

From my perspective, I am a truly fortunate man. I know my limitations and I know my purpose in life. I have found fulfillment and satisfaction in living each day in complete trust of God's plan for my life and doing the best with what I have to work with in every situation. My favorite saying is "The task ahead of you is never as great as the power within you."

I hope that as you spend these next few years in school, you will keep your priorities in line with getting your education. I hope you will decide to manage your time in a way to be successful in your studies. I hope you will choose activities that are worthy of your time spent. I hope you will associate with people who will support you in your efforts and encourage you. I hope you will enjoy yourself, but will be able to say that you did it with no regrets. Learn from my experience as I did. Remember ... Your life matters, make it count!

Always,

Chris Skinner

life matters
MAKE IT
COUNT!



The Ultimate Learning Experience

CHRIS SKINNER
Motivational Speaker

Dear Students,

I am writing you in hopes that something I say may help you during your time at school. It is my desire to see you succeed in your education and throughout your life.

I believe that life is all about choices. We are faced each day with multiple opportunities to make decisions, every one of which has the potential to change your life. I live with the consequences of some decisions I made during my time at Radford University. Unfortunately, the results of the decisions I made while I was only 20 years old will be with me throughout the rest of my life. Because of this, I have decided to share with you my ultimate learning experience.

I went to Radford University, eagerly, in the fall of 1997. At the age of 17, I was very young and inexperienced. I had been a good student in high school and had also excelled in many varsity sports. I was from a very small town where you might say I was a big fish in a little pond. My athletic abilities got me much attention. I lived in a household where I had a curfew, chores, and high academic standards to adhere to. When I arrived at Radford University, I became just one of 9,000 students. I had no more sports, no more popularity, no more parents, and no more rules! I was suddenly in an environment where I was

expected to act like an adult, make my own decisions, and be responsible for myself.

I had long anticipated attending college and had certain preconceived ideas of what that was supposed to include. Academics were not on the top of my list. I had heard college was supposed to be the best time of your life, right? I thought I could stay out as long as I wanted ... and I did. I thought I could sleep as long as I wanted ... and I did. I thought I could skip classes if I wanted ... and I did. I thought I could choose not to do my assignments if I wanted ... and I did. I thought I should join a fraternity and drink alcohol ... and I did. I thought having a good time was what every college student was expected to do and I was certainly doing my best at having a good time. However, I didn't feel like going to class or doing my assignments. I felt horrible most of the day. I always promised myself that I was going to do better ... tomorrow. Then it became too late in the semester to make amends so I promised to do better ... next semester. My grades took a dive and I ended up on academic suspension. My parents cut me off which forced me to join the Army National Guard to pay my tuition.

After boot camp, I attended New River Community College to prove to Radford University that I was serious about my education. I made a 3.0 GPA and was accepted back in at Radford. I realized that it really wasn't so hard to get good grades. I just had to attend classes, do the assignments and study. That still left plenty of time for fun. I thought I had it all figured out. Then I had my ultimate learning experience.

I attended the wedding of one of my fraternity brothers on June 10, 2000. We were all drinking and having a great time and decided that we would continue partying at someone's house, which was nearby. I made two bad decisions that night. I rode in a car with someone who had been drinking and I took off my seatbelt during the trip. My friend's reflexes were impaired. We were driving just two miles from the reception. During the trip, my friend swerved into some gravel and lost control of his car. The vehicle flipped 2 1/2 times and I was thrown from the car and into a ditch. I landed on my right side with such force that I broke my right shoulder blade, lost hearing in my right ear and broke my neck at vertebrae C5-C6, severing my spinal cord. I ended up paralyzed for life.

On that ride, we never considered the consequences. We thought bad things only happen to some unknown people on the 11:00 news, but not to any of us. Only this time, it happened to me and it was permanent. There was nothing my parents, my friends, or the doctors could do to help me. My situation had no quick fix. If I could go back to that moment or to many others in my past, I would make better decisions. As you know, we cannot change the past, but we can learn from it.

Reality for me today is having no feeling in my body from my shoulders down. I am unable to care for myself or do any of the things we all take for granted. I need assistance getting dressed, eating, taking showers, going to the bathroom and with just about any thing I try to do. People now look at me and I can see in their faces that they feel sorry for me. They see a poor, unfortunate person sitting in a wheelchair. But that is not my reality. I have a different attitude about life and it's meaning today. I make a conscience decision to accept my situation and make the best of it. I don't focus on what I lost. Instead, I use my time and talents to make my life count. Some of the things I do to keep my focus are:

1. I adhere to my motto ... Life Matters—Make It Count!
2. I surround myself with supportive, positive people.
3. I keep my goals, inspirational posters, and favorite sayings in plain view.
4. I maintain a right mental attitude by forcing myself to let go of negative emotions.
5. I make decisions carefully—treating each one as though it can change my life. I know for a fact that it can.
6. I use my time and talents to better myself and to help others.
7. I take advantage of every opportunity to learn. I did my best while attending Radford University. I realize that education is the basis for the lifestyle that will be mine in the future.
8. I depend on my strong faith in God to get me through the hard times.