

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL CAMPUS MINISTER

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I have considered the assignment given by your editor. The subjects offered were several and I attempted to write an article involving two or three of these, however, the results were less than what I wanted, so I have chosen one and submit it to your attention—"Characteristics of a Successful Campus Minister." The content of this article comes from personal observation as well as experience.

In twenty-nine years of service in campus ministry, the last fifteen of which have been as State Director, I have observed some very successful campus ministers. It is doubtful if any one campus minister possess all of these characteristics, but some have come close.

In this article, I present characteristics in addition to the standard ones of commitment to Student Work, excellence of preparation, and commitment to Christ as Lord. I also omit such characteristics as churchmanship and denominational loyalty.

The most successful campus ministers are first and last committed to the discipline of private prayer, Bible study and devotional time. The term "discipline" is key here for it describes the process necessary to achieve a productive private devotional time. Schedules are always full, time demands are constant and family pressures are frequently such that the campus minister finds "private quiet" time difficult to maintain. The successful campus minister develops a sense of self discipline to allow the Holy Spirit to provide spiritual food and growth each day in order to address the demands of an ongoing schedule of "giving" both emotionally and spiritually.

Speaking of time and self discipline, the successful campus ministers I have known have all been excellent time managers. It is not accidental that effective campus

ministers have developed their own "definite purpose," "philosophy" or "life goals" and are systematically going about the business of implementing them. Successful campus ministers are aware of the basic truths to which their lives are committed. I have observed campus ministers who appear to have distilled their life goal or philosophy down to a dozen or so statements which guide their entire ministry. It is evident because of the way they repeatedly refer to these truths and principles including theological, psychological, relational and family priorities.

In addition to the above it is evident in the life of the productive campus minister that effective time management is an ongoing self improvement project. There are many time management systems one can employ; however, all appear to have similar elements. These include careful calendar planning, reflecting ones definite purpose or philosophy, utilization of a monthly, weekly and daily action list (to be done list), and a system of effective record keeping. A knowledge of one's own "time wasters" and a diligence to systematically eliminate these is an indication of a campus minister committed to a life of professional and spiritual excellence.

The essential characteristic of successful campus ministers is the possession of a great dream or goal. The minister who achieves great things has great dreams. The saying "we either plan to succeed, or fail to plan and plan to fail" is as true in campus ministry as it is in any other type of ministry or profession.

I have observed several types of campus ministers. One type is the "maintenance ministry" person. They strive to maintain a "good program," and frequently a "good program" is all that is ever achieved. Another type I have observed is the "goal oriented" or "dream oriented" person. This person always comes up with creative ideas which lead to the achievement of a "grand dream" that never dies. The latter type of campus minister comes up with a way to succeed regardless of the circumstances.

The "dream oriented, goal oriented" individual is constantly motivated. The dream is the positive push needed when fatigue sets in. A dream or magnificent obsession is the one single difference between a successful and an unsuccessful campus minister. The "great dream"

will keep one on a positive track even when statistical results are not immediately obvious. Even the scriptures indicate "without a vision, the people perish."

The goals set by successful campus ministers I have known are big, exciting and not easily achieved. These goals are ones that if and when achieved guarantee self satisfaction, self fulfillment, calling validation and produce a sense of inner joy, happiness and energy.

A successful campus minister is one who sets and develops his/her own goals, not just borrowing the goals of others whether they be national or state leaders. For a goal (dream) to be a primary driving force, it must belong to the individual—it is always "My Goal." Successful campus ministers I have known are not "excuse oriented." They do not blame external limitations or barriers that keep them from being successful. These motivated people constantly focus on what can be achieved rather than why things can't be achieved. They are not "limitation focused," but are "visionary and success focused." I seldom hear these people say, "If I had such and such I could be successful." Dynamic campus ministers always know they can secure what is needed if they set their minds to it, organize and plan for it, and refuse to be discouraged. Such "If I had..." items might include a better center, an adequate budget, more staff, more associational/church support, a van, better students, better trained council members, etc. All of these are in the power of any campus minister to secure if adequately motivated and if the campus minister believes it can be achieved. Napoleon Hill once said "what the mind can conceive and believe it can achieve." It is not surprising then that "goal oriented" people are frequently sought out by others for their "secrets to a successful program."

Closely related to the above factor is the "thought control characteristic." The one most precious freedom campus ministers possess is the freedom to control their own thought processes. The campus minister who is in control of his/her own thought processes is not easily discouraged. They are not easily convinced to depart from a predetermined direction or goal, and they are perceived as calm, secure and poised. Students respond to this type leader for students interpret the above characteristics as an

indication that the campus minister has credibility and integrity.

I know several very successful campus ministers who possess a characteristic that almost always insures a great program. This characteristic is persistence. Once a direction, goal or dream has been set the successful campus minister just keeps on and refuses to be derailed in that set direction. Changes in approach are made as a result of good feedback, but persistence in purpose yields long range results. Flexibility has been established as a positive attribute; however, flexibility is not to be confused with lack of persistence. Flexibility relates to the method of goal achievement, not to the easy or quick change or alteration of goals.

Another characteristic of successful campus ministers I have observed is in the area of leadership development. Leaders are not just managers. Campus ministers who train and develop great student leaders soon develop strong and great student work programs.

The successful campus ministers with high self esteem and a definite purpose in his/her professional life will allow student leaders to fail at times knowing that in this process students will (if given adequate guidance) learn from failures. The campus minister who constantly "jumps in and rescues a given project or program" may well be training students to repeat their behavior so the campus minister will repeat the "rescue procedure" over and over. Students may well perceive the campus minister as needing to be the rescuer in order to appear successful. In contrast, students may perceive the campus minister to be so insecure as to be personally threatened by any program failure.

Successful campus ministers I have known have achieved their greatest success in seeing the lives of students changed and in seeing multitudes of students become successful, dedicated Christian leaders in their church, profession and family.