

kidunique



Helping Kids Discover Who They Are

Dan Webster

with Tony Schwartz and Chris Trethewey

KidUnique

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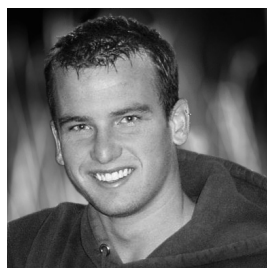


This book is dedicated to three young men whom I love and who call me “Dad.” It continues to be my great honor to encourage them to live their extraordinary lives.

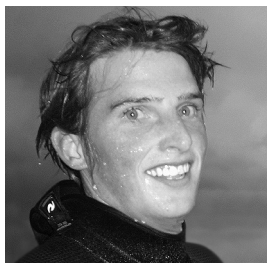
To my sons I say, “Go big or don’t go at all.”



Luke—You are one of the hardest workers I have ever known. Keep showing up and doing what you do. You have great aesthetic instincts—trust them. You have a big heart. Keep letting it be seen by your dear wife Whitney and others you love. You are content when most are restless. Enjoy the core of life. You are a real and non-judgmental friend—do not change. You enjoy life deeply when others complain. Stay grateful. And you are one of the toughest men I have ever known so keep knocking down every challenge.



Landon—You have a genius way of seeing life—trust your instincts. You have an amazing work ethic. Keep working hard and you will get the life you always wanted. You have never backed down from any big challenge yet. Stay brave and continue killing the giants. You are a deep and loyal friend—fearlessly love from your heart. Stay on the dance floor. Keep hearing the music. You refuse to settle. Keep the bar high. And keep loving excellence. Make your contribution beautiful.



Logan—You enjoy life. Keep living the dream. You are smart—do not apologize for that. You are romantic. Keep letting your heart show. You are a leader—push the right agenda forward. You are secure and instinctive—follow your gut. You are always the first one off the cliff. Be wise in the risks you take. You are trustworthy. Never underestimate the power of trust. And you have a heart for God. Keep listening and following.



Gratitudes

I am not sure how to say thanks to all those who have made a significant contribution to my life, and by doing so, to this project. I learned a long time ago a person can only give what he has received, and I have received much from many.

Without sounding too corny, I want to begin by thanking my mom and dad. My dad passed in May of 1989, but I know he would be proud. Every younger man needs the admiration of an older man, and I miss his love and affirmation. Others have stepped in and are gifting me with light and encouragement, but a dad's voice is hard to replace. My mom's belief in me has never wavered. For Dave and Mona Webster I am grateful.

In 1995 I met Tom Paterson. Like so many others, Tom has dramatically impacted my life. He guided me through his amazing LifePlanning process into my second half. Tom is a true Yoda. I have never met anyone quite like him. A brilliant process thinker and sage, he not only taught me the value and potential of every human being, he models it every day. To be around Tom is to be valued. Everyone is extraordinary to Tom. I love that about him. He is a man of great sorrow and insight. Maybe one does not come without the other. Thanks, Tom, for guiding the way.

There are many others who read this manuscript and gave me real-world feedback on my lofty ideas. They brought me down to earth and made the content better. A special thanks goes out to my beloved wife Judy, Julian Petzold, Linda Lindquist-Bishop, Logan Webster, and Laura Schulenburg. Troy Murphy is a design genius and did the layout of the book. Way to go, stud! Jim Raymond's artistic eye and photos selection were critical. De Jackson did the heavy lifting on the editing side of things. U R the best! So many others told me not to quit on the book and that my thoughts mattered. To Joe Horness, Lamont Moon, Lance Murdock, Gus Gustafson, Brian and Mary Lubinski, Rob and Becky Englin, Tim Lowe, Rohn Ritzema, Dave and Lori Chow, Denny and Scoob Ellens, Jim and Lynn Eickhoff, and so many others—I bless you for your ongoing friendship, belief, and support.

Then there are Tony Schwartz and Chris Trethewey—two of the finest youth workers in America. They are even finer husbands, fathers, and men. Without their encouragement and expertise this project would never have seen paper. Tony is truly “all that” and never met a moment that is too big for him. I love this about him. Chris is a man of deep courage. He knows what it is like to love and lose a child. His passion for fathering inspires me, and his heart is as big as a Vegas jackpot. I am humbled that these men took the challenge of putting together the 31-Day Experience. Like me, this book would not be the same without them.

One last group I must thank is all my LifePlan™ friends. Over the last 18 months I have had the privilege of facilitating LifePlans for many wonderful and gifted people. They endured, and actually welcomed, interruptions when I talked about the content of this book as it relates to life process. As a result I received incredible input and sage advice. So, thanks to Jim, Ben, Guy, Molly, Lori, Manuel, Carter, Keith, Tim, Tom and Sheri, Aric, Dan, and Laura. To God be the glory.



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Tony Schwartz understands student ministry. When he was a sophomore in high school, some friends invited him to check out an awesome student ministry and it changed the direction of his life. Those experiences, and the influence of some great leadership, helped Tony find Christ. Building teams to create thriving student ministry, influential student leaders, and difference-making friendships are passions that drive him. Tony is the director of the Element Junior High Ministry at Central Christian Church in Henderson, Nevada. He is a graduate of Wheaton College and the Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. Tony and Lisa have been married for 19 years and have two strikingly handsome sons, Robby and Riley, and one little girl named Ellie, who is pretty beyond reasonable standards.

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Chris Trethewey is a member of the Executive Team at Central Christian Church, where thousands of people attend campuses each weekend, along with a global community who attend online. Chris has spent over 15 years in youth ministry, where his passion for students to thrive in their faith continues to be a focus. He is passionate about the family and is a sought after speaker at both student and family events. He and his wife, Kim, have two beautiful and creative daughters, Kiara and Claire.

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WHAT KIDS NEED MOST

Introduction


Are You Serious?

*Point your kids in the right direction—
when they're old they won't be lost.*

Proverbs 22:6 The Message

"...I have written your name on the palms of my hands."

Isaiah 49:16

A black and white photograph of a person sitting in a dark, textured environment. The person is wearing a light-colored hoodie with the hood pulled up over their head, completely obscuring their face. They are also wearing a dark, buttoned-up jacket over the hoodie and jeans with a large, torn patch on the right knee. Their hands are clasped together in their lap. The lighting is dramatic, coming from the side, highlighting the textures of the clothing and the person's hands against the dark background.

*"You'll never amount to
anything. You are an ugly b#\$%*,
a slut, and you will never be
successful."*

What we are up against

Beth was a sophomore in high school when I first met her. She was invited to the student ministry I led. She was bright and gifted in the arts. She also carried a crippling backpack of hurt that put her future well-being in jeopardy. Her parents were not healthy people. Her mom was miserable and afraid to leave the house. Her dad was mean and hated his life. Often when a man does not have the courage to face and fix his life, he turns his pain on others. In this case both parents' personal frustration cascaded onto Beth. Unable to manage his misery, Beth's dad would say to her as she left for school in the morning, *"You'll never amount to anything. You are an ugly b#\$%*, a slut, and you will never be successful."* I know, I cannot believe it either. But these are the words he spoke. They stuck to Beth's soul like pine sap.

The unrelenting accumulation of these words fueled a goal in Beth to one day prove her father wrong. Her longing was to become wildly successful in a career. On the surface there is nothing wrong with that goal. Achieving something in life is a good thing. But her goal was not fueled by healthy motivations like desiring to honor God or serving the world with her gift. It was driven by an abiding bitterness toward her dad. Her goal was to one day stand at her father's deathbed, raise her middle finger, and say, *"Screw you dad, you're wrong, I am successful. Now go to hell, you bastard."*

What if Beth's parents had been more positive and encouraging? What if her dad had told her every now and then that she was beautiful, that she mattered? The vision of this book is just that: Kids matter. Its goal is to rally parents, teachers, coaches, youth workers, and anyone else who cares about a kid to get off the sidelines and into the discovery game. They can do it by expressing a seriously ridiculous kind of love that says...*you matter, you have gifts and talents to share with the world, you have a future of hope and meaning...and I will walk with you for a season to help you discover who you are.* What might that look like? How does such a thing happen? Let me paint a picture.



Inspiration from gym class

When it comes to physical education, the Naperville (Illinois) School District 203 has it right.¹ In a day when a third of U.S. schoolchildren are overweight, 90 percent of Naperville District 203 kids are fit. Not only are they fit, these students score consistently higher than the national average on tests in math and science. How can this be? Is there something in the water, or what?

What is happening in Naperville can be traced back to a visionary junior high physical education teacher who came across a newspaper article in 1990 reporting that the health of U.S. children was declining. This concerned and innovative coach began a new movement: the New P.E. The New P.E. has shifted the emphasis in physical education from sports and skill to effort and fitness. Along the way he discovered that when exercise is done right, it dramatically affects a kid on many levels, especially the ability to learn.

This New P.E. curriculum has been designed to teach kids the principles, practice, and importance of fitness. Every school in Naperville District 203 uses a TriFit assessment. This is a computerized health diagnostic system administered to kids beginning in fifth grade. It gives young students targets for heart rate, blood pressure, body fat, and the rest. It is a proven method of motivating kids to stay fit. One of the physical education teachers in the school district put it this way: It's his job to make kids know all of the things they need to know to keep themselves fit.

What is really compelling about this program is that at graduation, students are handed a 14-page health assessment document that chronicles their health history from fifth grade to graduation. It combines fitness scores with other factors like blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and tracks lifestyle and family history surveys. One researcher said it is an astonishingly comprehensive document by any professional health standard, one that an 18-year-old can have in hand when stepping into adult life. At 18, he or she walks out of high school with a diploma and a 14-page document that acts



as a guide to the future, offering direction on how to stay fit and keep a brain nimble. How cool is that? Nice job, Naperville!

The bigger picture

As much as I admire what these schools are doing, how much more life-affecting would it be if a student could walk out of junior high or high school with a different type of document? Not one that chronicles their health history, but one that tracks a history of gifts, talents, and uniqueness. This one would be lovingly prepared by an adult who is crazy about them. It contains the truth of who a kid is at his or her core. It would be the fruit of dozens of conversations with a kid. The goal is for a kid to walk out of high school and into adult life with a compilation of insights gathered over the years that uncovers the very essence of who they are. The document would contain precious truths discovered as a kid bumps into life, day in and day out. It would reveal who this kid is—and who he or she isn't.

Maybe it would take the form of a letter or a journal that records thoughts and insights over a period of time. Or maybe it takes the form of this book that will be cluttered with scribbled thoughts and insights after you do the *31-Day Experience*.

For Parker J. Palmer it will take the form of a letter he is preparing for his granddaughter, whom he greatly loves.

In those early days of my granddaughter's life, I began observing the inclinations and proclivities that were planted in her at birth. I noticed, and I still notice, what she likes and dislikes, what she is drawn toward and repelled by, how she moves, what she does, what she says.

I'm gathering observations in a letter. When my granddaughter reaches her late teens or early 20s, I will make sure that my letter finds its way to her, with a preface something like this: *"Here is a sketch of who you were from your earliest days in this world. It is not a definitive picture—only you can draw that. But it*



was sketched by a person who loves you very much. Perhaps these notes will help you do sooner something your grandfather did only later: remember who you were when you first arrived and reclaim the gift of true self.” 2

Can you feel the power a letter like that could have? How precious will that letter be to her in the coming years? Creating such a letter is a **sacred task**³ that will call for our best effort and engagement. To observe inclinations and proclivities, likes and dislikes, what kids are drawn to and repulsed by, how they move, what they do, what they say, and what their gifts and talents are will require the best of our love, patience, thought, and focus. But ask yourself: What task is more important?

College and professional athletes spend long hours dissecting opposing teams to increase their chances of winning. Smart businesspeople spend weeks or months investigating potential mergers to raise the probabilities of success in a future venture. Isn't it wise to invest the needed time and energy into the all-important task of helping kids discover who they are so they can **win in life**⁴?

Parents, youth workers, and teachers are all concerned for the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual development of the young. This book equips those entrusted with the development of the next generation to go one step further and help kids begin to solve the mystery of “me.” Every life is a mystery waiting to be uncovered, not a mistake needing to be corrected. Entering adulthood with both a foundation of loving interaction with an adult and clarity addressing who they are (the “true self” as Palmer mentions) is priceless. And investing the needed time and energy to help them win in life is just plain smart.

This book is for anyone who wants to impact the lives of kids, but most of the time I will be writing as though speaking to parents. “Kid” is a word I will use throughout this book to describe the focus of our attention. Your “kid” may be your own child or a student you teach, coach, or lead in a small group. Maybe he or she is a relative who has had a tough go of it, so

“Every life is a mystery waiting to be uncovered, not a mistake needing to be corrected.”



you are stepping in to help. As far as age goes, “kid” can refer to children in elementary school or students in college. A good friend coaches linebackers at a Division 1 university and he calls his players “kids.” Obviously, the application of all the principles shared here will have to be adjusted based on age. We will talk more about that later, and clear direction will be given in the *31-Day Experience*.

The payoff

When it is all said and done, we want a kid who is engaged by a KidUnique adult to:

- feel loved and know they matter because someone paid attention to them.
- have a boost in self-esteem as each is reminded he or she is a miracle, not just a mess.
- have an increased belief in self and respect for others.
- discover their talents and strengths by trying new things.
- be closer to understanding their true selves and be OK with that.
- learn to both appreciate and live into their true selves.
- grow by going for new adventures and opportunities.
- hear words identifying “what’s right” instead of only “what’s wrong.”
- learn to hear the voice of God and receive the help of God, because someone prays for them daily.

For these objectives to be reached, we must learn how to develop a nurturing relationship with a kid. We nurture business deals, investments, and even



“Kids today are longing for older, trustworthy adults who will listen, care, and just be around occasionally.”

our gardens. KidUnique is about nurturing a living, breathing human being, adored and made by God.

Nurturing a kid is encouraging him or her to grow, develop, thrive, and be successful. It builds **value**⁵ into them. How do kids learn they have value? Kids learn this core truth by how you treat them, day in and day out. Your words and deeds expose what you believe about them. When you listen, cheer for, hope the best for, pray for, see, and love, you are nurturing a kid and clearly saying he or she has value. Kids see their value in our eyes, they hear it in our words, and they feel it in our actions. It seems like every recently published study I read stresses the transforming power of nurturing relationships with those who are young.⁶

I can understand why this is true. These studies tell us that the majority of today's teenagers are angry and hurt because few adults are interested enough to really get to know them. They feel abandoned as a group and left to raise themselves.⁷ Kids today are longing for older, trustworthy adults who will listen, care, and just be around occasionally. A friend recently shared with me how life impacting it was for him when an adult stepped toward him in high school. He said, *“He didn’t want anything or judge me in the way my parents and others did. He simply cared about me as a person and continually expressed that he believed in me. Every time I heard that I felt great about myself.”*

Nothing is more powerful than a loving relationship where an older person values a kid by expressing interest in his or her life. Every person needs and longs for the admiration of someone older and wiser. KidUnique brings us face-to-face with young people. We get the privilege of **reflecting God’s heart**⁸ to them as we engage their world and search for the core of who God has made them to be.

KidUnique teaches adults (and students, too, we hope) the principles, practice, and importance of sorting a kid out and helping him or her live life from God’s plan. You will be able to **sort a kid out**⁹ as you track insights



gleaned by paying attention to his or her interaction with life. These insights get collected, discussed, and evaluated for validity. As you read this book, record important discoveries on the pages or purchase a special journal to track your insights concerning your kid.

In the end, each kid benefits by taking a huge step forward in getting a clear view of who he or she is, as well as strengths and passions. This becomes a powerful force guiding kids into what can feel like a very tumultuous future. It is our job to help kids move into the future from a position of strength, not weakness—confidence, not fear.

You may be thinking...are you serious? How in the world will I ever pull this off? Do not panic. The four-window model below will help create a framework to guide you through the core principles necessary to discover who a kid is and help you collect insights about the kid you love. Throughout this book you will get your arms around the four-window model, and then in the back of the book there is a practical and transformational *31-Day Experience* that applies these four concepts.

The four windows

Let me introduce the four-window model. These windows unleash a powerful force for discovery in the way we see kids. Every window is a compelling lens through which we watch a kid grow. As you actively look through and understand the four windows, they will alter the relational compass in your brain as to how you relate to kids in the future.





Window One:

OBSERVATION...the power of “seeing” kids.

We track, assess, and confirm insights.



Window Two:

EXPLORATION...the power of inspiring kids to learn about themselves by trying new opportunities and adventures.

We discuss these and identify interests and strengths.



Window Three:

AFFIRMATION...the power of identifying and telling a kid what’s right with him or her.

We see it and say it.



Window Four:

REVELATION...the power of listening for God’s whispers that touch the identity and calling of a kid.

We pray for our kids and listen for the “heavenly messengers.”





These four windows are different lenses to peer into each moment of the day. They make the expression of our love an action. They position us around a kid so that we can gain perspective. **Observation** will put us right in front of a kid looking straight on and seeing what we can see. **Exploration** puts us right next to a kid as we inspire discovery and help process reactions. **Affirmation** puts us behind a kid speaking encouragement and reminding what's right with him or her. **Revelation** puts us on our knees at the feet of a kid as we earnestly ask God for insight and help.

I hope the vision of what can happen is getting clearer. An adult who is engaged in KidUnique turns loose the power of the four windows. They move from the **PASSIVE zone** of relating to kids into the **ACTIVE zone**. In the next chapter we will consider what a fully engaged KidUnique adult looks like and how personally he or she takes this work. You will be able to assess how you are doing and how you can move into full engagement. The following four chapters give the details of the four-window model and how to unleash its power in the life of a kid. Then, you will be encouraged to do a resentment assessment before extending an invitation for a kid to join the process of discovery. The last part of this book contains a *31-Day Experience* to help kids directly discover who they are.

I can't wait to see what will happen as you step up to the plate and get intentional about this task. I know you will grow as much as the kid you love.

"An adult who is engaged in KidUnique turns loose the power of the four windows."