

Holly Tate: [00:07](#) Welcome to the Vanderbilt Leadership Podcast. I'm your host, Holly Tate, Vice President of Business Development here at Vanderbilt. On today's episode, I talk with Dr. Virginia Ward and Kristen Ivy who are the coauthors of It's Personal: Five Questions You Should Answer To Give Every Kid Hope.

Holly Tate: [00:24](#) Dr. Ward is the Associate Dean of the Boston campus at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, as well as the Assistant Professor of Youth Ministry and Leadership. Kristen Ivy is the Executive Director of Messaging at Orange, which is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to influence those who influence the next generation. We talk with them about better equipping staff and volunteers to authentically engage the younger generation. So tweet your takeaways from today's show using the #undercast and make sure you check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group where we post behind the scenes content and giveaways.

Holly Tate: [00:59](#) Here's my conversation with Dr. Virginia Ward and Kristen Ivy.

Holly Tate: [01:09](#) Well, Kristen and Virginia, thank you so much for being with us today.

Kristen Ivy: [01:13](#) We're excited to be here. Thanks for having us.

Virginia Ward: [01:15](#) Yes, thank you very much.

Holly Tate: [01:17](#) Well, I can't wait to dig into your new book. I've got it right here in front of me, It's Personal. But before we do that, I would love to hear your story.

Holly Tate: [01:27](#) So Kristen, could you share with our audience briefly what brought you to where you are today and the Orange team?

Kristen Ivy: [01:33](#) Sure. I would love to. I was an educator, actually taught high school for a few years. And when I stepped away from teaching, I went back to seminary and got a Masters of Divinity and fell in love with the concept of taking the best of child development and education world and theology to really dive into faith formation. What that looks like, what that means when you have a perspective that's strategic from birth all the way through early adulthood and how to think about laying those foundations in an intentional way. And that's when I found Orange. And so I have been with this organization we call Orange for around 15 years now, since it got started and launched. And I get a privilege to work with some of the most creative leaders. I'm a little biased on just these concepts of,

how do we do that through curriculum, through leader training and equipping churches so that they can really make the most of faith instruction for preschool all the way through high school.

Holly Tate: [02:36](#) Well, and I think that's what you guys at Orange do so well, is the approach to every phase of the child's growing and development. You know, how can we as the church serve them, and meet them where they are and make sure that they're following Christ in that. So thank you for all that you guys do.

Holly Tate: [02:52](#) And Virginia, I would love for you to share your story and what brought you to where you are as the Assistant Dean at Gordon Conwell.

Virginia Ward: [03:01](#) I started out on a journey of being a practitioner in youth ministry. So I have always had a heart to reach young people, but to do it in more of a holistic manner, to connect with a local church. My Mom taught Sunday school, Dad was a pastor, I'm a third generation preacher's kid. [inaudible 00:00:03:18]. Grew up in church, but still really didn't necessarily have the relationship that I needed, but there were caring adults in my life who saw me for who I was and what I could be actually. And so that drew me into a love for youth ministry. So went to Gordon Conwell's, studied there, did a Master's of Arts in Youth Ministry and then really was invited by other youth ministry practitioners, Duffy Robbins, Walt Mueller, to enter into, and Dean Bergman, to enter into youth ministry on the academic side.

Virginia Ward: [03:54](#) So I did a doctoral program there in emerging generations. On that journey of seeking how I could better engage with ministries that were already doing the work, I literally stumbled in to Reggie Joiner and the folks at Orange and just kind of grabbed a of them and said, "This is awesome for families. This is awesome for youth ministry." I think it's something that urban churches need to know more about and church leaders need to know more about the practicality of how to better serve the family, and not just isolating young people. So I've been a part of the Orange family four, maybe five, years now. And they're not getting rid of me no matter how hard they try. I really, really love it. I'm growing and expanding and, as Kristen said, to be around such a creative and innovative body of people who love Jesus and who are committed to seeing leaders and the family be all they can be for Christ.

Holly Tate: [04:56](#) I love it. Well, thank you both for all that you're doing to support churches and really understanding this next generation because it's a different world now, and it's so important that we're equipped on how to raise the next generation for Christ. And you know, that kind of leads us to the book. So the book that you guys have worked so hard on is called It's Personal: Five Questions You Should Answer To Give Every Kid Hope.

Holly Tate: [05:20](#) So Kristen, tell us about the inspiration for this book. How did the idea come along?

Kristen Ivy: [05:27](#) That's a really interesting question. You know, Virginia and myself and Reggie, we were in a meeting and we were actually exploring a different concept at the time, and talking about church leadership in a number of different ways. As we got into the conversation, the idea just sort of bubbled up. I don't know if you've ever been in a room when an idea gets thrown out there, it wasn't what you were intending to meet about. And as we kept pursuing it, there was just so much more energy and momentum, so we kept throwing ideas on these creative boards that we have in the room. It was kind of a late night conversation and ... I see Virginia smiling. She remembers exactly the moment. It's one of those things, you know where you were sitting, you remember the energy of the room. And by the end of the night, we knew this was a book and this was also going to be the theme of conference. And we were really onto something that was in our hearts to say all along.

Holly Tate: [06:21](#) I love that. And so the book walks through these five questions that every leader working with kids should be able to answer. And what I love about that is, we have people listening who are pastors and church leaders. We have other people that might be volunteers that are working with kids in our church. And then we also have educators, like you, Virginia, who are equipping or maybe directly training the next generation. And so these five questions walk through what every leader working with kids should be able to answer.

Holly Tate: [06:50](#) So Virginia, can you walk us through, I'm kind of putting you on the spot, walk us through those five questions, or at least maybe a couple of your favorites, so that we can give folks a glimpse of the important topics that you guys talk about in the book.

Virginia Ward: [07:03](#) Well, I love that we, and we all again, as Kristen said, we kind of all stumbled into this as far as how we start in building relationships with young people and people in general. So any

leader, we don't want leaders to think, "Oh, I can only apply this for young people." But the first question of, do you know my name? How many times has someone gotten our name wrong or didn't know our name, or we felt invisible. And so this book, that first question of these five questions, is an invitation to leave the shallow part of a relationship and to enter into some deeper waters where you really begin to get personal. So the first question, do you know my name? We liken that to the account with Jesus and Zacchaeus where he calls him by name and he sees him in the tree.

Virginia Ward: [07:47](#)

And when someone calls you by name, you're like, "Whoa, you really know me." And so that first question gives a leader an opportunity to get to know someone. Given the global space we're living in now, a lot of the names that people have, they mean something. Sometimes it tells you when they were born, depending on the culture, or it tells you where their lineage is in the family line, or they're named after some distant relative. And so knowing it, an individual's name, gives you an invitation, at least puts that first foot in the door that I want to get to know you. I see you.

Virginia Ward: [08:21](#)

And so then from there, one of the other questions as, even with Zacchaeus when Jesus said, "You know, I'm coming to your house." So the second question is, do you know where I live? So understanding where people live and not just geographically, but where they live in a socioeconomic space, in a society's place. Where do they live emotionally? Where do they live in a holistic manner? And we really get to understand that person and what's around them, who they're with, how they connect. And as a leader, imagine being armed with that information with a volunteer, with a staff worker, with a young person, with a family member. It really positions you to a greater place of relationship building.

Holly Tate: [09:04](#)

I love that. That's so good. I love that you brought up the story of Zacchaeus. What a beautiful example of just being known. And that was what Jesus was all about. Over and over again, even when it scared people, because sometimes it's scary to be known, but we all yearn for that. It's so important.

Holly Tate: [09:22](#)

So Kristen, how can churches use the concepts in its personnel to better equip their staff and volunteers? I mean, volunteers, this is such a huge topic at Vanderbilt as we're creating resources for ministry leaders, anything we do on volunteers is like the most downloaded. Everybody is looking for more help on how to equip their volunteers. So what would you say to

folks that are looking for more help and really equipping their volunteers to effectively lead the next generation?

Kristen Ivy: [09:51](#) I think there are some things that we discovered along the way that I would just say, for me, in my own volunteer training, because I volunteer as well. I've always volunteered in youth ministry. I feel like these are lessons I've learned the hard way and continue to learn on a regular basis. And so there's so much in it for the average volunteer. I think one of the myths that it kind of debunks is this myth that in order to volunteer you need to be perfect, or you need to have resolved your story, or you need to be meeting certain standards. And it really dives into something that we miss a lot of times, which is the value of authenticity. If you've come to a place in your life as a volunteer where you understand how to tap into an authentic place in yourself, you'll be a better volunteer to show up in the lives of other people.

Kristen Ivy: [10:38](#) And it, like Virginia mentioned, it challenges you to get out of a shallow superficial relationship where you show up in somebody's life to teach them scriptural principles and you never become vulnerable enough to be authentic with someone, to give them the kind of safe place they really need in their life to get to a more real and authentic faith formation. So it does push you into a different kind of relationship. And I think it also, as you could tell from the questions that Virginia's talking about, it elevates things that we tend to minimize in children's ministry and youth ministry. It's easier sometimes to focus on, what kind of microphones do you use? What kind of speakers do you have? What do you use for your lighting and your stage? And all of those environmental factors are really important, but a lot of times it's just easy for us to go, "Okay, we don't need to talk about know their name. That's too basic. That's not something that even, why would we even need to say that?"

Kristen Ivy: [11:34](#) It goes without saying and yet it really doesn't go without saying because it takes so much work to know somebody's name. It takes a lot of effort on our part and so we've kind of come back to some basics. You can do these without any budget. You can do these regardless of where your church is positioned geographically. You can do these ... I mean, it doesn't matter where your church is situated or what kind of denominational backgrounds you have. The principles that are in here are so foundational that we all have to get back to these, in essence, if we want to build solid volunteers.

- Holly Tate: [12:08](#) I love that.
- Holly Tate: [12:09](#) And Virginia, can you talk to, I love what, Kristen, what you just said, which is one of the foundational points of the book is to be authentic. Stop being shallow. So Virginia, I would love to hear from you, since you are in such a robust academic setting, what do you feel like it is that has, really has, this next generation yearn for authenticity?
- Virginia Ward: [12:32](#) Well, I think the whole span of technology, where technology allows you the use of cell phones, the internet, it allows you to almost live in a false self. Because I can create whatever environment around me. I can create whatever image that I want to create. And technology gives us the space to be able to stay in that cocoon. But when I'm face-to-face with you, and you see me and I'm talking with you, I can, you know, see, smell, taste, not you, but you know what I mean, touch you in various spaces and it makes us vulnerable, that you have to bring those walls down. I'm also finding and seeing with our students that there's a real hunger and a desire for an intergenerational connection. So we've had a lot of talk about Millennials and now with Gen Z coming up.
- Virginia Ward: [13:22](#) As the builder's begin to move off the scene, you've got this huge component, or this huge pile, of Baby Boomers who are trying to figure out, what's my role now? What do I do? And how do I connect with, not only just Millennials, but that Gen X generation that we don't talk a lot about. So people are seeking for more of a touch and technology is not the answer alone. It's made it easy to some degree, but it's also made it, given us all a false sense, and we still yearned to be touched. There are a number of research projects that have proven that young people and people in general long for a touch. They long to be seen and to be known and to connect with another human being. And so I think the rise of technology has brought about an increase in relationships needing to become more personal.
- Holly Tate: [14:18](#) So good. And I love what you just said about that generation gap. That's something that we hear at Vanderbilt. Our founder and CEO, William Vanderbilt, talks about the double-humped camel. So exactly what you just said. There's tons of Baby Boomers that are facing retirement, currently walking through career transitions in every industry. And then you've got the next generation of Millennials and Gen Z that are ... officially Millennials are now the largest generation in the workforce because there's just less Gen Xes. There were just less of them born. So you've got the Boomers that are looking at the

Millennials like, "Wait, you're supposed to follow me? I wasn't prepared for this." And so there's just a lot of transition that needs to happen that a lot of leaders aren't prepared for.

Holly Tate: [15:04](#) And so what I love about this book is, while it's written for us to think about how to give every kid hope ... I love what both of you said at the beginning of this interview, which is, "These can apply to any leader, no matter who you're leading." These five questions are just relatable to the human experience, and we all want to be known, and we all want to be seen and be heard.

Holly Tate: [15:26](#) So thank you to you both for writing about these important questions. I think every leader should go dig in, learn more, really spend time with these five questions and ask yourself, "Do I know the answer about the team that I'm leading? Do I know the answer to this about my board, or my elders or my volunteers?" So, so important.

Holly Tate: [15:49](#) So Kristen, where can folks go to learn more about It's Personal?

Kristen Ivy: [15:53](#) Well, it's available on Amazon, wherever you buy books, orange books.com, you can learn more about it. It's a quick read. It's a short read. Honestly, if you're trying to read more and complete more books and you want to just get a check mark on something really fast and easy, this one really is. You can knock it out in a day or a weekend and sit down and really get ahold of all the principles. So just kind of encourage you a little bit there. It is just a few notes that all of us feel like we have lived out, that we're excited to share.

Holly Tate: [16:27](#) Well, I just like everything Orange does, it's very well designed and so you're exactly right. I mean, just flipping through it, there's takeaways, there's quotes, really easy to read. So thank you for making it skiable for those of us that like to skim, awesome.

Holly Tate: [16:43](#) Well, Virginia and Kristen, thank you so much for your time and for just the blessing that you are to the kingdom. We're so grateful for the important work that you're doing and helping us all understand this next generation and understand how to lead them well. So thank you.

Kristen Ivy: [16:55](#) Thank you so much Holly.

Holly Tate: [16:59](#) Thanks for listening to today's episode. The Vanderbilt Leadership Podcast is produced by our friends at Twelve:Thirty Media from ready to you, the worship media content to custom

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Holly Tate: [17:27](#)

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