



Mike Whaley (R) recruited most of his board members for Memphis College Prep through contacts he made while in NEXUS.

Follow the Leader

NEXUS recruits Memphis' brightest and best to bring about change.

Ever read a story in the newspaper about or work alongside someone you really admire as a leader? They do great things, not only in their careers but also in their communities. Other people benefit from their talents, resources and gifts, and as a result, everybody's better off than where they started. Think Memphis could use a few more people like that?

That's the whole idea behind Second's NEXUS program. Founded by Second in partnership with MPACT Memphis, a civic organization, NEXUS seeks to replicate proven, successful leaders in order to multiply their influence on our community. They do this by calling on Memphis' best and brightest from all walks of life and asking them to mentor younger protégés.

The pairs commit to a nine-month curriculum beginning with a weekend retreat at Victory Ranch in August and culminating with graduation in May.

They meet monthly on Thursday evenings at Second to hear from well-known speakers on topics such as Leading through Change, Dreaming and Asking, as well as meeting together privately at least once a month to discuss the topics and share life lessons.

“NEXUS came at an important time for me and set my direction.”

—Austin Baker

All of this hopefully prepares the protégés, as well as the mentors, to become effective leaders for positive change in Memphis.

A Memphis MILE

Austin Baker, 27, was in the NEXUS Class of 2006 with Dr. Neal Beckford as his mentor. He graduated from the University of Memphis in 2004 with a degree in Management and Finance

and was working at E-Serv, an employee benefits company, as well as helping out with the family business, Owen Brennan's restaurant.

“NEXUS came at an important time for me and set my direction,” Austin says. He was deeply committed to the U of M and felt there was too much disconnect between the professional world and students in the business school. So, in true NEXUS fashion, he led a change to make things better.

He, along with professor Dr. Robert Taylor, established MILE, the Memphis Institute for Leadership Education. In its first year, 2007-08, it paired 25 of the best juniors and seniors in the business school with 25 successful business professionals in the Memphis area.

The idea caught on quickly with the students,” Austin says. There is a careful selection process to choose who will be in the program.

SECOND IMPRESSIONS MEET YOUR STAFF



Heather Hunt

Family

My husband Chuck of almost 10 years and three-year old daughter, Hadley

Job at Second:

Director of NEXUS

Came on staff:

June 2007

The thing I enjoy most about Second is:

I grew up in a very small church in a very small town. I feel like Second is a small community with many ways to serve.

I feel I can really make a difference when:

I connect people!

The best thing about Memphis is:

There are so many ways to get involved and make a difference. Through my position at NEXUS I love seeing the energy and passion from so many young and proven leaders in Memphis. They are all truly making a difference.

Please don't EVER ask me to:

Take out the trash!

My friends would describe me as:

Creative & thoughtful.

People would be surprised to know I:

Listen to Sports Talk Radio.

Kindest thing somebody has done for me lately:

Recently a friend sent me flowers!

"We assess how well they're learning in the classroom, their deeper commitment to the community at large, how well they demonstrate what it means to be a Memphian, their GPA and their leadership experience, and then there is a panel interview with professionals," he adds.'

Mentors are recruited just as carefully. They are often alumni, business owners and leaders with a teaching heart and a connection and commitment to the University as well as leadership experience.

Like NEXUS, MILE participants have a speaker once a month and outside sessions together, but they also experience mock interviews, job shadowing and volunteer together. "We've found that these activities are very helpful when it comes to preparing a student to successfully pursue a job upon graduation," Austin says.

MILE just graduated its second class, which jumped from 25 pairs in the first year to 83 pairs in the second. "We feel we've created 100 new leaders for the city, and they're out there serving on boards and working on problems," he says with pride.

Austin is quick to acknowledge NEXUS as the inspiration for his efforts. "I was so fresh from college, and seeing those relationships being formed made me realize that this idea could be helpful to students as well," he says.

Andy Ling graduated from MILE2 in April, after completing the first year of the MILE program in the spring of 2008. "We liked it so much we asked for more, so they came up with MILE2," he says.

Andy's mentor for the first year was Blake Carson with local insurance company Lipscomb and Pitts.

"I liked everything about the program. The speakers were great—on topics like business ethics, public speaking and networking, and the opportunity to mix with other



Austin Baker speaking to MILE students at a recent meeting.

like-minded students and mentors was very helpful," Andy says. He graduated in May with a degree in Business Management. He says he feels better prepared to enter the workforce and contribute to the community as a result of his time in MILE. "I not only learned from my mentor but everyone else's as well. And there were a myriad of different businesses and professions represented," he says.

He feels that the strength of MILE is that it takes the students beyond what they can learn in a textbook or classroom and puts them in contact with people who are doing "the real stuff," as he puts it.

"Whatever community these students end up in will benefit," he says. "They graduate smarter, better prepared and wiser about business ethics than they would be without MILE."

Memphis College Prep

Mike Whaley, a graduate of the NEXUS class of 2008, went through as a protégé to Dr. Cayce Lawrence, a graduate pro-

fessor in the business school at Christian Brothers University.

At the time he was teaching at Getwell Elementary and was halfway through the Build the Next One program, a national program that recruits teachers and others to begin high-performing charter schools in urban areas. There are six schools set to open across the nation next year.

He was a little nervous and unsure about his mentor at first. "I wasn't really interested in higher education and didn't see how this relationship was going to help me in what I wanted to accomplish," Mike says. He's quick to acknowledge now that the two had and still have a great



Mike Whaley with students at Star Academy, a local charter school. (Photo: Steve Roberts)

relationship and that Dr. Lawrence turned out to be a valuable source of advice and connections for his new endeavor.

Mike is working hard to open Memphis College Prep in the fall of 2010. Its location is still undetermined as he and his board evaluate possible sites. He's been busy in the year-long fellowship program, training and serving residencies at other schools in low-income areas. Right now he's at Star Academy, a kindergarten through fifth grade program housed at Golden Gate Church on James Road.

Memphis College Prep will be a college preparatory elementary school (K through 5th grade) that stresses character development, rigorous educational standards and higher education. "We will focus on the foundational level that will lead to their ultimate success. We want our kids to enter middle school working at or above their grade level and on par with their more affluent peers coming from private schools," he says.

He's busy recruiting students from all over the city to commit to Memphis College Prep. "It's going door-to-door in the neighborhoods where at-risk kids live, mostly minorities who are zoned to attend failing schools. It's visiting leaders of preschools, Head Start and other programs, working to identify the children who will most benefit from this opportunity. Most will come to us below where they should be academically. It's our job to catch them up," he says.

NEXUS has served Mike well in his dream beyond just providing him with a helpful mentor. "Almost half of my board members came through NEXUS, and they are a great group of committed members who are using their expertise to get this school off the ground. NEXUS opened doors to leaders who have a passion for public service and especially for public education," he says with conviction.

And who is the NEXUS speaker that stands out the most in his mind? Our very own Sandy Willson, speaking on Motivating. "It made me think about what motivates others toward your cause, because you can't assume it's always money. It really helped me in the board-building process in getting weight and people behind this idea. I was able to describe to them how this project will impact other areas of Memphis that people care about passionately," he says. ■

Recruitment efforts for both mentors and protégés for the 2009/2010 NEXUS class are underway. Admire somebody's leadership skills? Tell them about NEXUS. Interested in serving as a mentor yourself? Let us know. Think you could benefit as a protégé and learn from some wise and powerful Memphians? Then NEXUS could be the place for you. For a complete description of the program, visit www.nexusleaders.org, or contact Executive Director Heather Hunt at (901)454-0034.

NEXUS meets monthly on Thursday evenings at 5:30 p.m. at Second Presbyterian Church for dinner and a speaker.

The scheduled list of speakers and topics for the 2009/2010 class follows:

August 7-8, 2009:
Your Leadership Strengths, *Opening Retreat*
Victory Ranch, Boliver, TN

September 10, 2009:
Leading Through Change
Micah D. Greenstein
Senior Rabbi, Temple Israel

October 1, 2009:
Motivating by Mentoring
Tomeka Hart
President & CEO, Memphis Urban League, Inc.

November 5, 2009:
Funding
Susan S. Stephenson
Co-Chair & President, Independent Bank

December 3, 2009:
Planning
Tom Schmitt
President & CEO
FedEx Global Supply Chain Services

January 14, 2010:
Asking
Bobb Biehl
Executive Mentor, Masterplanning Group

February 4, 2010:
Building
Interactive Panel
with Community Leaders in Non-profit,
Corporate & Education Sectors

March 4, 2010:
Ethical Decision Making
Sandy Willson
Senior Pastor, Second Presbyterian Church

April 22, 2010:
Dreaming
Gordon MacDonald
Author & Speaker

May 6, 2010:
Focusing, *Graduation*
Bobb Biehl
Executive Mentor, Masterplanning Group