Let's stop waiting
for others to step up.

Let's stop assuming
that it's just going
to happen.

Let's avail ourselves to God,
and His divine leading,

and commit to partnering with
the countless others who care
about college students...

So that we might **shape**,
lead, and **influence**
in the ways that God desires!

Let's go the extra mile.

Let's have the hard conversations.

Let's be even more intentional
with our words
and our actions.

With the experiences we *provide*
and *expose* our students to.

Let's *work with God* to help
this upcoming generation
become the women and men
that God so desires for them to be!

Let's not settle...

... because we've been called
to something more!

And let's not allow our students to settle
for something less...

... because they deserve
so much more!

Let's commit

or *re-commit*

to the unending
and prayerful pursuit
of **all** students!

And in the end...

... when it's all said and done...

... may we hope to hear:

*“Well done my good
and faithful
servant...”*

... with you I am well pleased.”

A FINAL WORD

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

If this has *stirred* something within you...
if this has *challenged* you to make a *change*,
or take a *stand*,
or *start* something new...

Then do it!

God has called you.

Your students are counting on you.

The Kingdom waits...

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Reach the campus...

Change the world.