

## Leading in Challenging Times

Welcome to this session of Guidestone University.

A number of years ago, I was serving as administrator in a private university. Private colleges and universities are enrollment driven because they need to generate or grow enrollment in order to generate revenue. This college in particular had experienced a number of years of decline or stagnation in enrollment, and at the same time they had this aggressive vision for growth. So, coming in the door I was under enormous pressure to deliver significant growth for the university.

I'm a fairly intense person, those that know me know I'm on almost all the time when I'm working, and so my team, right away begin feeling that pressure. I kept telling myself even kept trying to encourage them and said, "Hey look. This pressure that we feel is temporary." but I really could see no end in sight, and I kept pushing harder; I kept pushing faster, and at that same time I was dealing with some of my own personal demons.

My wife was trying to manage our home and take care for our young daughter at that time, and she was really doing that on her own. I felt like such a hypocrite. Here I was trying to develop my team, trying to grow a university, doing what I thought was great work, trying to help other people improve when I was the one that needed to change.

My wife remembers the day when we stood in the kitchen at our home and she was standing across the counter, and I was explaining to her what I was experiencing, what I was feeling – what my team was feeling, and she listens supportively and patiently like she always does. After I was done, she said, "Mike, there was a time about six months ago, that I felt like a part of you was dying, and I don't know if you'll ever going to get it back." I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me about that?" she said, "I wanted you to be able to work through the challenge on your own without the added pressure from me."

It was during this same chaotic time in my career and our family that I received a phone call one afternoon as I was walking across the campus. In fact, I remember like it was yesterday. I remember exactly where I was standing in the parking lot, I was just below

Mercer Hall in the campus of Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee. I remember picking up the phone, I remember the voice on the other line was of a young man that I'd been working for about a year, we had hired him straight out of college. I remember hearing immediately the hurt that was in his voice and I'm thinking, something's not right. I was crazy-busy that day; I was getting ready to leave town.

He started telling me, "I've made a decision – a bad decision. I did something that I shouldn't have done that has hurt my relationship with my girlfriend, relationship with my family. It's affecting my work, it's affecting a lot of things in my life and I really just need to talk to somebody about it."

I remember saying to him, "I want to help you. I'm getting ready to leave town in about an hour, my wife and I are leaving town, we're going to spend a weekend in the Smokey Mountain with a group of young professionals that we are working with them. I think you need to go pack a bag; I think you need to go with us."

Over the next few months, I spent scores of hours with this young man. What I learned from that experience was life-changing for me. As we get started in this course, I want to share with you three things that I learned during this crazy time in my life personally, this crazy time, chaotic time professionally, as I walked this path with this young man.

Several years ago, I was working with an executive coaching firm and the CEO used an illustration that significantly impacted how I approach challenging situations. How I lead through challenging situations, both in my life and in our work. I think it will help us to frame our conversations today, and so I want you to take a look at this quick video.

My favorite part of that video was the guy doing the air guitar. He's the guide on the raft – that's just awesome; that was amazing! Have you ever rafted a river like that? That's exactly what I felt like during this chaotic time in my life. Like in any moment, I would be capsized, in any moment I would be thrown out of the raft.

Maybe you're listening today, and you feel like you've been thrown out of your raft; you've been thrown off your game. You're flailing around on the water; you're flailing around in the churning white water; you're thrown out. Maybe somebody threw you out. Maybe you came here today and you're feeling like that. Whatever your situation is, we're going to walk you through a simple process that will help you make a few

fundamental decisions that will simplify thousands of other decisions for you in the future. I'm excited about getting started on this journey with you.

We'll see you in the next session of Guidestone University as we get started.