

CMDA Connections

*A guide to building relationships with
students and residents that will help
them become authentic Christian
doctors*

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1. Are Connections really important?

If you look back on your own spiritual life, you will remember times at church, camp or fellowship gatherings that were certainly important. Each of us has had those moments in a group setting that have allowed us to touch our Maker with joy and direct our future. But, for most of us, the really important decisions in life are made in closer relationship settings, with a friend, a parent, a spouse, a teacher or a colleague whom we trust. We move in a certain direction because we hear words of wisdom from someone we trust or look in admiration on a model who fits our dreams or, because of the way they live, transforms them.

We have been most influenced by individuals who have taken the time to speak and act with us, who consider us to be persons who matter. When these have shown their commitment to us, we open ourselves to their influence. This is the picture we have of Jesus and the Twelve and it has been true in our own lives.

Our students and our residents are drifting in a milieu of influence peddlers. They will make life changing decisions about vocation, location, relationships, mission and wealth within that milieu. By the time they finish their training, most will be caught on a moving sidewalk that will not let them off without real difficulty. Many Christians will choose pathways that will limit their influence for Christ or even damage that influence without even realizing what they have done. We as Christians often drift into insignificant service for our king while our eyes gaze at authentic Christian living fading in the distance.

One of the most powerful influences for authentic Christian life choices is that of respected colleagues who have completed the difficult preparation, who have walked through the mine fields of secular influence, who know what it is like on the other side of training, who are genuinely interested in the student's and resident's well being and who live authentically for Christ. Such a person can, more easily than most, direct students and residents into a life that will honor Christ. If such persons are not present and not relating in significant ways, the students and residents may be left to the influence of

colleagues who care little for our Saviour and know little of the Truth of eternity.

We can be superficial buddies with hundreds of folk and never make a real difference in their lives. We can connect deliberately for the Lord with a few and all of creation may be changed.

2. What do I have to offer?

Some of us are naturally drawn into close relationships. Many of us feel like we can never think of the right words to say and many would much rather read a good book or run ten miles than spend time in discussion with a stranger assigned to us.

We all have different personalities and this leads us to different levels of confidence in helping one another and different levels of comfort in significant relationships. As part of God's plan for redeeming the world, this variation in our personalities is really okay. We are each different types of blocks needed to build his Church and help each other.

Influencing folks for Christ is not about being well appreciated by the one to whom we speak; it's about sharing God's wisdom filtered through our experience, interpreted by the Holy Spirit. If we are fully devoted followers of Christ and have completed our training in medicine or dentistry, whatever we think of ourselves, we have lived long enough and lived through enough to offer God's wisdom to those who come behind us. We can make an eternal difference in the lives of these students and residents, if we trust God and *will it*, though we may never comfortably *feel it*.

3. How do I prepare myself for a Connection?

-Ask God if he would have you influence a resident or student for Christ in an individual or small group setting.

-Check with your local CMDA leaders (graduate leaders or field staff or regional director) to seek an opportunity.

-Begin praying daily for the one that God would have you influence, even before they are identified. If you are married, pray with your spouse for this person.

-Begin praying daily that God will prepare your life by helping you turn from the sin in your life.

-Begin praying daily that God will provide the time he needs for you to develop the connection. Usually this means simplifying your life by removing a less important activity.

-Talk with someone else who has spent time in purposeful mentoring relationships. If you know of no one, ask your CMDA leaders to find you one.

4. How do I make the Connection?

As you pray, God may lead you to the right person to influence without an organized process. Go for it.

An approach that would impact a larger number of students and residents for Christ would be for each city to develop a system of Connections in that city. Otherwise the relationship developments that do develop will likely be sporadic or non-existent. For this to happen, it takes a champion called out by God to lead such an effort. You need to ask God seriously whether you are that champion for your city. If no such person arises, individuals may still move forward with God's leadership.

If God calls you or the doctors in your city to organize a broad effort for Connections, you or your CMDA leaders should develop an organized plan for asking students and residents if they would like to be connected with a graduate doctor. A separate plan will be needed to call out the doctors willing to spend quality time with them. A third step would then be to pair up those willing to connect: the graduate doctor with the student/resident.

If you are the person whom God has called to develop a program for Connections at your location, you might consider a sample letter like the one in Appendix A to send to Christian doctors in your community

A letter like this should be followed with a personal phone call from a doctor to each doctor who receives it.

A similar contact should be made with students or residents. A sample letter or e-mail to them might look like the one in Appendix B:

The graduate doctor committed to connecting with the student or resident should be the one to take the initiative in making the connection and should persist through the difficulties of tracking down the student or resident. As the mentor, you are the one whom God has called to serve in this way. God honors perseverance in his call as much as any other act of faith.

5. How do we get things started?

Your connection with the student or resident may remain superficial or may become a deep mentoring relationship. This will depend on time, mutual expectations, circumstances beyond your control and, most of all, the Holy Spirit. (We believe that the connection can be accomplished in many cases with a relatively minimal time commitment. We are only asking for you to commit to two meetings with the student/resident and then to go where God's Spirit leads you.)

A good way to approach the connection might be the following:

a. **First meeting:** contact the student/resident, tell him/her that you are the Christian doctor that CMDA had arranged for them to meet with; arrange a time of meeting. This first meeting would be casual without an agenda. A meeting in your home with your spouse would be nice, especially if there is a student or resident spouse who could attend. The goals for that meeting

would be to become friends and to inquire regarding any difficulties they might be facing in their transition. Specifically, you should ask them

- 1. How they are doing spiritually
- 2. Whether they have found a church home and
- 3. Whether they are practicing a personal devotional life.

You can then make suggestions as needed. At the end of the first meeting, we would like for you to set up a second meeting within two months.

b. Second meeting: The setting can be the same or can be held in your office or at a coffee shop---your decision. That meeting should continue to expand the friendship and inquiry into problems but also become more directional in an advisory capacity, based on perceived needs. Prayer should be a part of every meeting.

c. Long term plans: If you both agree to a longer term relationship, then you should decide how often, where you would like to meet and then set the next meeting date. This is where your wisdom and God's Spirit should guide you.

You may see that it is best to continue a very informal prayer and share relationship. You may feel that deeper discipleship tools are needed. Either way, we suggest you contact your CMDA Area Director or Regional Director, discuss the situation and receive any advice or resources you might need.

We suggest that you meet at least 4 times yearly and probably more often than that, up to once weekly. The more often you meet, the more opportunities the Holy Spirit has to work through you into their lives.

If you develop a true mentoring relationship, we would suggest you work through a section of the Bible together and focus on real life application in the world of medicine or dentistry. I Peter or Mark would be good places to start. In true mentoring, confidentiality and accountability are key components within each session.

6. What resources should we use?

Initially, as above, we would recommend you start with relationship building and the Bible. These, plus possibly the opportunity to shadow you at you work, are the most important tools you will need.

If you wish to study more deeply regarding developing significant mentoring relationships, the following books have been used to some benefit:

Building Church Leaders published by Leadership Resources at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com; section on mentoring

Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others, John Maxwell and Jim Dornan (Thomas Nelson, 1997)

As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship, Howard Hendricks (Moody, 1999)

Connecting: the Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life, Paul D Stanley and J. Robert Clinton (NavPress, 1992)

CMDA will develop an e-community for those who establish relationships of influence so that each of you can ask each other for advice.

CMDA will establish a web page entitled Connections with regular updates with mentoring suggestions

The CMDA Life Transformation Group I brochure offers good accountability questions to ask with each session in a mentoring relationship

7. How about opposite gender relationships?

No matter how innocent, opposite gender relationships can lead to unplanned sin or misunderstanding. Therefore it is always best to have more than two people present if you are connecting with a student or resident of the opposite gender. It is usually also best, for reasons of experience and understanding, to connect male with male and female with female in such relationships. However, this is often not possible in a given location. Rather

than forgoing the connection, it would be best to either have a spouse present or for two or three students/residents meet with one mentor.

8. Group vs private connections?

One on one relationships are usually best but sometimes a group is the only good way to develop a relationship that leads to influence, as above. The group dynamics and additional time required will prevent some of the student/residents from voicing their concerns and thus dilute the experience for some.

9. How long should we continue the Connection?

After the first few meetings, it will become clear if the relationship is one in which you may continue in a way that God will use you. If so, you should probably continue to meet throughout the training years. We would not recommend that you propose a long duration relationship from the front end, since few people are willing to commit to meeting with someone they don't know or trust, until that trust is built. Sometimes, circumstances will change and it will be best to discontinue the relationship before the training period is completed.

10. How do I hand them off into their future?

The graduate doctor should accept the solid responsibility to see that the trainee moves from their influence into the hands of other Christians. During training this means helping the trainee become firmly established in a local fellowship of believers, even though attendance may be spotty. At the end of the training period, you should determine where the trainee is moving and contact a Christian doctor in that location, asking them to connect with your trainee when they arrive. Information regarding Christian doctors in other locations should be available through your CMDA Regional Director or through the director of Campus and Community Ministries in Bristol, TN. If the Connection ends while the student/resident is still in the same location,

you should seek other Christian doctors you know who might influence the trainee while there.

Appendix A: Letter to doctors whom you wish to enlist

Dear Ministry Partner,

This fall marks the fourth year of mentoring medical students at the University of California Davis School of Medicine. These relationships have been very significant in the students' and mentors' lives.

My goal this year is to make mentoring less intimidating for the potential physician mentor. So, I invite you to *connect* with a first year medical student. The goal is to provide students with a *Connection* to a Christian practitioner. This person provides a significant relationship, helps introduce their student to the larger Christian medical community, models how they incorporate their faith into the practice of medicine, and ultimately impacts the student's spiritual and emotional well being.

What does making a *Connection* look like?

Based on information submitted by you and the student, I would pair you up. Please note you would only be paired with a same gender student. I would then suggest that you connect in the following ways:

- Initial contact by phone to introduce yourself and to set up a time when you can meet in person.
- Meet in person in a public place for coffee or a meal. At that time you can discern what direction this *Connection* will take.
- Invite the student to coat tail with you in your office or on rounds in the hospital.
- Invite the student and their spouse to your home for a meal

(continued)

After these contacts, you and the student can decide if you want to continue the *Connection*. I realize that every relationship is very different and the student's needs vary widely. Sometimes chemistry happens, and sometimes it doesn't.

I encourage you to begin this process as soon as I send you the name of a student and to maintain your *Connection* as long you're willing. Some *Connections* will continue throughout the student's four years at UCDSOM.

Every one of these *Connections* will look different and you are allowed great flexibility in how you *connect* with your student. But I am convinced that as hundreds of *Connections* are made between Christian physicians and students that the next generation of our colleagues will be better equipped to care for their patients, love their family, minister to their colleagues and fulfill the Great Commission.

If you are interested in connecting with a first year student, please email me ASAP (dcfalck@pol.net). I currently have seven students who would like to connect!

Together in His Service,

Darilyn

Appendix B: Letter to students to invite them into a Connection

Dear,

As you continue your training and seek to become the doctor that God created you to be, you may benefit from time spent with another Christian doctor who has walked in your footsteps. Over the next few years, you will not only be developing skills in healthcare, you will be making decisions that influence every thing you do in life. There are many destructive paths out there that can destroy or limit your influence for Christ. Since the Church began, it has always been God's plan for the faithful who have gone before to help point out the path for those who follow.

We want to offer you the opportunity to meet with a Christian doctor during your training and learn from their experience. The goal is that you would complete your training more capable of following God's will within the complex world of medicine (dentistry) than when you entered. (continued)

If you would like for us to connect you with a Christian doctor during your training, please e-mail us at _____, or call _____ at _____. If you call and no one is home, please leave a message so we can get back to you.

*We pray that you will have a great year of training ahead,
In Christ,*