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DISTANCE COACHING: PHONE CALLS

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CONTACT

A helpful article written by Jill Young on the benefits of coaching campuses from a distance.

Phone Calls

The art and science of contact

Jill Young



Jill Young works with the Student LINC ministry in Orlando, Florida. She coaches students in the Southeast region. Jill loves taking her 13-foot Sunfish sailboat out on the lakes of Central Florida.

The first time I gained an understanding of distance ministry was talking with a Southeast LINC staff woman at a regional staff gathering. I asked her more about what she did and I was intrigued. She told me about all the students she brought to Christmas conference and how her contact with them was mostly by phone. I said, “How come we don’t hear more about this?!”

When my journey on staff found me at a desk on the Orlando Student LINC team in 1995, I felt like a freshman in college. I was excited but didn’t know anything. Even though I had been on the field six years, I was ignorant about how this distance ministry thing would work. I was put through the crash course on how someone goes through the process of contact to filtered leader.

Then came the first phone call. Ring, ring. Panicked, I looked at my LINC teammates and said, “What do I do?”

Julie Stanikas said, “Pick it up, you know what to do.” Ring. My hand lifted the receiver.

“Student LINC, this is Jill. How can I help you?” And believe it or not, I did know what to do. I went through the telephone interview sheet and informed the person of who we are and how we could help. Then I dropped our “first mailing” in the mail.

A campus ministry is born

Now, I can’t say whether that first phone call was Josh or not, but within my first week, Josh did call the 800 number. Our receptionist rang my phone, “Jill, there is young man named Josh on the line and he is interested in starting a ministry on his campus.” Yes, it was that straightforward.

Josh, a sophomore at the time, was a student at Jacksonville University. There are about 2,000 students at this private, liberal school. His voice let you know that this guy had a future in either radio or speaking. He was articulate as I asked him how he found out about us and asked him how Campus Crusade could help him.

He explained he was frustrated with the other ministries on campus because they didn’t reach out to the unbelievers. He also shared about his calling to be a pastor someday. He said a former staff member told him to give Campus Crusade a call to see if we would help. That’s where we began.

We set up a time for a weekly phone appointment immediately because I had a good feeling that Josh’s application would be fine. I scheduled Josh on Fridays because I knew that talking then would end my week on an encouraging note. He was familiar with the Four Spiritual Laws and already sharing his faith weekly so my training with him over the phone was brief in this respect. Next, I went through the Holy Spirit booklet over the phone. I told him to have a pen handy so he could draw lines in the booklet. He was so thankful to go through this booklet. The next Friday I asked him if he had a chance to look at it again and he said, “That booklet has really impacted me. I have read through it daily.” I was so jazzed!

JU is a tough campus. Even though JU is located in a southern state, it has a northeastern flavor. Thirty-five percent of the students are from out of state and many are from the northeast. Josh’s local, southern accent and Baptist background caused some barriers to get around. Josh and I talked through a plan of attack.

The three years I coached Josh over the phone, I trained him to use the Holy Spirit booklet, basic follow up and a strategic planning process. It wasn't until his senior year when he began to see some true critical mass come together. There were only about seven students involved and six of them were graduating.

The seventh student was Nathan, who is now the "key student" leader at JU. Nathan has led the ministry to the next level where there are three cell groups and a group of eight core leaders. Last year, they brought 12 students to the Christmas conference, given away Freshman Survival Kits for the last two years, and are finally seeing a couple of involved new believers in their movement. God is working in their hearts and using this motley crew of students to share the gospel with each person on campus. Four and a half years ago this was not true.

The Art

Well, Josh and Nathan are just a couple of the key students and volunteers I've had the privilege of coaching. There's Staci, Holly, Kristin, Joe, Jim, Bart, Dave, Andrew, Mike, Alex (girl), Sarah, Joseph, another Josh, another Mike, Beth, Lisa and so many others. It's amazing that each key leader represents between five and 50 others who have been or are being influenced through my coaching that one person.

One thing I've learned about coaching key leaders over the phone is re-learning what it means to listen.

When I talk to someone in person, I pick up on visual cues as well as listen to what the person is saying. On the phone, I find I must pick up audible cues.

How does the person sound? Excited, down, encouraged or discouraged? Why is there silence? Is she distracted, thinking, or just not paying attention? What is the noise in the background? A TV, radio, people talking in the hall, interference? Why is there hesitation? Does he agree, disagree or have a better idea of what to do? If I don't listen for the cues, I'm not building a relationship with my key leader. If I don't ask questions based on the cues, I miss out on the character building moments that come from being in ministry together.

One time, I was talking with a student and heard the clicking of a keyboard in the background. I asked, "What's that noise I hear?" He said, "Oh, I'm typing." Wanting to believe the best, I said, "Are you taking notes on our conversation?" He said, "No, I'm doing my e-mail. I can listen and do e-mail at the same time." I told him that I'm sure he could but that I'd appreciate him giving me his full attention because it was like him talking to two people at the same time. One of us would feel left out because his attention was elsewhere. He understood and has never done that since.

Another time, I was talking with a student and she was telling me about a difficult situation and then she stopped mid-sentence. I wasn't sure what happened, so I asked, "Are you crying?" There was a muffled, "Mm-hmm," on the other end of the line. I wanted to jump into the phone and put an arm around her shoulder and give her a big hug. Since I couldn't do that, I told her my intentions and sent an e-mail later with some encouragement.

The Science

The appointment itself is similar to appointments I had on campus. I think through ahead of time what items to cover. It seems this is more crucial on the phone since I get one shot with not just a student, but the student leader. Another benefit is that the student or volunteer is usually excited to hear from me because they need direction, encouragement and training.

Generally, the first 10-15 minutes is devoted to seeing how they are doing and listening for clues for what could be beneath. Many times I find people are much more open on the phone than in person because of the safety of distance. This helps since I don't have the "down time" to just hang out with them. The next 30-45 minutes I use to coach them in the next step of training for them personally and/or just talking about the next step for the movement on their campus.

Recently, the ministry at Flagler College seemed to be going well and I noticed that the student leader talked frequently about giving his testimony. So, I asked him to e-mail me his testimony. With Bart on his cell phone (I can hear the bell tower on his campus) and me correcting on the computer, we reviewed his testimony. It was a great appointment. I sent him the updated version for him to complete.

My frequent outline for an appointment is using the critical path elements as a springboard for questions. How is prayer going? What's happening with people sharing their faith? What material are the leaders using in cell groups? Who is the point-person for recruiting people to Christmas conference?

Benefits

When I explain to my friends at church what I do, the answer is, "So you must travel a lot." My reply, "No, I do most of my work over the phone." Since I am located in

Orlando and most of the campuses I work with are in Florida, the assumption is that I'm on the road a great deal. If I could narrow down the two weighty benefits I've experienced from doing distance ministry over the phone, they would be time effectiveness and student ownership.

Using the phone cuts down on travel time. Jacksonville is only a three-hour drive from Orlando. I travel there only once a year. Every time I travel there it kills me to think about how many campuses I could be talking with on the phone as the hours pass. I travel to lead a leadership workshop seminar. It lasts about eight hours from start to finish. I cover leadership principles from the Word, our leadership model and give the leaders from the campuses which are represented time to plan the first six weeks of the following fall.

I also get sick when I think about how many hours I spent doing "expansion work" as a new staff member. I drove with another staff guy for a total of four hours once a week. Every single one of those appointments I could have done on the phone. None of our evangelistic contacts ever showed and doing "randoms" really didn't bear much fruit.

The phone also helps with the "no shows." Usually the student or volunteer is there for me when I call, but on occasion, an appointment is missed. No time is lost on trying to figure out the next thing to do. I can call other contacts to find out their interest, mail some items, work on other ministry projects.

The other weighty benefit is student ownership. The students I coach don't mind if I can't be there on campus. My first conversation with them includes the vision of the scope of reaching every student and how I ask the Lord to lead me to people He's already prepared to reach their local campus. They understand there are other students

like them who need resources, training and encouragement. In fact, I'll say, "Well, I need to go. I'm about to talk with Sarah at ____ campus." That student says, "Cool, tell her 'hey' and 'we're praying for her campus.'" One student attended a community college that had two other branches. He is hanging posters to surface leaders on these other campuses! Is that student ownership or what?

I do get to see the students at fall retreats, Christmas conferences or for a

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spring leadership day. It's like meeting a pen pal, but better. One of my favorite memories is from Christmas conference. Some of the staff said, "Jill, this girl Sarah is looking for you." I said, "I'm looking for her!" When we caught each other's eyes, she came running up to me with a big smile and a big hug. Many thought we knew each other from a summer project, but we had just talked on the phone for the last 10 weeks.

I not only meet the students and volunteers I talk with, but I also meet the students they've talked to me about. These are the ones we've prayed for and some who have received Christ because the student leader stepped out in faith on his campus.

Not only is it great for me to meet the students in person at conferences, but it is great for them to meet each other. I make a point to talk about what God is doing on other campuses I'm working with so the student leaders know they aren't alone in what they are trusting God to do. When they get together and talk about their ministries, it is a joy to observe. They begin to coach each other in fundraising, prayer, evangelistic ideas and taking the step to go to conferences or summer projects.

I have the students fill out an evaluation after the spring leadership day and they always say they want more time to talk to each other about what they are doing on campus. These

conference gatherings are an opportunity to coach without an interruption of student ownership.

As I look back on the last four and a half years of using the phone to coach ministries, I am amazed. God multiplied my influence in ways I can't imagine. The scope still looms ahead as we press on to reach every campus. You can bet that wherever I go I will not give up using the phone as much as possible; not just for how it benefits me, but for how it benefits the student leader.

Well, I'm off to do a phone appointment...