



SHAPING
THEIR
FUTURE

Mentoring Students Through Their Formative College Years

GUY CHMIELESKI

Advance Praise for *Shaping Their Future*:

“Every college student studies under the influence. This book will inspire *you* to be that influence. With two college-bound kids of my own, I would give this book to anyone who would have the courage to help shape their future.”

Tim Hawkins

Director of Sojourn Collegiate Ministries
Chaplain at MIT

“There’s no shortage of talking heads opining on the failures of today’s young adults. The problem is many of them don’t work with young adults. They’re observers, not participants. Dr. Guy Chmielecki is a refreshing exception. He’s an academic and a practitioner who has devoted his life to working with college students. He has earned the right to be heard. And what he has to say is wise, practical, and hope filled. *Shaping Their Future* is an indispensable guide for anyone who cares about the next generation. The book is crammed with wisdom on how to help young people navigate the rocky terrain of early adulthood while growing in their commitment to follow Jesus. I’ll be recommending *Shaping Their Future* to anyone with a heart for young people.”

Drew Dyck

Managing Editor of *Leadership Journal*
Author of *Generation Ex-Christian*

“Guy Chmielecki has provided a welcome guide in a time when mentoring relationships are more important than ever! This book is great for campus ministers, pastors of college congregations, and other mentors who work with college students. Guy draws from the best scholarship related to the changing needs of emerging adults as well as his own personal and ministry experiences. He identifies the central role of mentoring relationships in the faith development of young adults and is spot-on in describing the changing relational skills of college students. The chapter topics are relevant and clear, the ‘Mentor’s Toolbox’ provides excellent applications, and he gives handles for those seeking to navigate a mentoring relationship. It is a great resource for both experienced guides and those who are only beginning to be a positive presence in the life of young adults.”

Rev. Ashlee Alley

Director of Campus Ministry
Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas

“The thesis of this book is straightforward and true: College students are traversing the exciting, risky, and often dangerous path to adulthood. They need mentors who know what they’re getting into and will give themselves to formative relationships with college students. Written by an attentive and insightful practitioner, this book is wise, savvy, honest, and real. Each chapter starts with where we are and leads to where we need to go. It weaves personal experience with pastoral reflection. The ‘Mentor’s Toolbox’ asks probing

questions that keep us on track. Guy mentors us as he teaches how to mentor others. I heartily recommend this book.”

Rev. Dr. Stephen Rankin

Chaplain and Minister to the University at Southern Methodist University
Author of *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life*

“*Shaping the Future* by Dr. Guy Chmielecki is an excellent book for campus ministers, professors, parents, pastors, and university officials—anyone who is concerned about the future of today’s collegians and the young “emerging” adult population. These collegians are in the transition of a lifetime! The reader will find how crucial our role is in helping today’s young generation navigate healthy autonomy, relationships, and purpose. Chmielecki draws from his own personal experience as a college student and his research and years of serving on campus and provides practical ways we can lead, influence, and resource this future generation through intentional mentoring relationships.”

Dennis Gaylor

National Director of Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, USA
Springfield, Missouri

“Too often we only hear about how college students aren’t where we think they should be, which simply is not mutually beneficial to the body of Christ. Thankfully, Guy doesn’t allow us to arrogantly posture ourselves in shallow misunderstanding but instead brings practical insights to the core issues needing to be addressed and does so in a way that gently nudges us toward intentionally making disciples from a heart that is motivated by love.”

Chuck Bomar

Pastor of Colossae Church, Portland, Oregon
Founder of CollegeLeader (CollegeLeader.org)
Author of *Better Off Without Jesus* and
Worlds Apart: Understanding the Mindset and Values of 18–25 Year Olds

“If there is any doubt that today’s college students are in need of wise and compassionate mentors, Guy Chmielecki’s book expertly dispels it. He writes from fifteen years of experience, giving us convincing evidence as well as helpful resources to do the job. This book is an essential tool for those of us who are willing to accept the call to mentor a generation that waits for us to lead the way.”

Tracy Balzer

Director of Christian Formation at John Brown University
Author of *A Listening Life*

“Every college student needs a mentor, and every mentor needs this book.”

Tyler Ellis

College Minister at the University of Delaware
Author of *Question Everything*

“The college years have the potential to be one of the most life-shaping seasons of one’s life, but the determining factor is how well students continue to grow

and mature in that new setting. In *Shaping Their Future*, Guy Chmielecki helps potential mentors understand a big-picture approach to how to relate and guide college students so that they can navigate through the transition and into a healthy life in college.”

Tommy McGregor

Founder of TheTransMission

Author of *Lost in Transition: Becoming Spiritually Prepared for College*

“There is a crisis of faith and maturity among today’s college and university students. One of *the* best answers to this crisis is mature, adult mentors who will listen and speak loving truth in their lives. Guy Chmielecki’s book, *Shaping Their Future*, gives you an insight into what the students are going through, but more importantly he helps you understand their thought process. At the end of each section is the “Mentor’s Toolbox,” which you will find to be a wonderful and practical help in your walking with students. Whether you are a professional college minister or a layperson who cares, you will find this book everyday helpful!”

Arliss Dickerson

Leadership Development Consultant for Baptist Collegiate Ministry

“In *Shaping Their Future*, Guy Chmielecki identifies the key developmental areas experienced by college students. Based on his own experiences as a student and now as a spiritual mentor, Chmielecki offers practical guidance for making intentional interventions in the lives of the students we encounter. Acknowledging that the college years are crucial to the growth of students, he encourages us as mentors to go beyond superficial relationships and to challenge students to dig deeper so greater strides are made as students prepare for a life that makes a difference in their world for Jesus Christ.”

Dr. Joe Brockinton

Vice President for Student Life at Southern Wesleyan University

“Guy has broken this topic down into bite-size chunks that are simple with relevant themes important in any mentoring relationship. I found myself reflecting not only on my position in higher ed and opportunity to mentor but on my parenting too.

“*Shaping Their Future* is a great call to take the initiative carefully but *take the initiative* in mentoring and challenging students in our spheres of influence to grow spiritually in healthy ways. Thanks for putting this out there!

“As a higher education administrator for twenty-five years and father of three adult college students, I loved the opportunity to interact with topics that are incredibly relevant in shaping the next generation of leaders. This is a book that a wide variety of people will resonate with.”

Dr. Mark Troyer

Vice President for Enrollment Management at Asbury University

“Life with God is an adventure. For many the university years are a defining part of that adventure. Through humor and fresh insight, Guy Chmielecki does a

masterful job in creating for us a practical blueprint on how to best prepare this generation for the full experience.”

Dave Short

National Director of Campus Alpha, Alpha USA

“Shaping their Future is a must read for anyone seeking to mentor college students, point them to Jesus, and prepare them for the rest of their lives. Students need and want your help! This is your field manual that not only gives you great insight to many of the most critical topics they wrestle with, but also helps you ask life-changing questions and journey with them more effectively.”

John Allert

Executive Director of Campus Ministry Toolbox

“As willing as our hearts are to pour into college students, the responsibility that we have as mentors to the younger generation can often be daunting. Guy Chmielecki doesn’t sugarcoat the challenges that we face in coming alongside college students today, but he does offer encouragement and insight that will help us in the process. Chmielecki provides us with an in-depth understanding of college students—their faith and worldview, their understanding of college, money, responsibility, freedom, intimacy, and their place in the world. Understanding their value systems, families of origin, and how culture has shaped them equips us to engage with them in a meaningful way—a way that invites them into a journey of pursuing God’s truth, gaining meaningful experiences, claiming more responsibility, and asking tough questions.

“This book is a helpful tool in preparing us to pursue meaningful relationships with this generation of college students in order to help them make the most of their formative college years. Chmielecki challenges us to stop waiting for opportunities to develop these relationships and be intentional with initiating and building them—our students are counting on us too! His sense of urgency in this is one that resonates—we are doing students a disservice by allowing them to waste such a significant season of their lives; college can be a time of squandering opportunities and wandering aimlessly, or it can be one of incredible growth and formation. Chmielecki’s invitation for us to invest in this generation is one we must take seriously, and his book is a useful guide into investing in their growth and development in a way that is life giving and guided by the transforming powers of the Holy Spirit.”

Brad Baker

Pastor to College Students at Saddleback Church

“Dr. Guy Chmielecki has written an insightful and informative book that will assist anyone working with young adults in making the very most out their formative years. Read this book with a pen, paper, and a highlighter at the ready! There is much to glean and immediately apply from this book. It is a much-needed resource for a pivotal season of life.”

Pastor Laurel Bunker

Dean of Campus Ministries

Campus Pastor at Bethel University

Shaping Their Future

*Mentoring Students Through
Their Formative College Years*

Dr. Guy Chmielewski



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*Few and far between are teens
whose lives are shaped by purpose,
who demonstrate direction,
who recognize their interdependence
with communities small and large,
or who think about what it means to live
in the biggest house in the global village.*

—

Tim Clydesdale,
The First Year Out

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Foreword

Shaping. Forming. Crafting a life. Jesus did most of His work in ordinary places with ordinary people—in the streets, on the road, in homes, over meals—as He lived life “on the way to the next thing.” We learn from Him there are no walls to the places or the people who can teach us to know God. Some are occasional, seemingly coincidental moments or people who touch our lives and shape us simply by proximity. But some are those with whom we linger over life as friends in conversation over good coffee. Mentors have other names and roles in students’ lives: coaches, faculty, supervisors, pastors, advisors, RAs, etc. They form relationships in which they choose to be present to students for their formation.

My relationship with Guy Chmielecki is one of those for me. Our friendship most often took place in college cafeterias, the campus ministry office, and coffee shop tables. He was a student; I was his campus pastor. He was willing to speak his mind with big questions and sometimes to listen. We got on well and continue as friends to this day. I no longer know who the mentor is, but I know we learned how to meet at the intersections where

life is lived authentically—in questions, occasional answers, pain and failure, success and joy—in decisions needing to be settled and choices to be made. Shaping, forming, and crafting life took place in those conversations.

Such a relationship is not only for a few but is something necessary for each of us. Eugene Peterson said it best: “I am not myself by myself.” A person’s development depends on continuous exposure to other people who themselves embody identity, formation, and vision.

We should know it by now: we do not come to faith alone. We are not *self-made* but inherently *other-made* by those precious ones who shape and form and craft us by their words, questions, prayers, and time. We should know it by now: we need the wisdom of others to help us find our own. Mentoring is a gift that continually gives to each. The role of mentors is not that of a professional theologian or spiritual expert but rather one with the willingness to do the hard work of listening to the story God is writing in the days and nights of the other. It doesn’t require specialized certification as much as it requires a curiosity and willingness for deep enough listening and deep enough seeing into the shaping work of that Artist who is crafting a life. We should know it by now: we all need someone to tell our stories to. We are formed and shaped and crafted for life by the mysterious power of questions and words. We live into our stories as we tell them to others willing to listen.

Spiritual mentoring is something we all need and all can give. The requisite skill is fairly simple: it’s like taking a walk with one of my young grandsons. You know how that goes: It doesn’t usually take us in a straight line. We stop and wonder and look and talk. We repeat words and go back and look again. We meander and wander. We look and look, and always there is wonder about something larger than just us—it might be a butterfly or bird or penny on the street.

Mentoring is a holy invitation to enter life with another in just that way—to participate in Jesus’ story as we walk our way through life. There is always the danger we will get sidetracked and think the story is only about us—that’s why we need others to help shape the conversations and set the table with the food of the gospel. We aren’t the Artist shaping and molding and crafting as if we know the ultimate shape of the other, but we walk with the Artist and with a student in a holy place.

Wendell Berry describes the grandmother of a character, Hannah Coulter, who speaks of the mentoring work accomplished mostly at Grandma’s kitchen table, “She shaped my life, without of course knowing what my life would be. She taught me many things that I was going to need to know, without either of us knowing I would need to know them. She made the connections that made my life. . . . If it hadn’t been for her, what would my life have been? I don’t know. I know it surely would have been different.”

Shaping Their Future is an invitation for you to acknowledge the role others have played in shaping your life, and it is a call to enter the arena yourself with others in the most formative moments of their lives. The university years provide what many look back on as setting a baseline for the formation of identity, vocation, and spirituality. It is not a technical skill but a hopeful willingness to engage and listen. It is a deep curiosity to see the face of the Artist in the unfolding story of the student seated beside you. It is reverence and awe for the living and breathing soul with whom you are privileged to walk. Let this book be a guide as you set forth on holy work for the sake of the Kingdom. It is rich with its own guidance for the sacred relationship you have with students.

*Dr. Keith R. Anderson, President,
The Seattle School
of Theology and Psychology*

Acknowledgments

This book has been “in process” for many years now and really has become an exploration of my own life development. I must thank many people, and I’m sure I will unknowingly leave someone out, but know that this book could never have seen the light of day without so, so many.

I would like to thank my family for all of their love and support throughout this process. To my sweet wife Heather, who has believed in me from the very beginning and been so understanding of my many late nights at the computer: thank you. You have helped me to become the husband I am today.

To my kids (Derek, Autumn, Kaiya, Noll, and Lailie) for being too young to really understand what’s happening now but excited in their own ways for Daddy—simply because I’m excited. You’re teaching me about what it means to be a dad.

To my parents, who have served as lifelong mentors, and especially my mom—for her willingness to review numerous early drafts of this book: thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I would also like to thank the many mentors who have helped to shape my own life and ministry throughout my journey. The list is too long to mention everyone, but Gary, Keith, Sherry, Alyson, Stu, and Ben deserve special thanks here.

I would like to thank the numerous students who have allowed me to come alongside them and walk for a season as a friend and mentor. You have taught me a lot about what it means to be both—in my successes and failures.

I would like to thank my peers and colleagues who continue to shape and sharpen me as a leader and mentor. I am especially thankful for those I have worked closely with: Lisa, Ashlee, Christy, and Micah. I'm equally grateful for the growing community at FaithONCampus.com and for those who have offered their insights and encouragements as they've read through early drafts of this book—most notably Tyler and Tiffany.

Finally, I would like to thank J. D., Andy, Holly, and all of the good folks at Seedbed Publishing. They have made this project possible through their willingness to take a chance on this first-time author. They have been a joy to work with and have been incredibly gracious and encouraging to me throughout the process.

God's richest blessings to you all as you continue to invest in His Kingdom through your roles as mentors—all in your own unique ways!

*Grace and peace,
Guy*

First Words

Nineteen years ago I was a college freshman, but I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was a relatively new Christ-follower and off to college without much of an idea about what was supposed to happen. I knew that I loved Jesus and wanted to make my faith central to my life, and part of my college experience, and so I started with an unusual openness to whatever God might have for me.

Now, for a few different reasons I use the word “unusual” to describe my openness to God at the outset of this new chapter in my life. First, as a new Christian, the idea of following Jesus was still a relatively unfamiliar idea to me. I made the decision to accept Jesus’ gift of salvation while in high school, but, truthfully, I didn’t know what it all meant. It had been made quite clear that this decision would impact my life after death, but there had been only faint allusions to how this decision should impact my life before death. So although I didn’t really know what it meant or looked like, to follow Jesus in this lifetime, I believed there had to be something to it. So for this *sense* to be enough for me to be open to follow Jesus definitely qualified as unusual to me.

The second reason I suggest this was unusual was the fact that many of my peers, classmates who may have been followers of Jesus for most of their lives, didn't seem to live with the same kind of openness to Jesus. To look back, now, I can't tell you exactly what it was I saw or did not see in their lives. Or what I heard or did not hear in their words. But I could tell that many of them,

» *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.*

— Paul,
1 Corinthians 13:11

as committed to Jesus as they might have claimed to have been, did not seem to be as open to following Jesus *wherever He might lead*. This wasn't (and isn't) a judgment on them. It was simply something that I noticed. And this *something* stood in stark contrast to *something else* I saw in the lives of a few guys I was getting to know.

These guys are the third reason I classify this openness to God's leading as unusual: precisely because *they* were unusual. Now, I don't mean to suggest that they were the kind of weird or unusual that makes you want to pick up a stick, slowly back away, and then call the police from a safe distance. In fact, it was quite the opposite. What I saw in these guys was the kind of unusual that made you stop, take notice, and wonder what, *exactly*, was so unusual about them. I can now look back and recognize that the unusual I saw in these new friends—which made them unique, by comparison, to so many other college students on campus—was they had been living open to God for a number of years before we met. No, they weren't perfect, but they were authentic and persistent in their pursuit of Jesus. They were on the path that I wanted to be on, just a little farther down the way. And they were modeling for me, and others, a way to live life fully open to God.

I'm thankful to each of them for the ways they modeled faithful devotion to Jesus as college students. They were living

proof that it was possible. Matt, Jon, Mike and Nate—you'll never fully know the ways that God used you in my life during those formative college years. I'm thankful for you and the parents, pastors, teachers and mentors who invested in you in the years leading up to (and through) the time we spent together on campus! I am forever changed because of it.

If you're wondering what this story has to do with this book, keep reading.

The Problem

The college years are some of the most formative in life. The context of the university campus is unlike any other—rich with educated voices, diversity, freedom, opportunity, and space to explore who you are and who you are becoming.

For far too many students today, however, the formative college years are being wasted. In a lot of ways college has become High School Part 2 but with a lot of debt incurred. While it was once assumed that youth will stay in school through the twelfth grade then go on to pursue further education *only* if it was required in order to obtain a specific job, this is no longer the case. For most of today's young people, the expectation is they will graduate from high school and go right into college, much like they transitioned from middle school to high school.

This being the case, a growing percentage of students are entering college without a clue of why they are there or what they are to do. Many have no clear sense of direction or purpose. Couple this with the retention of many of the same poor habits and attitudes they have toward coursework, as well as the low levels of responsibility that were present during their high school years, and you get too many of today's college students wasting some of the best years of their lives. As a result, they are not being shaped and formed in the ways that God desires for them. They

are not making use of the formative environment and season of life that are the college years.

Moving toward Something Better

The college experience demands a transition, or series of transitions, and our young adults need to work with God to make the most of it. This book, designed for mentors of young people,



It takes a village to raise a child.

— African proverb

is meant to serve the reader as a guide, a rudder, or even a springboard into specific arenas of life that require our students' attention, consideration, and application or action. It's about the rest

of their lives and best utilizing some of the most formative years they'll ever have available to them. Now is the time for college students to co-labor with God to become the women and men they are intended to be!

But it's not that easy, is it? The reality is, there's no one-size-fits-all (or even most) when it comes to making the most of the college years. No magical formula, or secret code, can make these years a grand success for each and every student.

Just as God has designed each one of us to be unique, I believe that the journeys we take—the journeys that students take—will also be unique. This means we're not looking for a map that comes with a start point, end point, and all of the best, pre-determined "stops" along the way. Instead, we recognize that the specific start point is the place each student finds him or herself. We acknowledge that the end point is not the goal, but, instead, the journey itself is the goal, and therefore students need to be encouraged to live each day with great intention and purpose. Instead of offering students answers to their questions, we need to help them to ask the right kinds of questions. The kinds of questions that will open them up to the ways God wants to work in their lives. The kinds that will cause them to call into question

the “outcomes” or “end destination” that the world around them has defined as “best.”

As a professor, I often tell my Old Testament students that their questions may or may not be fully answered during the course of our semester together. I also let them know that their questions will likely lead them to more questions, bigger questions, and that although this might grow frustrating, it is a sign of God at work in our midst. I believe the same to be true about most of life. Jesus extends the same invitation to our students that He did His own: “Come, follow Me.” He does not say where they will go, what they will do, how they will manage, or even what the “end result” might be. Instead, He creates space for questions, learning, formation, and even some struggle, pain, and chaos along the way. It’s an invitation to an intentional journey that has the potential to change absolutely everything!

Why It Matters

Over the course of the next couple of chapters I’ll attempt to outline why, exactly, it does matter that we *seize the day* and begin to reach out to today’s college students in intentional ways.

The short of it is this:

We are afforded some of the greatest opportunities here in America, and yet a growing percentage of our young people are not taking advantage of these opportunities. This is resulting in an increasing number of college graduates who are underprepared to care for themselves and contribute meaningfully to the world in which they live. Increasingly they lack the kind of faith that shapes them to their core, and this has ramifications in absolutely every area of their lives. Without direction, or the capacity to make good decisions, or even the ability to take

on meaningful levels of responsibility, these young adults will wander. They will struggle. And they will waste some of the best years of their lives.

I believe God is calling us—the parents, pastors, professors, coaches, directors et al. in the lives of these young people—to *step up* in some quite intentional ways! If we don't, who will? Our students are counting on us, whether they realize it or not.

This book may not provide the answers to all of the questions you have, but it will provide direction as you come alongside students and journey with them. I also want to invite you to check out <http://faithoncampus.com>, where I offer resources and meaningful conversations along these same lines, on a regular basis. Educating and equipping the next generation of young believers, and those who will come alongside them, is my life's calling.

Be encouraged, co-laborers in Christ, for you do not journey alone or work in vain. Don't hesitate to be in touch if I can assist you with anything. So let's come together, under the banner of Christ, and invest in our students as if our future depends on it! Because it does.

1

Emerging Adulthood

Students today are part of a generation falling behind developmentally—and academically, some would argue—and it has everything to do with *how* our students are approaching their formative years. For many students college has become High School Part 2. It's the *next thing*. For many it could just as easily (and accurately) be described as grades 13 through 16. Students continue on in their educational pursuits in a new context but retain many of the same ways of thinking and living they did in high school.

A new season of life has cropped up over the past thirty to forty years and has become known as Emerging Adulthood (or Prolonged Adolescence or Delayed Adulthood). It's a season that includes the college years on the front end and extends well into the late twenties for many of today's young people. I've actually seen, in some instances, where researchers have defined this season of life to extend to age thirty-two. Young people are no

The 5 Main Features of Emerging Adulthood

1. It is the age of identity explorations, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. It is the age of instability.
3. It is the most self-focused age of life.
4. It is the age of feeling in between, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. It is the age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.

— Dr. Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*¹

longer in the developmental stage of adolescence, but they've not yet come into their own in the realm of adulthood either. Some of this is because of their own choosing, and some of this has to do with the cultural environment that has been created for them. Regardless, it is a season of life that is reshaping the college experience in ways that are hindering the ultimate formation and development of today's young people.

High school graduates are heading off to college with many of the same attitudes, habits, and patterns they possessed in high school, without any sense that these things should change as a part of their new reality. As a result, the formative college years are becoming something much less than formative. To make matters worse, these young adults are incurring an overwhelming amount of debt in the process. So after four (or more) years as a college student, many are just as immature and undeveloped as they were when they first arrived on campus, with the only noticeable addition being the massive debt that takes on the form of a giant albatross hanging around their necks—severely weighing them down and further hindering their desire to “grow up,” even after they graduate.

Much could be said about emerging adulthood, but for the sake of this book I'd like for us to think of it in terms of *freedom* and *responsibility*. Young people are enjoying many of the newfound freedoms that come with moving off to college (which has long been a part of the college experience) but are increasingly unwilling to acknowledge (or accept) the corresponding responsibilities that accompany those new freedoms (a defining characteristic of emerging adulthood). They want to fully enjoy all of the possibilities and decision-making power that come with being "out on their own," but they're uninterested (and in some instances, unable) to manage the "adult" responsibilities that come along with each freedom. And as you might imagine, it's causing tension and frustration in a variety of different contexts, while at the same time "stunting the growth" of these young people—during what are supposed to be some of the most formative years of their lives.

Add to this challenging scenario a few more elements: (1) a pop culture that fully supports the high freedom/low responsibility lifestyle, (2) a parenting paradigm that has sought to "be friends" with their kids and served to shelter them from struggle of any kind, and (3) the collective "hand-cuffing" of adults in relation to how they engage and challenge students. And the stage is set for a defunct college experience—at least in terms of students growing and maturing in many of the ways that they should.

American pop culture has long been about "self." Our culture sends a near-constant barrage of messages that tell us to "do what we want," "love what we do," and "indulge ourselves in whatever our hearts desire," which has served to create a generation (if not an entire culture) of self-obsessed individuals. We're losing (if not already lost) any sense of community or community obligation. We're losing our collective grasp on reality. So add a cultural endorsement of self-centeredness to a season of life (the college years) that is (by design) quite a self-centered experience, and

we shouldn't be surprised to see what we see on campuses today. Sure, many students are able to see through the cultural façade of self (in some ways) and seize opportunities to serve others and be about the betterment of the collective campus community. But many of their peers struggle to see beyond the end of their noses, which only serves to further feed the ethos of emerging adulthood.

Many parents unknowingly serve as enablers to this season of Delayed Adulthood. We're currently seeing a generation of college students who were parented by individuals who had "distant" relationships with their own parents—their fathers in particular. Many of these individuals feel that their parents cheated them from having something more substantial in terms of a relationship. So they've made a conscious decision to offer their children (many of today's college students) a more personal, tangible parent/child relationship than the one they experienced. They decided to be friends with their children. They allowed their kids to overstep boundaries. They struggled to adequately challenge them to step into *responsibility*—a key word and concept to the overall argument I'm trying to make here. They failed to be a parent—something only they could be—and settled for being a friend, which most of their kids eventually grew to resent. Now, this isn't true for all of the parents of today's college students but a much larger percentage than ever before.

And yet, if you were to ask most parents if they want their college student to be *more* mature, *more* responsible, *more* capable, and *more* independent by the time they graduate from college, you'd undoubtedly get a near-unanimous "YES!" But far too many parents continue to (un)knowingly operate as the managers of their students' lives—even from a distance—during their formative college years. Instead of giving their student increasing levels of space—to make decisions on their own, pay for some of their own experiences, fight some of their own battles (take on more ownership and *responsibility* for their own

lives)—they’re doing these things for them. And it’s not challenging today’s students to handle some of these scenarios, or learn when they fail, and as a result it’s stunting the developmental process. No, this isn’t true for every student, but it is for far too many.

Equally troubling is an American culture that has made it difficult for nonparental types—like pastors, professors, coaches, and so on—to step in and really challenge students without fear of potential backlash from the parents. These probable mentor-types are being forced to operate with their hands tied behind their backs *until* a student grants them “permission” to speak into their lives. So would-be mentors hold back, bite their tongues, and don’t interject themselves (in appropriate ways) into the lives of today’s young people. Again, this isn’t the reality in every instance but in far too many. I know this because I’ve seen it happening on campus, increasingly so, over the course of the past fifteen years.

Today’s young people need to be challenged to step into adulthood now—and shown that it’s a good thing, that it’s the right “next step”—so that they can better utilize their formative college years. They need to understand that college is meant to be a one-time experience in which they truly transition into adulthood or, at the very least, get well on into the process. They need to understand that to waste these years is a great injustice and poor stewardship of an opportunity that much of the world does not have as readily available to them. The university experience needs to be seen, and therefore lived into, as the great gift that it is. Students need to be challenged to take responsibility for their lives, and the decisions they are making, knowing full well that more is at stake than just a diploma. It’s about the rest of their lives!

THE MENTOR'S TOOLBOX

- What elements of emerging adulthood are you able to identify in your students?
- Which of Arnett's five features is most challenging to you in terms of relating to this generation of young people?
- Where are you seeing students abuse "freedoms" and fail in the area of "responsibility"?
- Are you willing to be a mentor—a *part* of the solution?

Take some time to reflect on these questions in the space provided on the following page.

For further reading on the subject of emerging adulthood, consider:

- *Emerging Adulthood* by Jeffrey Arnett
- *Souls in Transition* by Christian Smith



**Notes, questions, reminders,
points of action, etc.**