

FORMATION

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Issue 01



Featured Articles by:
Christine Nolf, Jonathon Murillo

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WHY FORMATION?

A Journal by Formation Community Inc.

WHY FORMATION?

A NOTE FROM JEFF

Formation Community,

We planted an avocado tree a couple years ago in our backyard. As she watered it on a recent Saturday, our 9 year old daughter, Kentley, excitedly reminded me: “Dad, we only need to wait three or four more years before we get avocados!” I laughed out of joy that she is learning a countercultural truth of life.

We are formed through diligence.

We planted the tree in good soil. Adequate daily sunlight. Consistent watering. Periodic soil nurturing through harvested compost. Pruning. Fruit grows through consistency, through diligence. We won’t see avocados for a few more years, but we can be confident the fruit will come.

One of our story contributors in this inaugural edition of The Formation Journal, Jonathan Murillo, puts it this way: This (and every) season is about form.

“Over that chicken sandwich and fries, Jason was inviting me into a new way to see everything that I do as a practice of formation. Whether it was speaking on a stage, or setting up chairs, the simple practice of how I went about my work was most importantly shaping who I was becoming as a person. And by that, as a leader.”

It’s not the mountaintop-high experiences that make us better leaders. There are no shortcuts. No viral memes that will radically propel us into becoming a better leader. Our substance and strength are found in our diligence.

In her story for this issue, Christine Nolf talks about another key aspect of formation-community.

“Being with other leaders who were intentionally investing in their formation held up a mirror for me. It made a space where I could face the challenges I was experiencing with colleagues who could identify and offer encouragement and advice.”

Our writers for this issue identify the two intertwined definitions of Formation. The first is the act of being individually formed, of growing our capacity to learn, develop, grow, and bear fruit. The second is the act of intentionally moving in rhythm with others so we have the simultaneous high challenge and high support environment to slog through the daily diligence when our motivations wane or our vision becomes clouded.

Being in formation is an individual and a community endeavor. And that’s why this Formation Journal exists—to bring together the best voices from our nascent and growing Formation Community to tell stories of the culture we want to create.

So as you read this first edition, we invite you to join us in being formed. Join us in the simple rhythms of diligence as we become healthier leaders, build healthier organizations, and guide people into healthier community.

To future fruit,

— Jeff Tanner

Formation Community
Founder + Coach



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

JOURNEY ~~ALONE~~ *together*

It was June of 2010, and I was driving north on the 5 freeway through California to Oregon. Seven years had passed since I founded a community development organization, and this was the start of a three month sabbatical. As I came down off the Grapevine and saw the open road ahead of me, I felt the responsibilities of the organization start to roll off my shoulders. It was already hot in the valley. The heat drew me to the present moment as I began to trust that I could let go and look ahead. I had some trepidation about the wide open spaces the sabbatical was providing in my mind and calendar. What would I do in rural Oregon for weeks on end? Yet I knew there was work to do. There were things that needed to be pulled out of the mental archives and examined. As my car sped up on the highway, the first question that came to mind was: “What happened back there?”



“Back there” was 2009 when I found myself leading a growing non-profit organization through the recession fallout. As an organization, we had weathered it as well as possible. We were still in existence and moving forward with our mission. But looking in the rearview mirror from the 5 freeway, I could see that I was teetering on the edge of health as a leader. I thought of that winter night, alone in the office as it got later and later. At first, I didn’t realize he was there working too. He wasn’t a part of our team but sometimes used the office. He popped into my office to say hello. It was all so innocent and friendly, his concern about the team and my openness about my struggles to get us all through layoffs and budget cuts. But then it went sideways. My loneliness emerged all ugly and contorted as I came onto this guy who wanted nothing to do with my pain and inappropriate vulnerability. He was gracious but clear. I was out of line. Despite the heat of summer, the chill I felt that night returned as I remembered the tension and awkwardness. A year later the humiliation churned in my gut again. What happened?

Alone in the car, I began to untangle the knot in my stomach brought on by the memory. Maybe nothing wrong had happened. but I knew I had betrayed myself and dishonored a friend. I was outside of my own integrity, and it was the hollowness in me that was more shocking than the behavior. Clearly it had been a stressful season. But I had been in stressful leadership situations before. What was different that year? I kept pulling the threads of the knot, examining my life: my habits, my motivations, and thought patterns. Then it hit me. What was different was who I had around me, or didn't have around me. In my leadership journey, that was the first year that I was not a part of a group or cohort. As a young leader starting a non-profit, there had always been a philanthropic foundation or ministry offering a spot in their leadership cohort. Some years I was with other startup leaders learning the practical, technical basics of running an organization. For two years I had been in a monthly group with other women in ministry leadership where we shared candidly about our joys and challenges both personally and in leadership. But then 2008 hit and we all hunkered down. Funding for those "extra" development opportunities dried up, and it seemed hard to justify that kind of personal support while simultaneously laying people off for budget reasons.

On the road, I pulled the thread further, exploring what a leadership cohort provided for me. I had friends. I had a church community. I had a caring family. What had the leadership groups provided that bolstered my integrity?

My epiphany that day was that beyond friendship and community, leadership cohorts had opened space for me to honestly reflect on how I was doing as a leader. Being with other leaders who were intentionally investing in their formation held up a mirror for me. It made a space where I could face the challenges I was experiencing with colleagues who could identify and offer encouragement and advice.

When I was willing to be honest with myself and open with others, I walked away from our time together grounded in who I was with clear next steps to be a better leader. When we met again, I was held accountable for the commitments I had made. Being in a leadership cohort was a buoy and lifeline that had prevented me from sinking to the depths I found myself in 2009.





That long stretch of highway in Central California revealed a decisive commitment. I would never lead alone again. Every hour, every penny, and every awkward ‘get to know you’ moment would be worth it to be tethered with other leaders in my own formation. There is too much at stake for my own soul, my integrity, and the well-being of the people I lead.

The sabbatical of 2010 served its purpose. The reflections and ensuing commitments led to transformation that I continue to experience as a leader and a human. And the commitment to stay in formation with other leaders was more necessary than ever as 2020 hit us with more vengeance than 2009 threw at us. As a pastor leading a church through a global pandemic involving location moves and leadership transitions, investing in my own formation was not an extra but an imperative. The only way I know to hone and shape my leadership is to journey with other leaders navigating shifts in their sectors of culture. I am convinced it can actually save our lives.

- 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.



@imchristinenolf

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- CHRISTINE NOLF

chicken sandwich

The chicken sandwich conversation that changed it all.

My LinkedIn does not make sense. I would frustrate the heck out of a career counselor. My vocational journey defies the best practices of the traditional playbook and it definitely felt like a confusing, tangled experience in the moment when discerning critical decisions, opportunities and challenges.

It only makes sense looking back when you see the threads, throughlines, and pivotal epiphanies that changed it all.

One of those off-script career stops was an internship at a University while completing my Graduate studies. The two came together as a package deal, with my degree fully funded and a part-time role serving undergraduate students. Newly married and early in my career, I left a full-time Director level job at a non-profit... to be an intern.

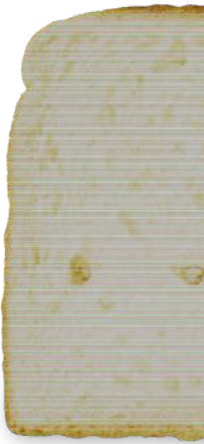
The rest of my cohort had just graduated undergrad and lived within a few miles of campus and lived with roommates or their family, so they could give most of their time to the program. I, on the other hand, had an hour commute and needed to work a second part-time job to support myself and my spouse.


At the time, I just wanted to get through that season, but looking back I wouldn't trade it for anything.

The most meaningful moment of those three (3!) years was a random Thursday afternoon lunch with my supervisor, Jason.

After listening to me complain about the whole situation, much like I did in the paragraphs above, Jason was silent for what felt like forever. Then he looked at me with care and spouted off some of the most offensive things I've ever heard in my life.

You're all splash and no substance.
You are undercooked in the middle and on your way to being burnt on the edges.
You don't know how to shoot your free throws.
You're overqualified for this role...so what?





“This season is about form.”

“No one has given you the gift of being unimpressed with what you can do and care more about who you are. Here is that gift.”

How dare he.

I am offended all over again just reading that.

This went beyond a simple challenge to “stay humble” or “pay my dues”. Over that chicken sandwich and fries, Jason was inviting me into a new way to see everything that I do as a practice of formation. Whether it was speaking on a stage or setting up chairs, the simple practice of how I went about my work was most importantly shaping who I was becoming as a person. And by that, as a leader.

I think about that conversation often, especially at the beginning of every new professional crisis or opportunity. The form that I go back to is not about what I learned how to do but how I learned how to learn. How to grow.

That intern season was particularly stressful and painful as it was undoing much of my own self perception and what it meant to “make it” as a leader.

Jason raised the stakes appropriately when he said:

“If you don’t figure out how to do the everyday movements of life and leadership well, regardless of the circumstances, you will be calling me in 10 years because you’ve burnt out, given up, or had a moral failure that harmed others.”

“Maybe this season of your life won’t change the world, but maybe it will change you.”

Jason was only halfway right. That season was about form, but so also is every season. Every season and situation is an opportunity to be formed, refine your form, and form a meaningful contribution to the world.

Since that lunch, I have seen my Formation as an interplay between who I am becoming, what I am creating, and how I am doing both of those things together with a specific community. Here is a word on each:

Becoming

Our tendencies shape our patterns and our patterns drive actions; actions have consequences that make up our reality. In that season, the emphasis was on becoming aware of my tendencies, patterns, and actions in the context of being an intern. Only then was I aware of the reality I was making for every other season of my life to follow.

The only constant in every season of your life is that you take yourself with you into the next.

Heeding Jason's words about form, I started to approach every menial task, even my 2 hour a day commute and hours upon hours of homework as trajectory setting activities. Regardless of the immediate result for outcome, the season was about where I was headed and what instincts I was shaping in myself and what muscle memory I was setting up to run in the background of my future actions and responses.

That is the work of becoming.

Creating

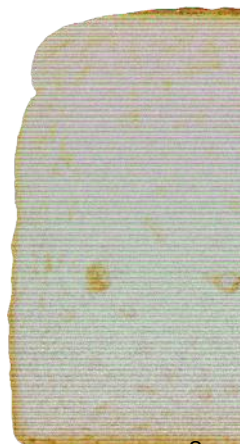
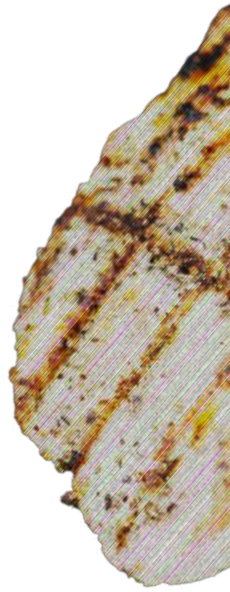
The products, offerings, and moments that we put out into the world contribute to the experiences of others for better or worse.

This means that it is not enough to simply hole up in a retreat center or our favorite coffee shop to be alone with our thoughts about ourselves and call that formation. The ultimate evidence of who we are becoming is what we are creating, and what we are creating shapes who we are.

There is an interdependent relationship between the things we are creating and the person we are becoming. The good news is this does not depend upon a certain position in an organization or participating in a certain industry.

Every day, you are creating either accidentally or intentionally.

After I finally accepted what the season as an intern was really about, I was able to create meaningful moments, powerful experiences, and new groundbreaking initiatives that were truly transformational for the students I was serving. I never would have been able to do so if I was still trying to get over why I was there in the first place. Focusing on form formed something deeply impactful for others.



Together

Becoming in isolation leaves you malformed and ill-equipped for life.

Creating in isolation always falls short of the impact you envision, and at its worst produces products that inhibit the flourishing of others, beginning with your own.

Plus it's just the worst. Not fun at all.

Opening ourselves up to the inputs and reflection of other perspectives on who you are becoming and what you are creating is this outside force that keeps momentum going in the right direction. Recognizing your limits and uniqueness opens you up to the contributions of others to your formation and impact on the world.

I could not have had this major life-changing epiphany without opening myself up to Jason vulnerably, and without his wisdom, insight, and care enough to speak truth to me over a chicken sandwich.

I hope you have others in your life to do the same—who care more about who you are than what you do.

So who are you becoming? What are you creating? And what does it mean to do that with and alongside others?

- Jonathon Murillo

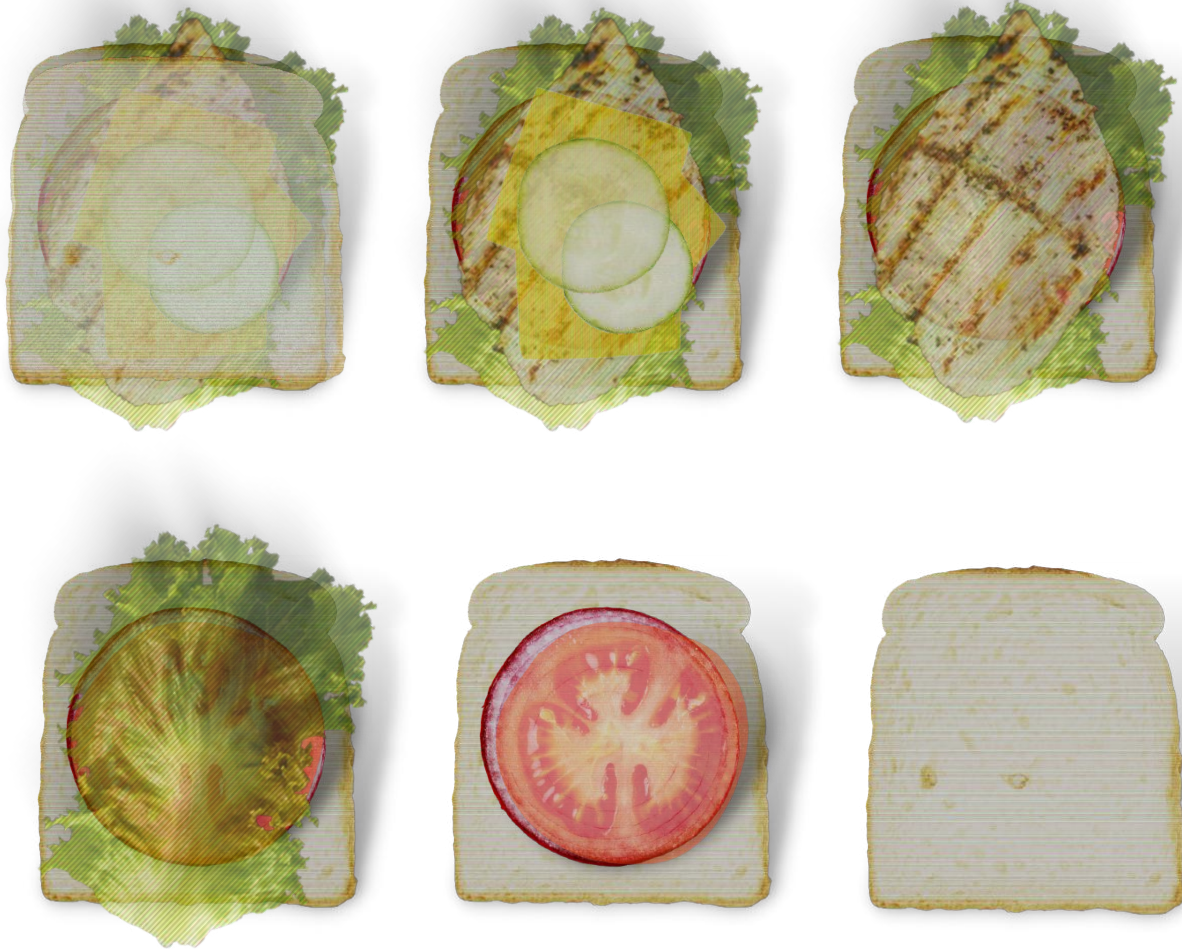


GET TO KNOW THE AUTHOR

Jonathon Murillo is currently the Director of Strategy and Content at Ignite Institute. Jonathon focuses on coaching and working alongside emerging leaders and founders. Strategy & Communication are his jam. Jonathon resides in Portland, OR with his wife and daughter. On the weekends, you'll find Jonathon and his family reluctantly learning how to be outdoors-y in the PNW, cheering on the Raiders, and binging the latest Marvel show.



@jonathonjamesmurillo



"Every season and situation is an opportunity to be formed, refine your form, and form a meaningful contribution to the world. "

- Jonathon Murillo

reflection

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



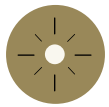
As you reflect on your formation as a leader, in what ways can you **celebrate** your diligence in being formed and your commitment to being formed in the high challenge and high support of a leader community?



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, July 15th | 10 am - 3 pm

Costa Mesa, CA

formation.community/formation-method-training-july-15

Friday, August 12th | 10 am - 3 pm

More info: formation.community

FORMATION LEADER CERTIFICATION



Next Certification Cohort

Next Cohort Launches August 2022

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

More info: formation.community

[Downloadable Information Packet](#)

CHECK OUT THIS FORMATION LEADER...



Joanna Waterfall

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Check out her personal work here:

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