

DO HARD THINGS: DISCLAIMER(S)

Do Hard Things

A teenage rebellion against low expectations

© 2008 by Alex Harris & Brett Harris

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Chapter 4

Purpose and Potential

Reclaiming the teen years as the launching of life

Raymond is eighteen years old and lives in Baltimore, Maryland. His parents divorced when he was fourteen and Raymond is involved in everything you can think of: smoking, drinking, drugs—even drug dealing. He moves from house to house, crashing with various friends, and has struggled to hold even the most basic jobs.

When he looks at the direction his life has taken, he expresses regret. “When I first went to high school my understanding was like, ‘Wow, this is the time to party. It’s high school, and everybody’s supposed to party in high school.’ But I don’t know,” he says. “I wish I wouldn’t have thought that.”

Raymond insists that he’s not going to do drugs forever. He plans to sober up, get his GED, and move on with life. Someday he hopes to own a car dealership and sell BMWs. To help keep his dream alive, he subscribes to *Dupont Registry*, a magazine about luxury cars, houses, and boats. When he’s older, he plans to go to church more, too.

“I think about my future a few times a week,” he says. “What do I want to do with my life? Do I want to sit around and be a pothead all my life?” Heck no, he says.

And so why not change now?

“I don’t know,” Raymond replies. “I’ve thought about it, but I kinda look at this as the summer to have fun and party. I’m eighteen, and since I don’t live under my mom’s roof, I can be out as long as I want. So I’m like, ‘This will be a summer for fun, I’m gonna party and have fun this summer.’ Then after that I just want to sober up and be clean and get my life together and straighten up.”

“But I don’t want the future to get here too quick,” he adds. “I still want to be able to live life and have fun.”

There’s probably a little bit of Raymond in all of us. Do you see him in you or in people you know? His views reflect the thinking of so many in our generation. Like many teens, he figures that he has plenty of time. At any point in the future, he can decide to clean up, grow up, and pick up his life as if nothing happened.

But is he right about that?

Is it really as simple as flipping a switch, or is Raymond in for a rude awakening? Will he go down as one of those guys who thought he was getting what he wanted out of life, only to realize he was actually wasting his teen years and putting his future at risk?

In this chapter, we’ll take a quick look at a whole group of people like Raymond. In fact, we’ll even give them a name. Then we’ll show you the huge opportunities they’re missing out on. But just to warn you: we’re going to use words Raymond probably wouldn’t like. Because we describe these huge opportunities as five kinds of hard things that have the power to launch us from where we are now to our best possible future.

But first, what do we mean when we talk about being launched?

Failure to Launch

We took swimming lessons when we were kids, but growing up in the rainy Pacific Northwest, we didn’t really swim a whole lot. In other words, don’t

expect us to demonstrate any nifty strokes or perform crazy flips off the high dive. It's not happening.

One thing we did learn, though, was that diving boards have a "sweet spot." If you take a big leap and land on it just right, the diving board will launch you up into the air and down into the pool in a perfect swan dive. You hope. Of course, if you miss the sweet spot, things don't work out so well. Your body jolts, the board clunks, and you bounce, teeter, and careen into the water. You may even do a belly flop. In fact, if someone is watching, you're guaranteed to do a belly flop.

But back to the big picture. Do you see it?

The pool is your future life. The diving board is your present life. The Myth of Adolescence would have you think that now is your time to party beside the pool. But the fact is you're already on the diving board.

The whole purpose of the diving board is to launch us, with purpose and precision, into our futures. We will either make a successful dive into adulthood, or deliver something closer to a belly flop—a failure to launch.

In his book *Thoughts For Young Men*, J.C. Ryle wrote, "Youth is the seed-time of full age, the molding season in the little space of human life, the turning-point in the history of man's mind." In other words, what each of us will become later in life largely depends on what we become now. Are we taking that seriously?

1 Corinthians 9:24-25, the Apostle Paul writes, "Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training (emphasis added). They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (NIV).

We are convinced that the teen years are the primary time God has given to us for "strict training." We can hear Raymond saying, "Strict training! You've got to be kidding!" But stick with us.

In Proverbs 20:29 it says, "The glory of young men is their strength."

Did you catch that? At no other time are we better positioned to decide who we will become. Our strength—sharp minds, energetic bodies, and flexible schedules—is our glory. We are not likely to have this same set of strengths ever again. By choosing to use our teen years for strict training, we can choose to set direction, develop character, and build momentum for an amazing future.

But what happens when we fail to use our teen years for strict training? What does a “belly flop” look like in real life? Unfortunately, it’s not too hard to find out.

The Rise of the Kidult

In 2005, *TIME Magazine* ran a story on “kidults,” a new breed of adolescents in their mid- to late-twenties and beyond, who offer convincing evidence that the modern concept of adolescence is not a biological stage, but a cultural mindset. It doesn’t stop when you graduate from high school, or when you turn twenty-one.

“Everybody knows a few of them,” the article pronounced. “Full-grown men and women who still live with their parents, who dress and talk and party as they did in their teens, hopping from job to job and date to date, having fun but seemingly going nowhere.”

Kidults generally have neither clear direction nor a sense of urgency. “Legally, they’re adults, but they’re on the threshold, the doorway to adulthood, and they’re not going through it,” says Terri Apter, a psychologist at the University of Cambridge. In other words, they’re standing on the end of the diving board, but they won’t jump in.

And it’s not just in America. Countries around the world have developed names for young “adults” like this: they are called “Kippers” in England, “Nesthockers” in Germany, “Mammones” in France, and “Freeters” in Japan.

“This isn’t just a trend, a temporary fad or a generational hiccup,” the article warns. “This is much a larger phenomenon, of a different kind and a different order.”

But we shouldn’t be surprised. After all, kidults are the logical result of the Myth of Adolescence, which encourages teens to view adulthood as spoiling the fun of the teen years, rather than viewing it as the fulfillment of the teen years.

Being taught to avoid growing up doesn’t help us launch into adulthood. At best, it leaves us hanging on the end of the diving board—stuck in the childishness and irresponsibility of adolescence. At worst, it leaves us floundering in the deep end of the pool—unprepared for the exciting challenges of life.

We received this email in July of 2007, but it represents many conversations we’ve had with people in their twenties, even early thirties:

I had my own idea of fun, which was too much recreational reading, too much playing video games, too much of my own thing. To this day, I’ve never held a job, and I’m still living at home. My lack of real life skills has had some very negative consequences to a relationship that is very important to me.

When I was a teenager, 26 seemed like so far away, but my bad decisions then (to do nothing) are affecting my life now in some pretty serious ways.

I’m an example of how low expectations and our “if it’s fun, do it” culture can mess things up, and I’m living proof (as are the others out there like me—still living at home, doing very little but still dreaming big) that adolescence truly can be extended past the teen years.

Kidults are a tragic example of the Myth of Adolescence in action. And the consequences aren't limited to your teen years. After we shared Raymond's story at a conference in Indianapolis, a man (probably in his mid- to late-forties) approached us. With tears in his eyes, he told us, "I'm Raymond. That story you told is exactly who I was."

He explained how he had done well in school when he was a teenager. His high school had a three-class structure for each grade and he was in the top class every year. Because school was going so well, he thought he was free to party and experiment with drugs. But more than twenty years have passed, and he's still struggling with the repercussions.

"I thought the teen years were my time to party," he said. "And I've been paying the price ever since. I don't want teens today to make the same mistake."

The good news is, we don't have to! As we saw in the last chapter, what is "normal" today is actually a cruel exception—a myth. The teen years have not always been thought of as a time to waste, and teens haven't always been ripped off by low expectations. But at the same time, there is hope, even for kidults. As we encouraged that man in Indianapolis: It is never too late to start doing hard things. William Wilberforce, one of the greatest rebelutionary examples who ever lived, wasted the first 25 years of his life on parties and social extravagance. And yet he went on to be the unrelenting force behind the abolition and emancipation of slaves throughout the British Empire.

How did he do it? First, God broke through and changed his heart. Immediately, Wilberforce was filled with a profound sense of regret, bemoaning the "shapeless idleness" of his past and "the most valuable years of life wasted, and opportunities lost, which can never be recovered." But second, Wilberforce chose to do hard things. He threw himself into study and serious work. For over forty years he fought against slavery in the British Em-

pire, and through his unwavering efforts, saw it abolished shortly before his death. Few men have left a greater mark on history.

So there is good news. God offers grace and redemption to those with wasted pasts. But let us never presume upon God's grace by wasting even a minute of what Wilberforce rightly called "the most valuable years of life."

The Genius of Hard Things

Remember George, David, and Clarissa from previous chapter? We left George as official surveyor of Culpepper County at age seventeen. David was in charge of a prize ship at age twelve, calmly keeping an unruly captain under control. Clarissa was nursing smallpox patients and overseeing a classroom of students at seventeen. Each of them clearly used their teen years to train and to launch. How did it serve them?

After three years as surveyor in Virginia, the governor appointed George to the state militia as a major, a high rank. Then, when word came that the French were entering Ohio territory, George was ordered to lead a mid-winter expedition over hundreds of miles to assess their strength and to warn them to leave—which he successfully did.

By age twenty-two, George had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and by age twenty-three, he was Commander in Chief of the entire Virginia militia. You may have heard of what he did later in life, too. Exactly twenty years later, George became the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, later becoming the first President of the United States—George Washington.

Dave's full name was David Farragut, the U.S. Navy's very first Admiral and hero during the Civil War. His courage in the face of heavy enemy fire in the battle of Mobile Bay won him lasting fame—but it was far from his first act of bravery. He had prepared for that moment ever since his childhood days as a cadet on the Essex.

Clarissa is better known as Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. Her desire to serve others started when she was eleven years old caring for her brother David, and it only grew from there—to the sick in her village, to the children at the school where she taught, to thousands of wounded men in the Civil War, and later to millions through the American Red Cross.

There's a reason we still know the names and stories of men and women like George Washington, David Farragut, and Clara Barton. They invested their teen years in a way that shaped them into the history makers they later became.

Most of you probably weren't surprised to hear how George, David, and Clarissa turned out. That's because, inside, all of us know that the teen years aren't some mystical period disconnected from the rest of our lives. For good or for bad, they will launch us into the future—our future.

In the stories of George, David, and Clarissa we see that embracing responsibility and challenges in their teen years was genius. Why genius? Because doing hard things as teens prepared them for lives of incredible impact—lives that came with additional hard things that they wouldn't have been able to accomplish otherwise.

We need to be honest with ourselves. Is how we're spending our time right now preparing us for what we hope to become in the future? Are we doing things now that will equip us for greater things God may have for us to do? These are the fundamental questions for this season of our lives.

A historian once wrote that George Washington "became the man he strove to be." That statement is not only true of Washington; it's also true about us. We will all become the men and women we strive (or don't strive) to be.

George, Dave, and Clarissa put into practice advice from the Old Testament: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lamenta-

tions 3:27). As young people they made a habit of overcoming obstacles—forging the determination and character that empowered them for the rest of their lives. Again, that shouldn't surprise us. After all, that's how effort works. That's the genius of choosing to do hard things.

Let's close off this chapter by looking at what we mean by “do hard things.”

Five Kinds of Hard

We call the following five categories the “Five Kinds of Hard.” They aren't secret, mystical or helpful just to some—or even just to teens. They're God-given opportunities powered by God-given principles that work for everybody. If we launch into these opportunities now, we'll see powerful results—both now and in our future.

The examples we cite under each category are just that—examples. They are not intended to exhaustively define “hard things” for you, but rather give you a picture of the incredible variety of hard things available for us to do.

So here we go. Five different kinds of hard things:

1.) Things that are **outside your comfort zone**. This could include activities like public speaking, learning a new skill or expanding an old one, traveling to new places, and meeting new people. Anything that takes you outside of the rut of your normal day-to-day, week-to-week activities would fall into this category. These actions can challenge us because they are unfamiliar or even scary, but they usually end up being some of our greatest memories and they always end up growing our comfort zone for the future.

2.) Things that go **beyond what is expected or required**. For example, say you only need a C to pass a class, but you aim for an A+. You are not content to “do no harm”—you purpose to do good. You might volunteer to clean up after the church breakfast, stay late at work without pay to help a friend finish a job, or perform household chores you aren’t even assigned. These actions are hard because they rest entirely on our own initiative. No one else will make us do them. Because of this, they are almost always the accomplishments that we feel best about.

3.) Things that are **too big to accomplish alone**. These are usually big projects like organizing a rally, making a film, forming a teen ministry to the homeless, changing your school’s policy on a key issue, campaigning to get a shock jock off the air, or starting a band. They could also include really big causes like fighting modern day slavery, abortion, or poverty and AIDS in Africa. We are passionate about them because God has placed them on our hearts. In order to be effective in these kinds of projects we must be able to share our passion with others and recruit them to work alongside us.

4.) Things that **don’t earn an immediate pay off**. These are tasks like fighting sin, working out, doing your schoolwork, and obeying your parents. They are hard because you won’t see much progress from one day to the next and because, especially at the time, it can seem like you’d be happier if you didn’t do them. Also, these are often tasks that no one else sees and that don’t win you recognition or praise—things like

being faithful in your spiritual disciplines, expending energy on good study habits, or driving the speed limit (even when you're late). But you do them because they are right, not because they have an immediate payoff. In every case you will be better off long-term, even though the things are "hard" or distasteful in the short-term.

5.) Things that **challenge the cultural norm**. These choices go against the flow—dressing modestly, saying "no" to pre-marital sex, holding unpopular positions on issues like homosexuality and abortion, refusing to watch R-rated movies, sharing the gospel with others, or living as an obvious Christian. These choices are hard because they can cost you popularity and friendships. In some countries they could cost you your life. In order to accomplish things in this category, we have to care more about pleasing God than we do about pleasing people around us. But the payoff is huge: If we do them, we can change the course of history.

Starting next chapter we'll be going in-depth with each of these categories. We'll help you overcome common obstacles that stand between you and the accomplishment of these hard things. And we'll show you how teens around the world are attempting and accomplishing hard and exciting things for God.

You'll meet a fifteen-year-old girl whose small idea launched an online project impacting thousands of people around the world; a fifteen-year-old guy who raised over \$20,000 with a group of four friends to provide clean water for children in Africa; a seventeen-year-old who heads a Grammy-nominated band; and many other teens leading rebelutionary lives at home,

at school, at church, and in their communities. These young people are rebelling against low expectations by choosing to get every possible benefit out their teen years in creative, responsible, and highly effective ways.

As you read through the five categories, you probably thought of some hard things you've already done. If so, we're asking you to throw yourself into doing these things with a new level of passion because they are unique challenges God has prepared for you—because it's what you were made to do. We're asking you to live, not your easiest life, but your best life according to God.

Five simple but power-packed choices help make that possible. That's what we want to look at in more detail next.

Chapter 7

The Power of Collaboration

How to do hard things that are too big for you to do alone

As long as Katrina Martin can remember, she's been interested in anything to do with clothing. She's sixteen now, but even when she was four years old she would watch old movies with plots way over her head, just because she liked to look at all the beautiful costumes. She wants to go into fashion design when she grows up. But here's the catch: she wants it be with a fashion company that values modesty.

Her fascination with what she describes as the “forgotten quality” of modesty grew out of her love for fashion—that and many late-night mother-daughter talks as she was entering her teen years. “My desire to dress well expanded into a desire to please God by how I dress,” she told us. “And thus began my quest to figure out what modesty is. In my reading, I always found very good reasons why to dress modestly. But everything I read seemed to leave out the important detail of what modest means.”

She knew that modesty was a heart issue, but it was also a clothing issue. She was puzzled by the lack of resources, and she was especially frustrated that nothing she found presented views on modesty from Christian guys' point of view. Her Christian friends online told her to just ask her father and brothers but for her that wasn't an option. Her only brother was an infant

and her non-Christian dad didn't understand her concerns.

Katrina was sure other girls had a lot of the same questions she did, but she didn't know where to turn for answers. She had an idea that someday she'd find some godly, Christian guys who would allow her to ask them questions about modesty and give answers that she could share with other girls. But how and when and where? Should she just stand in the church lobby with a clipboard?

Katrina felt strongly that she was wrestling with important issues. How do Christian guys really feel about the way girls dress? What is modest to a guy? She thought if she could get solid answers, she could help thousands of teenagers. But she didn't know how or where to get the answers she was seeking.

Her challenge was simply too big for one girl to figure out.

If you've ever had an idea that you felt was just too big for you, or been faced with a project where you didn't even know where to start, you probably know how Katrina felt. There are some hard things that are too big to be accomplished alone. We call them big hard things, and responding correctly when faced with them is what this chapter is all about.

Big hard things range from Katrina's quest to things like organizing an event at your church or school, making a film, reaching out to the homeless in your community, campaigning to get a crude TV show off the air in your community, or starting a band. Big hard things can also include really big causes—fighting to end modern-day slavery, abortion, or poverty and AIDS. We'll be taking a closer look at those kinds of big hard things in Chapter 10.

Unfortunately, more than any other kind of hard thing we talk about in this book, our response to big hard things is usually to give up before we even try. "It's too big for me, end of story," we tell ourselves.

We need to change the way we think about large projects and big ideas. Instead of focusing on our individual limitations, what if we stepped back,

looked around, and asked the question, “Who could be motivated to tackle this with me?” The answer to that question, as you’ll see in this chapter, makes possible a whole new range of options for rebelutionaries. The answer is collaboration—one of the Three Pillars of the Rebelution.

Notice the words “co-“ and “labor” in there? They give you a picture of what collaboration is—it literally means “working together.”

The Power of Collaboration

American popular lore tries to persuade us that our destiny has been won only by rugged individuals who stood tall, acted alone, rarely talked, and drank their whiskey straight. We are taught to admire the rebel, the loner, the maverick. But the facts suggest that the achievements of nations—like those of corporations, armies, universities, sports teams, churches, and families—depend heavily on people coming together to co-labor: to agree on a common goal, then collaborate to make it happen.

Who we collaborate with, of course, is a big deal. Throughout the Bible, we’re taught to make sure we’re doing the right things with the right people. For example, in 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul instructs us to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

We love that verse, because it captures the rebelutionary mindset of collaboration: rebelling against low expectations (“flee youthful passions”), doing hard things (“pursue, or strive after”), and harnessing the power of teamwork: “along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.”

A study of horses revealed that a single horse pulling alone could pull an average of 2,500 pounds. The test was repeated with two horses. You’d expect the weight pulled to double—to about 5,000 pounds. Not so. Instead, two horses working together pulled 12,500 pounds! That’s five times the amount one could pull alone.

Would the numbers hold if instead of horses we used Vespas or Volkswagens? We doubt it. There's something inside a living being that rises to accomplish exponentially greater things when part of a team.

God has made all of us (not just horses) to be more effective when we work in fellowship with others. In fact, the Bible warns us of the danger of isolating ourselves from others. In Hebrews 10:24-25 it says, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." Proverbs 18:1 is even more blunt: "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire, he breaks out against all sound judgment."

People who try to just "go it alone" miss out on the relational advantages as well. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tell us:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When he was seventeen, Jeremy Blaschke and his homeschool group decided to raise money to buy an ultrasound machine for a crisis pregnancy center. Looking back, he says that he didn't really know what he was getting into.

"I never paid that much for anything before," he told us, referring to the ultrasound's price tag of \$25,000. "I really didn't have a grasp of how much that actually was and what it meant to say we were going to raise it."

After a big fundraiser at the local fair and another at Jeremy's church, they had raised \$3,200 towards their goal—and spirits were high. "At the

time I was thinking that it was going to be easy, that we could get it done in a few months,” Jeremy said.

Instead, it got harder. Spring turned to summer—and summer to fall. But together, exactly a year from when they started, Jeremy’s group reached their goal—and more. The \$32,000 they raised was enough not only for the ultrasound machine itself, but also for the training necessary to operate it. Jeremy still can’t talk about it without mentioning his sister Diana and two of his best friends.

“There’s no way I could have done it by myself,” Jeremy said. “I would have gotten frustrated and bored, or just burnt out. They really gave me the support and encouragement to keep going.”

Jeremy’s story is a great example of why we gain such advantage by working “along with those” who share our resolve to do hard things for the glory of God.

For an in-depth look at how teen collaboration works—and at some of its unique challenges—let’s return to one of our favorite collaboration stories ever: How Katrina got the answer to her questions about modesty.

“Do you think I could post some questions?”

In September 2006, Katrina stumbled across TheRebellion.com and joined the forum. It wasn’t long before she got involved in a discussion on modesty in the Girls Only section—and it was there that she had an idea. With hundreds of likeminded Christian teens on one website, what if they could start a discussion on modesty?

When we first received her note, all we knew was that a fifteen-year-old girl from Massachusetts wanted to get Christian guys to give their opinions on modesty. She wrote:

I think girls see girls differently than boys do. Do you think I could

post some questions for the guys to answer about what they think is modest and immodest?

We wrote back to say it sounded possible, as long as the questions and answers were posted anonymously and used the guys' and girls' private forums. A few days later we received an almost identical question from another girl. When we mentioned the idea to other girls and guys, we received enthusiastic responses.

We decided to explore the idea. Katrina opened a thread in the girls' section of the forum and invited readers to submit questions they had for the guys. In a week we had more than 350 questions from hundreds of high school and college age Christian girls from around the world. They wanted to know how guys felt about everything from lip-gloss to swimsuits to sheer sleeves—along with open-ended questions like, “As a guy, what’s your responsibility in this area?”

Besides the forum thread, Katrina was receiving dozens of emails a day. “My inbox was swamped,” she said. “I was extremely surprised that so many other girls were curious about the same things as me.”

We realized we were on to something important. Clearly it wasn't just Katrina's question anymore. Christian girls around the world wanted to better understand how their clothing affected guys. Others wanted to honor God by the way they dressed, but weren't sure where to start. One thing was clear: they had a lot of questions.

After praying about it and talking with our parents we decided we would attempt an online modesty survey. But how? Just the issue of how to format questions for the guys to answer was daunting. We would need a secure system that could collect and track answers. But none of us knew how to do that, and we didn't have money to hire professional help.

Enter David Boskovic, the rebelutionary tech-whiz from Canada who

had helped us launch our full website earlier that year. In between school-work, milking the cows, and running a family business with his older brother, David volunteered his time to design an extremely professional “smart” survey system. It was so good that we had a survey expert from New York contact us to ask which company had built it for us. Imagine their surprise when we told them it was an eighteen-year-old guy—and that he did it from the ground up in less than a month.

The system would track which questions each participant had answered and allow them to return as many times as needed to complete the survey. Each question was rephrased as a statement (e.g. “Bikini swimsuits are immodest”) to which guys could agree or disagree on a five-point scale. Every question included a text box for the guys to further explain their responses. Many questions also included links to pop-up windows with photo-illustrations and definitions. Those were compiled by our fifteen-year-old sister Sarah and a team of girls from the forum. After all, how many teen guys know what “gauchos” or “shrugs” are?

On January 8th, 2007, we opened the 148-question survey. We hoped for at least 100 male responders. Best-case scenario, 1,000, but that didn’t seem realistic.

But what did we know? In the first day, we heard from 120 guys, and within three weeks our total respondents numbered 1,700 Christians guys from forty-eight states and twenty-six countries. Together, they had submitted 160,000 answers—including over 25,000 text responses.

The next task was to process the data. We wanted to release the results on Valentines Day as a gift to all Christian girls striving to dress modestly. That date left us with just two-and-a-half weeks to wade through 3,290 pages of data. Fortunately, David’s incredible programming allowed us to automatically process our findings. That allowed us to focus on the text responses, selecting the top twenty to fifty for each question.

For two weeks our living room was filled with stacks of survey results and scattered with highlighters, pens, and paper clips. After several all-nighters—including some 36-hour days—we released the results. By then, 130 teens had volunteered to mention the survey on their blog sites, send email blasts, or hand out cards at their schools and churches.

Then we waited.

The first signs were not encouraging. About an hour after launching the results we started getting reports that the website was running really slow. “That’s weird,” we thought. “We’re on a really fast server. What is going on?”

Here is the story from Katrina’s perspective:

[That morning] when I went on to find the link to the results, the website took about five minutes to load. I thought that was very strange and when it finally did load people kept saying that the survey was kicking them off. I, in my ignorance of the Internet, thought that maybe a couple hundred people were on there.

Later when I was Instant Messaging a friend she said something about 10,000 people looking at it in the first hour. It was so many that the server had actually shut down.

I couldn’t believe it! I was so excited that I was jumping around the house yelling “10,000 people in the first hour!” in spite of the fact that I had a sore throat and fever. My sister said that she was going to whack me on the head with her cookie tray if I didn’t stop screaming!

It wasn’t until later that we got the full report from David: even with the server down for over an hour the survey had received 420,000 hits in the first twelve hours.

What an amazing experience! Our team received hundreds of com-

ments and emails expressing gratitude for the survey. One of the most common responses was from girls who were blown away that so many guys actually appreciated their efforts to dress modestly—and cared enough to take the survey. Our favorite response, though, was from Katrina herself, reflecting on what had come from her sincere question and simple idea:

I was amazed that the survey became so big. It started with my little idea and it grew into a project with thousands of people involved.

The survey isn't legalistic and there are no rules from it, but the answers allow girls to get a glimpse into the minds of guys. There is no way I ever could have done something like this on my own.

I had always wanted to have an impact. Somehow I wanted to encourage Christian girls to dress more modestly, but I never dreamed that I would actually have a chance to have such widespread influence.

It was the first time a big dream of mine came true.

The satisfaction that comes from knowing that what we've accomplished together dwarfs anything we could have done alone is something we've seen before. We saw this truth play out beautifully with the Modesty Survey, the Alabama Supreme Court races and with our Reblution Tour conferences.

We want to pass on a few things we've learned about collaboration that might help you when you're faced with an important task that's too big for you to accomplish alone.

10 Things We Learned about Teams

Walk into any Barnes and Noble and you'll find whole aisles devoted almost entirely to the subject of collaboration. It's called the Business Section. We

recommend you spend some time there. We know we can't compete with authors who are wiser and more experienced on such a complex subject. Besides, we don't need to re-write what is written there. We simply offer a teens'-eye view of where to start, how to avoid a few common pitfalls, and ultimately, how to harness the power of collaboration to accomplish big hard things for God

1. Start with questions. The first thing you need to do is ask yourself some foundational questions:

- What is God saying to me about this idea?
- What is the advice of my parents and others I trust?
- Am I the one to lead? If not, can I be a catalyst and get things moving?
- What are my personal strengths and weaknesses?
- Who are people I know who can help fill the gaps where my ability or knowledge falls short?
- Do I care enough about this issue to not just start something big, but to see it through no matter what?

As you saw in Katrina's story, God does give guidance and help to those who are seeking Him. You might get all green lights, or you might see a lot of yellows or even reds. Make sure you ask—and listen—before you launch.

2. Walk with the wise. Right from the beginning, look to those who are older and wiser for reliable guidance. One of our favorite verses about collaboration is Proverbs 13:20: "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." This verse reminds us that friends can be a curse or a blessing, depending on whether they are wise or

foolish. It also tells us that we become like our friends. You've heard the old saying, "You are what you eat." It's probably just as accurate to say, "You are who you hang out with." If we want to be wise, mature, and godly, we have to make friends of people who have those qualities.

Walking with the wise usually means spending time with those who are older, more experienced, and more godly than we are. This applies especially to collaborating on major projects. Proverbs 20:29 says that the glory of youth is "our strength," and that the glory of the old is their "gray hair." In ancient Israel, gray hair symbolized dignity, honor, experience, and wisdom. Teens have a lot of energy, but we don't always know what to do with it; older people often have better insight but don't always have the time or energy to see them through. The beauty of collaboration between older and younger generations is that we combine strength with wisdom—a sure-fire way to accomplish more for the glory of God.

3. Don't overlook home field advantage. Family is a God-designed vehicle for collaboration that most teens miss, even though we're right in the middle of it. Your parents are intended by God to be your primary mentors, and unless you're an only child, siblings can be some of your best helpers. Look back at the stories we've covered in this chapter: Katrina's biggest supporter and mentor was always her mom. Jeremy's main assistant was his sister, Diana. We've seen this over and over in our own lives and in the stories of countless teens.

The Rebelution conferences are put on for teens, by teens. The local coordinators for our Denver and Dallas events in 2007, Joanna Griffith and Marshall Sherman, were seventeen and sixteen, respectively, when they started work securing facilities and assembling their local teams. We had publicity captains as young as thirteen spreading the word at their school, local paper, or youth group, schools, local papers, and youth groups. In

Denver our facility captain Robert Anderson—in charge of event set-up and logistics—was fourteen.

But—although teens have the titles and carry the responsibility—it’s a whole-family affair. Joanna’s parents ran countless errands and manned the book tables and check-out station. Her sister, Susanna, was the refreshments captain for the event, providing lunch and snacks for over 500 people. Joanna’s other siblings helped by running errands, carrying boxes, stuffing nametags into their plastic holders, and any number of other tasks.

In our family, not only is our father one of the main speakers at the conferences, but our older brother Joel leads worship. When it comes to organization, schedules, supplies, accounting—and everything in between—our mother is a third-degree black belt. Our sixteen-year-old sister Sarah helps to coordinate volunteers, makes phone calls, sends emails, folds and arranges hundreds of Do Hard Things t-shirts, stuffs nametags, and is our Mom’s right-hand girl. Our thirteen-year-old brother Isaac is a jack-of-all-trades. Before the events he is in charge of brochure mailings—packing, addressing, and mailing hundreds of envelopes to families around the country. Even our seven-year-old brother James helps. At the Indianapolis conference in 2007, he spent hours with older volunteers, zip-tying over 2,000 folding chairs into straight, even rows.

By the way, when we let younger kids work alongside us, we’re doing for them what we ask of our older mentors. When they walk with us, relatively speaking, they walk with the wise. They get to be mentored in how and why to do hard things. We get energetic and enthusiastic help. Everybody wins.

We understand that not everyone has a family like ours, and we’d be remiss if we tried to make our family sound anything near perfect. But we hope you catch a vision for collaborating with family, if not with the family you have now, then with other families in your community, and with the family you’ll have someday.

4. Use technology to grow your team. One of the greatest benefits of modern technology is that it lets us connect with likeminded people regardless of location. Many of our best friends today are people we know primarily online, and yet we've been able to work together on some exciting projects.

The Modesty Survey is one fine example. The Alabama campaigns are another. For one candidate's website design we used a company that is the co-enterprise of Jake Smith and another rebelutionary, Alex King. Alex lived in Maine and Jake in Oklahoma. They've still never met, but they delivered top-notch service.

These same guys, along with a several other online friends, also headed up an online magazine, podcast, and blog network for Christian teens called Regenerate Our Culture. It ran for almost two years and brought together teen writers, editors, and radio hosts from around the world. Again, hardly any of them ever met in person.

In fact, one of the most common responses we've received since launching TheRebelution.com is from young people who thought they were all alone in their convictions about the teen years. They express how grateful and relieved they are to finally find a community of likeminded teens—and it's all online.

5. Treasure high-quality criticism. From early on in the development of the Modesty Survey, we asked for and received counsel from family and friends. Modesty is a sensitive topic, and we knew that we needed help framing the questions. We also knew the survey results could easily come across as a list of rules or as a bunch of guys telling girls how to dress. We didn't want that. Thankfully, we were able to receive high-quality input as we developed the survey, which helped us provide biblical teaching on modesty

in the weeks leading up to the survey's release. Of course, getting corrective input doesn't always feel good at the time. It would have been easy to react defensively to the "criticism." But without it, we could have ended up doing more harm than good.

6. Credit is free if you give it away. One of the common dangers we've come across is that pride (e.g. striving for credit and taking offense when we feel overlooked) often sabotages team efforts. What to do? We recommend dealing quickly and respectfully with hurt feelings. We also recommend establishing a team code that says, "Credit is free around here, and we give it away." That helps individuals focus on the needs and accomplishment of others and of the group as a whole. This makes for a much happier, healthier, and effective team.

Any one of us involved in the Modesty Survey could have made a wreck of the project if we had been seeking all the credit. Katrina could have demanded a bigger role in everything—it was her idea. We could have tried to take all of the glory—it was our website. And David could have done the same thing (plus charge us a lot of money we didn't have)—it was his survey system, and none of it would have been possible without him. But thankfully, none of that happened. Instead, we focused on accomplishing something we believed in, and thousands have been blessed as a result.

7. Other people are sinners, too. Probably the hardest thing about working with other people is that you actually have to work with them. Know what we mean? Even good, solid, sincere Christians are sinful and imperfect (i.e. "difficult if not impossible at times"). And pressure, weariness and frustration often bring out the worst in people. That's why big hard things require patience, humility, and a nearly endless supply of forgiveness.

One of the reasons we love stories like Katrina's and Jeremy's is that

they're all about big hard things being accomplished by a group of ordinary teens. One of the things our dad likes to say about the church is that it "runs on regular." The same is true about the Rebelution, and it's certainly true about accomplishing big hard things—it doesn't take superheroes or saints. It just takes a small handful of likeminded people willing to do hard things together and extend a lot of grace along the way.

8. Expect a nightmare or two. Over the course of putting together the Survey—and working on the campaigns in Alabama—we ran into countless miscommunications, disagreements, and silly mistakes. At times, the unbelievable, impossible and disastrous happened—all at the same time.

For example, in the process of organizing the successful distribution of over 120,000 campaign newspapers at the Talladega Superspeedway NASCAR 500—an enormous event with over 1 million people in a single weekend—we ran into more than our share of what felt like minor catastrophes.

First, the fifty college students driving in from four states away forgot to factor in the time difference and arrived an hour before we were ready for them. We didn't have sign-in sheets to check them in, and pizza hadn't been delivered yet. It was a bad start.

Then we discovered a major miscommunication. The students' professor had communicated to them that they would be campaigning for the governor's race—not the Supreme Court races. When they found out they were disappointed, and some of them were upset. They felt like they had been tricked, and a few of them wanted to leave right then and there.

At this point there were only three campaign members at the campground: Alex, Brett, and another seventeen-year-old named Jonathan Monplaisir. We wanted to crawl into a hole and die. Then the college students found out how old we were—and that we were in charge—and it seemed like things couldn't get any worse. Thankfully, they didn't.

We made a lot of phone calls and were able to get the candidates there quickly to give the students a pep talk. We called the professor and obtained a statement from him admitting that the mistake was his and that he firmly believed that helping our candidates was just as important as helping the governor's race.

Over the course of that evening we were able to pull things back together, get pizza to the hungry students, assemble over 1,000 campaign signs, load tens-of-thousands of newspapers into the vehicles, and get everyone into bed. Compared to those first few hours, the next two days went like clockwork.

Nightmares happen. But we shouldn't be surprised. The Bible warns us that when we actively pursue Christ's mission, we'll face obstacles. So our best response is to be forewarned—and not to panic when it happens. Actually, we've found that nightmares give your prayer life a real boost—and teach you a whole lot at warp speed. Protect yourself and your team from being discouraged by looking for God's hand in every situation.

9. Don't give up. Successful collaboration almost always requires a lot of people working together over a long period of time. So teamwork requires perseverance.

It would have been easy for Katrina to give up on her big idea long before it came about. She didn't know anyone else who could (or would) help her. Even on our forums, the initial response to her idea of asking guys questions about modesty was less than enthusiastic. Other girls pointed out how awkward a public discussion on the topic would be. She almost gave up altogether, but her mom encouraged her to keep going and to ask us directly. "It took some convincing," she says, "But I'm so glad I didn't give up."

10. Success happens (in more ways than one). We've found that col-

laboration is not only how we accomplish big hard things, but it often turns into a big hard thing itself. That means we should measure our success not just by the goal we're shooting for, but also by how well we work together to get there. Look inside your team effort for small but important victories—personal firsts, spiritual breakthroughs, tough to-do lists completed, lessons learned, total disasters turned into qualified successes. They're all successes of different kinds, and they're all important.

Our two major collaborative efforts—the Alabama campaigns and the Modesty Survey—had very different final results. The Modesty Survey turned out better than we ever imagined. We lost the elections. But in a way both were a successful because the young people involved grew stronger in the process. They made real accomplishments, gained valuable experience, impacted others for good, and learned lessons about teamwork and big hard things that they'll be able to hold onto forever.

Tackling Big Hard Things

The most exciting thing about stepping up to the challenge of big hard things is that when God calls on you, He will bring the help you need to get the job done. So don't be afraid of tackling big goals with others. Your first big hard thing might not be raising \$32,000, coordinating a grassroots campaign, or launching online survey. But just like with any hard thing, the big hard things you can accomplish will get bigger as you get stronger.

We hope you've seen that big projects don't have to wait until later. We can accomplish great things together for God, starting today.

We love the way Katrina put it, looking back at the Modesty Survey:

At the time, nothing seemed at all strange, but when I look back on it now, it totally blows me away. We were all eighteen or younger. I was only fifteen. It makes me wonder, what more is possible when

teens work together? There were about five main people working on the Modesty Survey. Imagine what we could do with a team of one hundred people!

What could you do with three people, or ten, or a hundred? Pray and plan.
Then go for it.