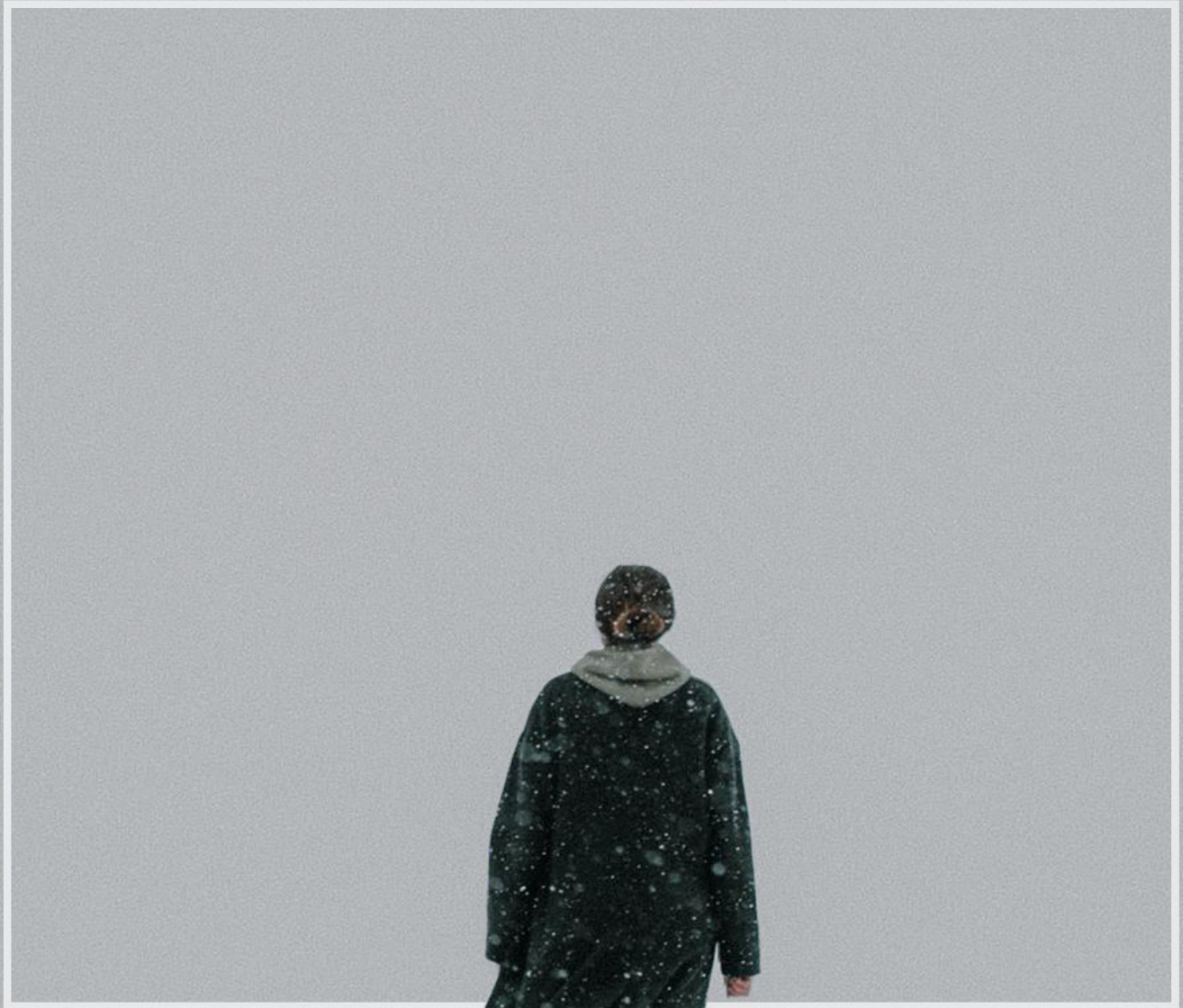


FORMATION

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Featured Articles by:
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**WE WEREN'T CREATED
TO LEAD ALONE**

A Journal by Formation Community Inc.

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WE WEREN'T CREATED TO LEAD ALONE

A NOTE FROM JEFF

Formation Community,

As a Creative Pioneer in the 5 Voices system and an Enneagram Type 5, I'm naturally inclined to spend a lot of time in my head solving problems and strategically dreaming. Socially, I also bias toward protecting my energy.

Growing up, I spent hours alone in our cold Wisconsin basement building elaborate forts and marble runs. I built igloos outside in the snow to dwell in the cold silence. For reasons I can't go into here, my tendency toward isolation was both natural and nurtured.

In 2017, when an early form of what is now called Formation Community was conceived, we identified the following problem statement:

Isolated leaders can't sustain impact.

Over the years, I had seen and experienced my fair share of trauma inflicted by unhealthy leaders. I had also realized that the resulting cultures full of mistrust, entitlement, fear, and apathy destroy organizations and communities.

Perhaps more importantly, though, I realized that my tendency toward leading in isolation was putting me on a bad path. So I don't think it's a mistake that my vocational path has led to this organization and community that holds this primary belief:

We weren't created to lead alone.

In this issue of The Formation Journal, we're exploring this truth from a couple different angles

through the voices of two members of our current Formation Leader Certification cohort—Dr. Matthew Smith, founding president of Hildegard College, and Christine Nolf, a pastor at Redemption Church.

In his piece entitled "Freedom in Formation," Smith explores the truth that structure and form empower creativity, and that undefined liberty is paralyzing.

"Creation requires form. The sonnet form is not a cage that imprisons a writer. It's a dwelling place in which a poem is born and grows. It's—dare I say it—an incubator."

In her piece entitled "There is Time," Nolf, compels us to pause and consider how to replace our drive for achievement with time for connection and care for ourselves and each other.

"Taking time for the ongoing work of trust and relationship building has led to decades long partnerships that are much more productive, nimble, and responsive than I could be alone."

As you experience this month's journal, I invite you to identify a challenge you face in your own leadership journey, to make time to curiously explore it with others, and to submit yourself to a structure in which you find freedom to be formed.

Because you weren't created to lead alone.

With you,

— Jeff Tanner

Formation Community

Founder + Coach

To read more from Jeff,
follow him over on Substack: www.jltanner.com





FREEDOM IN *formation*

In 1807, at the height of his career as a writer, William Wordsworth published a book of poems. The Romantic poets were known for whimsy and imaginative freedom, what Wordsworth calls “Fancy.” He uses everyday language to write of everyday delights. He sings to flowers, clouds, cottages, and hills.

Yet with Wordsworth’s age came a maturity that he attributes to the innate connection between the natural world and the human imagination. His tone is simple but also grave. It is childlike yet mature.

And so despite his championing of freedom of expression, Wordsworth’s style is deliberately confined. He embraces poetic rules as a monk might embrace a rule of prayer. Poetic and political revolution are best expressed through the wisdom contained in structure and form.

Wordsworth offers a manifesto for freedom-through-form in a poem that extols the virtues of the sonnet.



*Nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, ’twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.*

This is a sonnet about sonnets.

Sonnets have set forms. In the case of a Petrarchan sonnet, defined by the poet of the Italian Renaissance, it uses a specific meter, iambic pentameter, which you'll remember from your English class as ten syllables, consisting of five "feet" of two syllables each. It has fourteen lines—three quatrains (sets of four lines), followed by a concluding couplet (two lines linked by end rhyme).

Many poets have presented the sonnet as the paradigmatic example of structured verse. Sonnets have rules, but they achieve poetic license within and because of those rules.

The sonneteer is like a nun realizing the fullness of her life of prayer by confining herself to a convent. And he's like a student who becomes an independent thinker through routine and discipline. The sonnet form is a technology that helps the poet become productive, like a spinster at a spinning wheel and a honeybee blessed with the gift of flight.

"In truth," he says, "the prison, into which we doom Ourselves, no prison is." The real prison, that which keeps us from growing and creating, is so-called "liberty" without bounds.



*Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.*



What Wordsworth discovered as a mature writer is that undefined liberty is paralyzing. A blank slate is a prison. And it is only through form that the poet can find his true voice.

I'm a professor turned entrepreneur. Having taught for twelve years at a conventional university, I decided to leave my tenured position to found a new college.

Cue the expected eyebrow raise. Isn't higher education one of the most regulated and least innovated industries in the world? Is it even possible to create brand recognition when the category of "startup college" doesn't exist? How many millions (billions?) must one need to compete with the luxurious campuses, research initiatives, alumni networks, and accreditation structures that established universities already have?

How does one go from zero to college?

One doesn't. In fact, if Aristotle is to be believed, there's no going from zero to anywhere.

But zero isn't really the problem, because a leader always has one resource to begin forming: oneself. We cannot lead others where we ourselves are not already going.

I'm reminded of the opening question that Socrates asks the young Athenian aristocrat, Phaedrus. "My dear Phaedrus, where did you come from, and where are you going?" Plato's dialogues feature Socrates time and again asking some young upstart why he's doing that which he's doing.



Ancient philosophy urges us to consider the good for which we act. The point isn't simply that we recognize our hidden motivations. It's that what is good is tied to who we are as people. The irony is that we often don't know where we're going or where we've come from. Our culture tends to think of belief as the personal foundation for all of our actions, essentially, our identity. But if the ancient philosophers teach us anything it's that what we think we believe and what we actually believe are usually at odds with one another.

Belief is not something we simply have but something that we need to discover—and then rediscover again and again.

In the Formation Method, we describe the process of discovery as sense-making. And sense-making requires form. It requires a practice of reflecting on where we've been and exploring where we think we're going.

At Hildegard College, the liberal arts are taught entirely through original sources. Students learn geometry, philosophy, economics, music, and literature by studying the works from which those fields of knowledge grew. It can be intimidating.

And yet eighteen-year-olds are by no means slow to give their opinion.

“I think that beauty is actually . . .”

“I believe all humans have a right to . . .”

AND SO I’VE ADOPTED A RULE FOR THE CLASSROOM. NONE OF US ARE ALLOWED TO BEGIN A COMMENT WITH “I THINK” OR “I BELIEVE” UNTIL WE FIRST CAN EXPLAIN WHAT IT IS THAT THE AUTHOR IS SAYING. SEEMS LIKE AN OBVIOUS PROGRESSION—KNOW WHAT THE ARGUMENT IS BEFORE YOU DISAGREE. BUT YOU MAY BE SURPRISED HOW OFTEN I REPEAT THE RULE.

Some students find my rule stifling at first. Doesn’t it diminish their own personal voices? But students need to learn to read before they write.

The goal of liberal arts education is to free the soul intellectually and spiritually. And no, I’m not talking about the college course you took in Tree Climbing or on The Worldview of Lady Gaga (though both sound fun). What makes the liberal arts liberating is the unity they establish between the world and the mind’s ability to comprehend it. Autonomy, moral agency, virtue. These terms do not represent the independence of the person from the physical world, others, and God. Rather, the liberal arts teach that true agency and creativity are in-formed by nature of the good. Freedom obtains through the ordering of our loves in accordance with the shape of the world as it is.

Creation requires form. The sonnet form is not a cage that imprisons a writer. It’s a dwelling place in which a poem is born and grows. It’s—dare I say it—an incubator.



One of the crises from which today's leaders suffer is a lack of belief. I'm not talking about having ideas or convictions or passions. I mean putting structured practices in place that force us to study our actions in order to discover what it is that we truly believe, and then maybe to do something about changing it! For me, the Formation Method is not only sense-making. In a way, it's belief-making.

Working in isolation, leading through reaction, flying forward without first looking back: these are the real prisons of leadership. They paralyze our capability to lead others because they attempt to skip the only truly necessary step, formation.

*And hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground*

- Matthew Smith

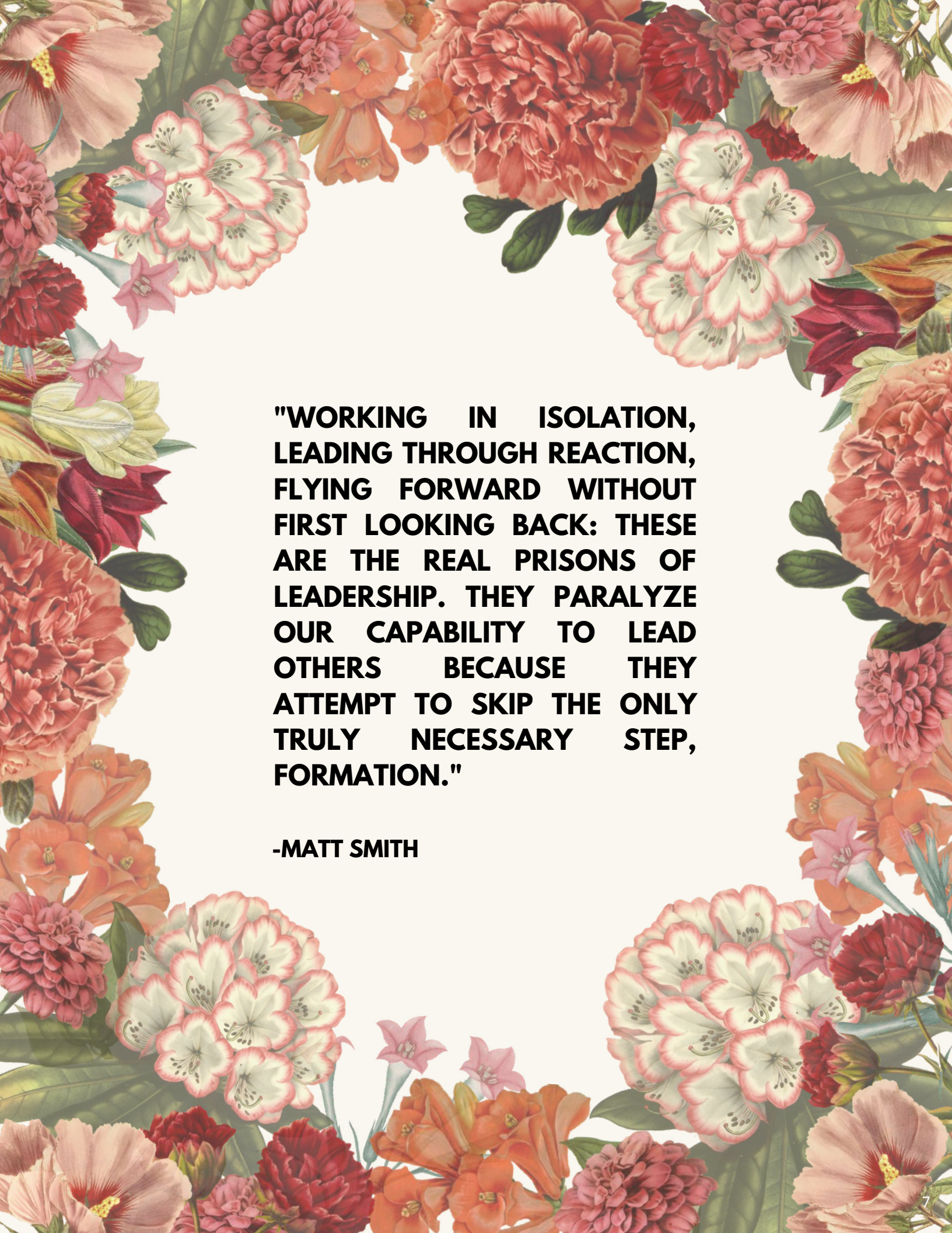


GET TO KNOW THE AUTHOR

Matthew Smith is currently the founding President at [Hildegard College](#), where he teaches classic texts in literature, philosophy, theology, geometry, and science. Matthew is an author and editor of several books, including *Performance and Religion in Early Modern England* and *Face to Face in Shakespearean Drama*. Matthew resides in Orange County, CA with his wife and 3 kids. Matthews favorite books to teach are the tragedies of Sophocles, Augustine's Confessions, Shakespeare's comedies, Euclid's Elements of Geometry, and The Book of Psalms.



@hildegard.college



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-MATT SMITH

THERE

For much of my adult life there has been a knee jerk reaction phrase that runs through my head any time a demand is made of me, “I don’t have time for that.” The line generally pops up when the “demand” is something that I perceive as frivolous or fun. Having lunch and getting drinks with a friend are extras, not things that matter or to prioritize. Going for a walk with a colleague, shaving my legs, calling my mom, painting my nails, prayer meetings, and networking lunches were all things I wondered, who has time for this?

IS

I took meetings in hallways and stood up while answering staff member’s questions, indicating I was on to the next thing. I didn’t have time for that.

As I got into my career and started asking questions about the kind of life I wanted to have and how that impacted others, I realized that the leaders who have shaped me are the ones who took time with me. They took me to lunch and asked me hard questions, making space for the real answer with their unhurried presence. They took the time to write introduction emails and connect me in significant ways to potential partners. They took my calls. They invited me into their homes for lingering dinners with people who cared about things I cared about. They had time.

So for the past few years, I have worked on a new internal response. It comes to me like a mantra: *There is time*. When I’m interrupted with a question on my way out the door, there is time. When the team is sick and goals are getting pushed out, there is time. When a parishioner calls in distress, there is time.

T

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M

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When I think of leading together, I remember that there is time to be together. There is time to get to know others. There is time to work together. There is time to change up the routine. There is time for breaks.

THERE IS TIME TO CARE FOR OTHERS

It used to be that one of my biggest fears in meetings was that someone would share something personal that would throw us off our agenda. I was afraid of looking like the jerk who only cared about work and was also aware that we were there to get some things done. This tension was a tough one for me. Now I know that there is time to stop and care for the person. As a church leader, those moments of spontaneous care have been some of the most important times to remind us of our mission and purpose as an organization. There is time to pause the meeting. There is time to send a meal. There is time to sit with a person who needs a caring presence. There is time to care for others.

CARE

THERE IS TIME FOR COLLABORATION + PARTNERSHIP

As a Pioneer voice in the 5 Voices framework, I am always ready to charge ahead. I generally feel pretty clear on what needs to be done to move an objective forward, and any time I have to take to explain that to you is keeping me from accomplishing the goal. That's how I used to think about it. My primary tasks in life revolve around community building so it became obvious pretty quickly that this attitude was not going to take me where I needed to go. I have learned there is time to partner with others. That takes trust, and trust takes time to build. There are few shortcuts. What I've discovered is that the time you put in on the front end of developing collaborations pays off exponentially in what you are able to accomplish with others once a network, collaboration, or partnership is established. Taking time for the ongoing work of trust and relationship building has led to decades long partnerships that are much more productive, nimble and responsive than I could be alone. And way more fun!

COLLABORATION

THERE IS TIME FOR WONDER

Many of my most important insights about my work and leadership did not come while I was working but while I was on a run, in the shower, at the beach, reflecting in my journal, or processing with a non-work friend.

WONDER

The deep work that is required for our writing, speaking, facilitating, and leadership growth has often come when I make time to step out of my office and the normal routine and give myself space to breathe, to walk, to take in beauty. There is time to lift our heads and wonder.

THERE IS TIME FOR A BREAK

During the pandemic lockdown I got in the habit of eating my lunch outside, just to get out of the house. I realized there is time to sit and eat lunch. A friend told me that they canceled their long weekend trip because of an unexpected change at work that happened the day before they were set to leave. Granted, I don't know their industry, but the question that popped into my head was, "Do you have such a lack of trust in your team or such an inflated sense of your own importance that you can't take one day off and deal with things when you get back?" We are not work machines. We have time to stop working every day, every week, every year. There is time to take a break.

B B B
R R R
E E E
A A A
K K K

Leading together gives us the opportunity to be together, to enjoy other people and their skills. There is time to be our best selves and offer that to others in collaboration. There is time to see goodness and rest. There is time.

- Christine Nolf

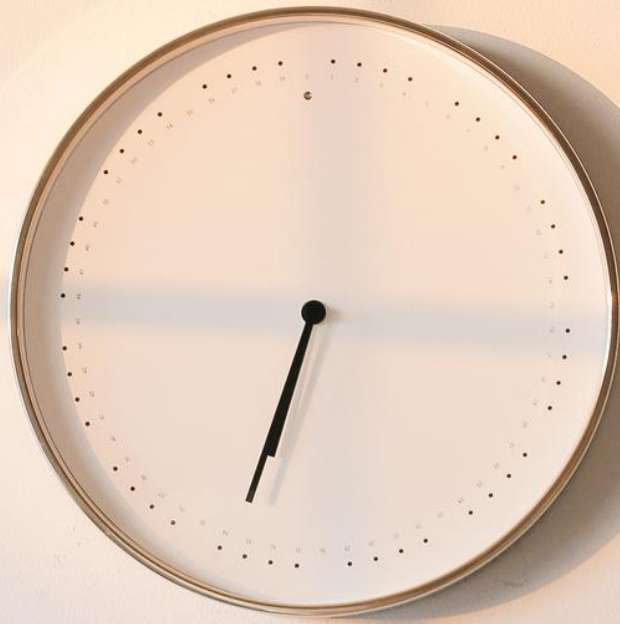


GET TO KNOW THE AUTHOR

Christine Nolf is the Pastor of Healthy Communities and Elder at [Redemption Church](#) in Costa Mesa, CA. Christine is a certified coach and facilitator and loves to help individuals and organizations plan and reach their goals to impact their communities. She lives in Costa Mesa, CA with her husband and son. Together, they love to host brunch in their garage converted into a tiki lounge.



@redemptionoc



**"WHEN I THINK OF LEADING TOGETHER, I
REMEMBER THAT THERE IS TIME TO BE
TOGETHER. THERE IS TIME TO GET TO KNOW
OTHERS. THERE IS TIME TO WORK TOGETHER.
THERE IS TIME TO CHANGE UP THE ROUTINE.
THERE IS TIME FOR BREAKS."**

- CHRISTINE NOLF

reflection

Here are some questions for you to process through and connect with your own formation.



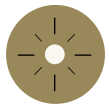
As you reflect on your formation as a leader, in what ways can you **celebrate** your diligence in being formed and your commitment to being formed in the high challenge and high support of a leader community?



As you **listen**, what are you hearing from creation, your communities, cultures you're part of, the divine, and yourself related to your formation? What trends are you seeing? What metaphors are you embracing? What emotions are rising in others and yourself?



What specific challenge(s) do you **identify** for yourself as you practice being formed in community?



What questions come up in your mind that will help you **explore** your challenge, to diverge with curiosity to expand how you see it, and look at it from different perspectives?



How would you **advise** yourself to take action based on your identification of the challenge and your exploration of it?



Now take some time to **epiphanize**, capturing the aha moments, key learnings, and insights you've encountered.



Capture 1-3 specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) actions you **commit** to taking this month to be formed in response to your exploration and epiphanies.



Send your commitments to a leader you trust to help you **track** your progress, ensuring you will be able to celebrate the completion of your commitments next month.

FORMATION OPPORTUNITIES

FORMATION METHOD TRAINING



Next Training

Friday, September 9th | 10 am - 3 pm

Hybrid: Virtual + In Person

Costa Mesa, CA

formation.community/formation-method-training-september-9/p/1-day-training=y72w8-72baa

More info: formation.community

FORMATION LEADER CERTIFICATION



Next Certification Cohort

Next Cohort Launches October 2022

6-month program includes Group Coaching, courses, and community with like-minded leaders.

More info: formation.community

[Downloadable Information Packet](#)

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