Understanding Culture Shock

Welcome to Youth for Christ! We are excited about the prospect of you being a committed staff person in service to the Lord through our organization. This first year on staff at Youth for Christ will be an exciting time to learn new skills, develop a deeper passion for ministry and grow closer to God in your own relationship with Him. One of the things that you may not realize at this point is that you are about to embark on a difficult journey. This journey is difficult not simply because you will be orientated to a new job or a new position and learning new skills. Your transition to YFC creates a deep level of change in your day-to-day focus. Maybe this Kingdom focus is what drew you into the position in the first place. We hope so! But the reality is, this new Kingdom focus is a difficult transition to make. The culture shock of beginning to work for YFC takes a lot of people by surprise. In fact, it might be helpful for you to know that a large portion of the people we recruit to work at Youth for Christ end up terminating their positions before the first year of their service is complete. The YFC staff has been scratching our heads over this. It has forced us to ask ourselves, “Why? What makes a person want to leave after their first year in the ministry and service to the Lord?” We are going to explore some of these complicated issues in this article. Understanding the phases of culture shock is meant to provide a framework for you to assess your ministry experience at Youth for Christ and is by no means meant to be authoritative or exhaustive. It would be impossible to cover all of the issues that pop up in a first year staff person’s experience. But, hopefully, it will open your eyes to some of more general trends that you most likely experience during your first year of work at Youth for Christ.

Culture Shock? You may be asking yourself. Why are they making me read something about culture shock? I thought that I was just going to be an administrative assistant, or a youth minister, or a grant writer. Or a … (fill in the blank). Why read about culture shock? Overcoming the culture shock of working with Youth for Christ is going to be one of the most difficult challenges of your life. Didn’t know that you were in for such a challenge? Don’t worry; we didn’t either when we first began working here.

This paper is a collection of thoughts and feelings of a number of staff who have experienced the culture shock of transitioning from being a college student, or having a job in
the secular world to working at Youth for Christ. We want to prepare you for a coming struggle and warn you of the pitfalls of deception that come with experiencing culture shock as a new staff person at Youth for Christ. I have my own personal experiences of being a first year staff person at Youth for Christ. I’ve also polled a number of other first year staff people, some who didn’t make it through the dark valley of the culture shock and others who did and came out on the other side victorious and ready to commit to full time service for the Lord. I talked to them about their journeys and have tried my best to see how all of this information can be collected together and be useful to serve YOU, the new staff person. The people I have seen experience this culture shock have been administrative assistants, grant writers, field staff worker—you name it. You can experience culture shock at every level in Christian ministry.

**So what is Culture Shock?** Culture Shock is when a sojourner is unfamiliar with the social conventions of the new culture, or if familiar with them, is either unable or unwilling to perform according to those rules.¹ I know it sounds extremely negative and distressing, but we don’t want you to be unaware and blindsided by some of the issues that the veteran staff has seen new staff go through time and time again.

Now, you may be thinking, *I didn’t know I was going to be experiencing culture shock by taking this position.* Maybe you haven’t moved cities or even houses to take this position. An important thing to realize is that every time you make a transition in life, you are going to experience some varying level of culture shock. First, let’s look at culture shock in a small controlled setting.

The first time I was introduced to the concept of culture shock was when I was in Anthropology 101 class at Wheaton College. We were forced to study culture shock at both an analytical level and an experiential level. Our professor made our assignments unreasonable and unconventional. The syllabus for our class was scattered and disorganized. He even graded our assignments with no seeming system of logic and uniformity. It had the entire class up in arms about our grades and the seeming lack of this professor’s skills as a teacher. Ready to head to the academic dean and submit a compliant about this professor’s offensive behavior, I suddenly realized that our professor was making our very classroom a microcosm of culture shock. *Is that possible?* Could I have missed that he was creating an environment

¹ [http://www.stvincent.edu/study_abroad/pre_departure/culture_shock](http://www.stvincent.edu/study_abroad/pre_departure/culture_shock)
of culture shock right at the end of my nose and I missed it? Yes! And since then, I have encountered the seductive nature of culture shock from my own cross-cultural experiences: in the classroom, overseas and through working with Youth for Christ. Culture shock is an extremely strong and deceptive force. It is a force so strong that even while you are in the midst of it, you are unaware that you are experiencing it.

When it came down to it, the members of our class had certain non-verbal expectations we expected our professor to fulfill. We had certain expectations for classroom and teacher relationships and responsibilities. We expected the syllabus to have a certain amount of information on it and those projects would be given appropriate levels of attention in the classroom. We expected that he would grade our papers in a linear and logical fashion. To the students in our classroom, those sets of unwritten rules were so deeply entrenched as our expectations for a classroom environment they might have well been the Bible. We wanted order!

In reality, our expectations were simply American, collegiate etiquette, not moral standards. The culture of that professor’s classroom was different than our set of expectations for a classroom. He ran the classroom how he saw fit, and as long as he didn’t cross the boundaries of moral or ethical behavior in scripture, he would not budge. This was his culture. It left us students with three choices 1) Drop the class, 2) Flunk the class by refusing to adapt to the new style of classroom etiquette or 3) Let go our expectations of how a classroom should be run and adapt to this new culture with a passing grade!

Culture shock can happen in any environment, no matter how big or small. If I can experience culture shock in a classroom where we were learning about it and I didn’t even see what was happening around me, just imagine how severe some culture shock situations can be. The most extreme cases of culture shock happen at the macro level as a result of an overseas or cross-country move or entering into a marriage relationship. Some of the smaller transitions in life can bring about culture shock at a micro level such as a move across town or a new job acquisition.

Any level of experiencing culture shock is traumatic to a person. The body is physically, emotionally and spiritually responding to a change of routine, friendships and value structures in very real ways. Culture shock is a very real, not imagined, syndrome. You cannot pretend
that culture shock doesn’t exist. Experiencing culture shock is one of the realities of becoming a full-time Christian worker.

**How do I know if I have culture shock?** Culture shock is a process, with three significant stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>How am I dealing with this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase 1: Elation and Optimism (2-3 months) | • Excited to spend time with students.  
• Eager to get to work, volunteering for jobs.  
• Wanting to learn “how things work”. |                           |
| Phase 2: Frustration and Depression (3-8 months) | • Miscommunications or even dislike for supervisor and/or ministry team.  
• Feeling overworked, tired, like the job is never going to end.  
• Sleeplessness/Insomnia.  
• Anxiety.  
• Utopian ideas concerning one’s previous culture.  
• Desire to return to old schedule (9-5) and be “done with the day”.  
• Desire not to have this as your job or career, but “just be a volunteer”.  
• Still maintain a deep love for the students/job even though you are seriously considering leaving.  
• Isolation from culture to protect yourself from negative consequences. |                           |
| Phase 3: Assimilation and Adaptation (8-12 months) | • Joy of serving in the position.  
• Excitement and vision for the future of the ministry.  
• Active participant as a team member.  
• Communication is clearer between supervisor and team because of developed trust. |                           |

*Sourced from Lisa Gintz, National City Life Director, Youth for Christ/USA*
Phase 1: Elation and Optimism

This may not seem as much of a phase of culture shock as it is just the plain excitement of a new situation in life. Remember that culture shock does not occur in a moment, but embodies the entire process. This elation stage is just as much a part of the process of culture shock as the frustration with the culture that is to come.

It should be noted that because you have been hired for this new position, you probably have a healthy sense of self-worth, or ego, from attaining the job. This can be an appropriate view of self, not the sin of pride. This appropriate self-worth is an excitement for the job that you are about to do and how it relates to the advancement of God’s Kingdom. This is certainly something to be optimistic and elated about! This happiness is a God given joy and God usually gives some sort of confirmation that you made the right decision to acquire this particular ministry position.

During this phase, you may also be feeling a deep gratitude about the situation that you just left. Perhaps you were frustrated with the restraints that your secular job put on your capacity to do ministry. Maybe you were in a spiritually compromising position in your old job, or just frustrated with the rigidity of the 9 to 5 schedule. These things are all possible reasons why you could be excited and happy about your move to Youth for Christ. Your new job will provide a full time career of ministry work, and depending on your position will also provide some new flexibility in your schedule. You will be deeply involved with people and the focus and goal of your position will be making disciples and evangelism.

To experience victory over culture shock, it is important for you take some time during this initial phase to set some concrete things in your mind. Take some time in prayer and thought and answer the following questions in writing. If you need to, talk to other people who know you well to answer these questions as accurately as possible. The answers to these questions will come in particularly helpful during the second phase of culture shock. It will allow to you accurately recall how you first felt when you began at Youth for Christ.

1) Do you feel called by God to come to this position?
2) Does this new position align with your gifts and talents?
3) Were you frustrated by the restraints a secular position put on your capacity to do ministry?

4) Why did you accept this position at Youth for Christ?

5) Have you left close friends behind to begin this job? How does that make you feel?

An important part of going through the first stage of culture shock is to be in tune with your own set of expectations when you began working full time ministry. You might be thinking, *I really don’t know what to expect. Maybe I don’t have any expectations?* Remember my classroom experience? I didn’t think that I had any expectations for the college classroom, either. But, in reality, I was carrying a set of assumptions that were so deeply engrained in my culture, I was hardly aware that they were even there. Believe it or not, the same is true for you as you began your journey with Youth for Christ. It is very important for you to begin talking with your supervisor about these “unknown” expectations. Do a little soul searching to see what set of assumptions you have about your position. What do you expect it will be like working in full-time ministry? Here are some questions that will help you get started.

1) Have you even known a full time missionary up close and personal? If yes, what were they like? If no, what type of person do you think is a missionary?

2) Have you ever worked full time in Christian organization or church before? If yes, what was it like? If no, what do you think it would be like to work for your home church?

3) What type of relationship do you think that pastors or missionaries have with the Lord? How do you expect pastors and missionaries to behave?

4) How involved should your supervisor be in your personal/spiritual life?

5) What are you expectations for the behavior of the students you work with...within the first few minutes, within the first month, within the first 6 months of meeting them?

6) How do you expect you will feel when you finish a day of work at Youth for Christ?

Our unspoken expectations are so important to our assimilation into a new culture. If the expectations we had coming into a new position are not met, we will begin to get upset and frustrated. Let’s use a more obvious example to illustrate our point.

Lisa Ginz
National City Life Director, Youth for Christ/USA
John got hired for a position that he thought paid him $50,000 a year in salary. His first check was for a smaller amount that aligned more with a $25,000 a year salary. He was confused, but figured it was an accounting mistake that would be credited to his next paycheck. When the second paycheck did not fix the mistake, John was angry. He went to his boss to try to correct the mistake, but his boss said that John had the wrong expectation. If John had read the contract carefully, the 50K salary was only for a person who had a certain amount of education, which John was lacking. John was so upset. He wouldn’t have taken the job if he didn’t expect the 50k salary. Frustrated and suspicious of working for this company, John eventually left the position.

Did John really have the right to be upset? Not really. His expectations did not match up with reality. John’s frustration was not rightly placed. *It was his own expectation that he deserved the higher salary that caused his own frustration,* and was not the fault of the employer! This is what typically happens when experiencing culture shock. Non-verbal expectations are not met during the elation phase, then, instead of the individual owning responsibility for their faulty expectations, tension develops in the new culture. Usually the individual is unaware that they are in the process of culture shock and therefore don’t attempt to reveal their unspoken expectations. Unable to deal with the fact that their non-verbal expectations are not met, the sojourner enters into phase 2 of culture shock: Frustration and Depression.
Phase 2: Frustration and Depression

This is the stage when culture shock takes a hold with its deceptive grip. Consider one of Central Ohio Youth for Christ staff person, Jim Malott, during his first year on staff. Jim had been serving as a highly invested volunteer with the City Life ministry for almost 2 years. We were all anxiously awaiting the purchase of a City Life Center property so that Jim could begin as a full-time staff person. He had prompted his current employer that he was ready to give his 2-week notice as soon as the property was purchased. Jim was so tired of his job in the secular world. He had to drive an hour each way to work. All that effort put into driving drained his energy and prevented him from putting focus on the ministry with the students in City Life. Our staff and Jim prayed faithfully for 6 months that the sale of the building would go through. Meanwhile, Jim kept saying, “I can’t wait to be on staff! I can’t wait to be on staff!” When the property was finally in contract, and Jim was able to come onboard. The news was met with much joy and celebration.

Just three short months later, Jim was looking on the Internet for a house to buy so he could move as far away from Central Ohio as he could! He was experiencing sleepless nights and anxiety over his workload. He was frustrated with how much time he spent doing his job at City Life and simply wanted a position that he didn’t have to think about at the end of the day. He even considered going back to his old job with the 2-hour commute! Anything was better than being on staff at Youth for Christ.

What brought about such a drastic change? Jim went from praying towards being on staff and saying, “I can’t wait to be on staff!” to lamenting, “I can’t wait to be out of here!” in just three months. This is the power of culture shock. Even someone who is familiar with the culture of Youth for Christ can still be deeply affected by a full-time job change into ministry.

Let’s look a little deeper at some of the common issues that have been observed in first year staff:

**Conflict with direct supervisor.**

During my first year at Youth for Christ, this was one of my biggest areas of struggles. I did not like my direct supervisor at all. I thought she was nosey and controlling. I felt she was out to sabotage what I wanted to do in the ministry. We had some pretty rough times when I
thought that she was purposely deceiving me. I felt so strongly about this deception that I arranged a meeting with her, some of the other field staff and our executive director. When it came time to make our complaints, we had nothing solid to speak of. Our complaints were feelings of suspicion, not concrete facts about her being manipulative towards us. It was during this meeting that I challenged to realize that Satan was working powerfully to create a wedge in our relationship so I would want to leave Youth for Christ. Despite my suspicions, the reality was that my supervisor had done nothing but caring things for me since I had arrived at Youth for Christ. I had let a few small (but real) miscommunications run our relationship into the ground. Now my supervisor is one of my closet friends!

There was a female staff worker who was in their first year on staff in the Development Division that I often had lunch with during my second year on staff. Tina was struggling with her direct supervisor as well. Tina felt that her supervisor treated her unfairly. I asked her if she had confronted her supervisor about the mistreatment. Tina sat on her hurt feelings for almost 6 months before she confronted her boss, gossiping to others in the office and her friends and family before speaking to her offender. When I spoke to the Development Director about the conflict exchange, she (being unaware of the offense that occurred 6 months ago) felt that the conversation was pleasant and was grateful that Tina had come to her to settle their differences. The director was sure the relationship was back on the right path again. During subsequent conversations with Tina, it was obvious that she felt that the conversation went awful, that her supervisor didn’t hear her and that they were back in the same cycle of mistrust again. Tina eventually resigned from her position in development without resolving her conflict with her supervisor.

It seems impossible that two people could come away from the same meeting with such different perspectives. This happens quite often with new staff. Working for YFC is not like moving to a foreign country where there is a new language to learn, but there is a new mode of communication and vocabulary that is common in the culture of Youth for Christ. If there is hurt or confusion with your supervisor, know full well that there is nothing more that Satan would like than to build a wall between you and the staff person who is devoted to your development as a full-time minister.

Follow the biblical model of Matthew 18 for approaching conflict with your supervisor or ministry team member. Pray that your eyes would be open to reality of the situation and
investigate your original impressions of your supervisor. Do they care deeply about the
ministry they are involved in? Do they have the position they have because they desire to see
others succeed in ministry? Answering, “Yes” to these questions will hopefully inspire you to
dig deep in your relationship with your supervisor and pursue peace and effective
communication. Meditate on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 to understand your role in a
disagreement with your staff. Also, consider other possibilities: Is this a communication
problem? Do I not understand the intended meaning of their statement? Does your supervisor
seem passionate about their relationship with Christ even if you don’t agree with their point of
view? Also consider what part you are playing in the conflict? What ownership do you take in
the conflict?

**Utopian ideas concerning one’s previous situation**

Jim wanted to go back and be a mechanic. Beth took another secretarial position. Amy
went on to be a teacher. Tina wanted to pursue her artwork full-time. Lana wanted to work for
another organization that fit more with her ideas of what a youth ministry should be. To be
most honest, I wanted to teach Bible and coach lacrosse at a boarding school in the Northeast.
It seems that one after another, despite the fact that each of us felt a sure calling from the Lord
to come to work for Youth for Christ, three months after new staff come on board we are ready
to pursue another career.

*Does God change his mind that fast? Maybe I heard him wrong?* There are all sorts of
questions that you ponder when you desire to either head back to your previous situation or
pursue yet another career path that seems like a “better fit” for you. Your previous culture was
not perfect though, which is why you left in the first place to come and work for Youth for
Christ. Remember how you hated the 9 to 5? Remember how it was to work in a secular
environment? Remember how frustrated you were with your boss, the rigidity of the schedule,
and the pointlessness of the tasks at hand? Unfortunately, the majority of the people who
leave our organization jump out of the frying pan and into the flame. Each time you make a
transition, the culture shock process begins all over again and you delay assimilation (which
only occurs after 8 to 12 months). Consider this fact carefully as you have the desire to pick
up and move again. The only way the circle of culture shock can be broken is if you commit to
being where you are for an entire year or more.

Lisa Gintz
*National City Life Director, Youth for Christ/USA*
“I just want to be a volunteer somewhere.”

Thought youth work was going to be a fun job? It is a fun job, but it is a lot harder than it looks. There is the never-ending pile of paper work and there is the constant flow of students that need attention. What about your own personal life that needs some attention? Somehow, desiring to be “just a volunteer” is a common response after experiencing the schedule of a youth worker for the first couple of months.

I had a lot of great contact with my volunteers during my first year on staff at YFC, and one of the things that they were constantly telling me is that they wished they had more time with the students. They felt a continual pull of living their professional lives and not being able to have full-time access to the students. This is an important spiritual point to recognize: *your job will be tougher than a volunteer’s role because you are the full-time staff person!* You are going to be working with more students, more often and attending more meetings. Therefore, in the spiritual realm, you will have a bulls-eye on your back for Satan’s fiery arrows. Yes, spiritually it might be less of a drain on you to “just be a volunteer”. But you have to ask yourself, *would it be better?* Why would it be better? Is it being a volunteer better because you would have less spiritual pressure and less responsibility? How does this attitude align with God’s scriptures?

In the realm of administration and development, this is an area of struggle that is especially deceptive to the new staff. Pam, a former administrative assistant in the YFC office told me, “Working for YFC was the hardest job I have ever had. I thought it was going to be cool because it was going to be like my old job as a bookkeeper, just in a Christian environment. Boy, was I wrong!” The office staff are just as susceptible to Satan’s attacks on their transition into a new position as the field staff are, even though they are not necessarily on the “front lines.” It seems very plausible to me that those serving in the office are even more prone to spiritual attack than those who are on the field. Why would Satan just go after a lone field staff worker when he could go back a step and thwart the path of a development staff person who is raising funds for multiple staff people or entire divisions? Operation staff are fruitful targets as well. If there is a large turn around at the front desk, then there is a lot of energy put into problem solving in that area by the leadership team. The Operations division is in charge of the computer networks, bookkeeping, sending out fundraising mailings,
representing the professionalism of our organization and hundreds of other tasks that are essential to keeping Youth for Christ up and running like a well-oiled machine. Office staff are not immune to the schemes of the Evil One attempting to slow the advancement of the Kingdom through Youth for Christ.

**Sleeplessness and pressing anxiety over work.**

This symptom is often accompanied by feelings of guilt when you are not working. Each staff person starts off by being gung-ho in their new position, ready to devote all their time into making the ministry a successful pocket of God’s blessing. Within several months, it becomes clear that the job is never done. There are always more non-believing kids to reach out to, more new believers to follow-up on, more donor calls to make, more paperwork to complete, and more connections to be made. I remember a time well into my first year of staff, Scott Arnold, our Executive Director told me, “This is a marathon, Lisa, not a sprint. Ultimately this job will never be over until Christ returns and you are always going to have to leave things unfinished. This is why we always pray for more workers.”

As staff people, we have a heart for our work and want to see it done in excellence. The caveat is that our job won’t be completed at the end of the day. The sleeplessness and anxiety for me were brought on by thoughts of failure. Others overwork themselves and consume their mind with the troubles of the day and thinking about what must be done tomorrow. Take some time to analyze your feelings. Why are you not sleeping at night? What are you thinking about when you are awake? What brings on the feelings of anxiousness? Is it situational anxiety like the thought of attending staff meetings or club? Or is it a more general feeling of fear about your situation or frustration with your task list? Take the time to discuss these feelings with a trusted friend or advisor. Make sure you don’t approach the person in your life who tickles your ear and always tells you what you want to hear. Often, we can complain about anxiety and sleeplessness and a worldly response can be “Man, you should just quit that job.” Ask someone who is interested in giving you Godly advice will pray with you and challenge you through your anxiety and sleeplessness. You will want to engage someone who will ask you the hard questions about what the Lord is teaching you through this valley time in your life.

*Lisa Gintz*
*National City Life Director, Youth for Christ/USA*
So now what do I do?

Remember those unspoken expectations? **False expectations usher you into phase 2 of culture shock, and deception keeps you there.** Woven throughout the entire process of culture shock is the Enemy working a devious scheme that ends up with you, the new staff person, wanting to leave full time ministry for good—never to return. Frustration unresolved over time develops into anger. With new staff people, I have seen Satan working overtime to keep that frustration unresolved. He wants you to believe that the people at Youth For Christ don’t have an authentic faith, therefore they aren’t even worthy of receiving input from. With the lines of communication down between the people who will be able to help you the most through phase 2, Satan works hard to completely break the connection forever. This usually comes in the form of looking to move or leave the staff position. If Satan can make sure that these problems never get resolved, he knows that the chances are that he can get you out of full time Christian ministry for the rest of your life. There is much at stake during your first year at staff on Youth for Christ.

It takes a heart committed to prayer and seeking the Lord’s truth to rise up out of the second phase of culture shock. Take a look at this diagram below.
Diagram courtesy of www.home.edu.snu.edu/~hculbert.fs/shocks.htm

1) How can you see Satan working off your initial attitudes to create a discomfort with your new position?

2) What role do my hidden expectations for this new position at Youth for Christ play in forming my initial attitudes?

3) Have you ever been in a culture shock experience before? What were your initial attitudes? Which coping strategies did you use?
Phase 3: Assimilation and Adaptation

There are times in your journey through the process of culture shock that you may feel that you will never get to this final phase. The culture of Youth for Christ is just too foreign for you to adapt to. There are times when you will have no desire to adapt to this culture: it will seem too hard and there is nothing desirable about the way things work. But to each of us who have made the assimilation into the culture, working for Youth for Christ is one of the most rewarding positions we have had in our lifetime. Youth for Christ is an organization that is deeply committed to reaching the lost and making disciples of Christ from today’s marginalized youth. The methods that we use to do this ministry are biblical and cutting edge for today’s culture. Youth for Christ is not an organization that fears change or new ideas. Rather, it is an organization that is always looking to see how we can improve our methods and serve the community around us. We are an organization that is uncompromisingly committed to the development of our staff, equipping them to empower Christian individuals to be a part of a ministry team that is well skilled in Christian love and relational evangelism. Becoming adapted to this new culture is a difficult process, but well worth the results.

I can’t pinpoint the day that I came out of my culture shock slump, but ultimately I felt like there was a critical point when I had an opportunity to deny the call the Lord had put in my life to ministry to urban teens through Youth for Christ. I wanted so badly to give myself permission to forfeit that call because I was unhappy with so many things around me during my first year at YFC. But I knew that God was calling me to obedience regardless of my emotions and my circumstances. My devotion to His service was being tested to the nth degree, and He desired to show me His faithfulness, if I would only surrender to what I already knew was the hard truth. God had called me to Youth for Christ, but I wanted to be selfish and have an “easier” life than a full-time ministry position afforded. It was only when I surrendered to stay at Youth for Christ long term did my perspective on my circumstances around me begin to change.

The acclamation process was gradual:

- *There was a time that I hated my supervisor.* One day, I began to see some qualities about her that I really admired. Shortly after that I asked her to disciple me.
• There had been a time when I was ready to leave YFC and go work in a boarding school. I applied to 10 different schools and heard a positive response from each one. As the job offers rolled in, I couldn’t convince myself that leaving was the right thing to do. A few weeks later I committed to stay in my position as a City Life staff permanently.

• There was a time that I was so sickened by the neighborhood that I worked in; it made my stomach churn each time I drove around Franklinton. Then one day I realized that I had strange love for this place as I drove through the streets. Shortly afterwards I arranged to move into the heart of the Franklinton neighborhood.

Assimilation and adaptation is a pride breaking process. You have to be willing to let go of your false expectations, and be willing to change your mind about how you feel the world around you should work. The attitudes of teachability and humility are the most important postures to take to eventually make a successful transition into your ministry position.

If, during your process of going through culture shock, you make a statement like, “Ministry shouldn’t be like this!” If you have done ministry before you should know that not every organization has the same development system, system of operations or supervision types. In some cases, different ministries will not even have similar objectives for service. If you have done ministry before and are making this statement, you entered into the situation with false expectations that the current ministry position should be like your last.

If you haven’t had a ministry position before and you find yourself saying “Ministry shouldn’t be like this.” Immediately ask yourself this question, “How do I know?” You probably have a combination of pride and false expectations. Where did you get your ideas about how ministry should be? Maybe you absorbed them by watching the staff at your home church, or through an education at a Christian college. Did you attempt to get a Biblical example of how ministry would be? Try looking up 2 Corinthians 6:3-13 and see if you have suffered the way that Paul did during his ministry to the Gentiles. Is that how ministry should be? Ask yourself this, why did you latch on to a more modern view of ministry than the biblical narrative example? Look around you at the servants that have been involved in ministry for 5 years, 10 years and 15 years or more. Have you humbly gone before them and asked them what being in full time ministry is really like? Have you asked them to give input into your spiritual walk and how your false expectations have kept you from serving to your greatest capacity?
Conclusion

It is important for you to remember that if you haven’t been able to get through culture shock successfully, then it will be hard for you to lead a team of volunteers through this process. In order for City Life staff to have an effective ministry, the City Life staff and volunteers need to be well versed in the process of culture shock so that they can walk this journey with people who come from different neighborhoods to serve urban students. The better we understand culture shock, the better we can learn to love urban students and motivate others to love them as well!

Watching a new staff person go through the phases of culture shock can be an agonizing process. Those of us who have been through the process desire to help you understand that your feelings of frustration and depression are normal. Hopefully this article will help you see the storm on the horizon and give you some support so you know that you aren’t alone in this process. Our staff at Youth for Christ are deeply committed to your success as a staff person and as a committed follower of Christ.

Lisa Gintz
National City Life Director, Youth for Christ/USA