



## More Than a Mentor

by Kent Julian, CSP

There have been dozens and dozens — possibly even hundreds — of people who have mentored me.

Nothing formal. I've never approached someone and asked, "Will you be my mentor?"

So how has this mentoring happened?

Whenever I want to grow in an area, I look for others who have already succeeded. For instance, I struggled in school for years, so when I finally decided to do better, I sought out the best teachers as well as fellow students who were doing well. When I launched into my career, I connected with folks in that industry who were succeeding. Marriage and family? I learned from men who were good husbands and fathers. Starting a business? I found entrepreneurs who had launched successful businesses.

While I am beyond grateful for all the mentors in my life, there are three who stand head and shoulders above the rest. They are more than mentors to me. They are heroes.

The first was **Jim Vaught**, my middle school math teacher and basketball coach. As an at-risk kid with significant learning challenges, I was going nowhere fast. Yet, for some reason, Mr. Vaught saw potential in me. He was the first person I remember who invested in me. I was a mess in so many ways, and his influence during my seventh and eighth-grade years helped me start turning in the right direction.

The second was **Dan Glaze**. He was a volunteer advisor in a student organization. Like Mr. Vaught, Dan invested in me and ended up being extremely influential during my high school years, college, when I married my wife Kathy, and through the first 3-4 years of my career. His guidance during those 10-12 years played an incredible role in shaping me as a young man and leader. He took the nuggets of truth Jim Vaught planted and helped them grow.

(NOTE: Before moving on, notice that I connected with two of the three greatest mentors in my life before finishing high school. Since you are someone who works with students, I hope this encourages you. The impact you can have is often beyond what you can think or imagine!)

For the next 15 years, there wasn't one person who I would call a hero. There were many people I looked up to. A lot of people I learned from. Many who mentored me. But there was no one I was necessarily close to like these former two men. Honestly, I thought I had grown out of the stage of viewing someone as a hero.

But then, when I had this crazy idea of starting a business to equip leaders in creating DREAM-to-DO cultures, I met my third mentor/hero. His name is **Dan Miller** (he is pictured above on the far right). I learned so much about business from Dan. But more importantly, I learned that to be an effective Thought Leader, you must live out what you say you believe. Being a Thought Leader is not about theory; it's about real life and the real world.

## The Best Heroes Don't Wear Capes

Dan Miller just discovered he has advanced pancreatic cancer and the prognosis is grim. Yet even though he is facing devastating news, I continue to learn from Dan the importance of living out what you say you believe. He texted me to share what he is facing, and while being open about his grief, he also said things like:

- *So I have the gift of being able to think and reflect — having amazing conversations with Joanne, my kids, and grandkids.*
- *My legacy is firmly embedded in people like you...you are the torchbearer of the principles I borrowed from the previous great thinkers.*
- *I have lived the life and work I love my entire life.*

I've thought a lot about Dan during the past several weeks. I've also thought about the two other "heroes" in my life. Specifically, I've been asking the question: *What makes these individuals "more than mentors" to me?*

Before sharing the traits I see in these three men, I need to clarify something. When I call them "heroes," I don't mean heroes as in Caped Crusaders who can do no wrong. All three individuals are ordinary men who just happen to have accomplished

extraordinary things. And this is exactly why I look up to them! If these average guys can do extraordinary things, then perhaps a regular person like me can do the same.

So below are three traits that made these three individuals more than mentors...

## 3 Traits of Leaders Who Are More Than Mentors

### 1. ATTITUDE

You've likely heard this saying: *Everything Starts with Attitude*. While many folks believe this statement is hokey, it's actually true. We get to choose our attitude in whatever circumstances we face. This doesn't mean we should be pollyannaish and ignore reality. It just means that no matter what happens to us, we get to decide what our attitude will be, and this decision impacts the outcomes we experience.

One of the reasons all three men were more than mentors to me is because of their attitudes, especially when facing challenges. Each was realistic. When something bad happened, they didn't ignore it or pretend it didn't happen. They didn't even pretend to like it. They might have had a short pity-party for a while (don't we all), but they never got stuck wallowing in pity. Instead, they would change their attitude and start asking themselves, "What does this make possible?" \*

\* The quote above is one of Dan Miller's favorite sayings.

### 2. ARTICULATION

All three men spoke *Already...Not Yet* realities into my life. What is an *Already...Not Yet* reality? It's a character trait or talent they could "already" see in me, but it had "not yet" been actualized in my life. They would say things like, "Kent, I believe you're the kind of leader who can \_\_\_\_\_," and they would fill in the blank. It's important to note that when doing this, they were not sharing flippant thoughts. They were careful to share unrealized realities that they truly believed were within me, but these realities had to be unearthed.

It's hard to express how powerful this kind of articulation is when coming from a leader or mentor. For me, these words opened my eyes to realities in my life that, up until that point, I had not seen. Even more, these *Already...Not Yet* words grew my confidence, determination, and grit, which helped me persevere as I pursued challenging goals.

### 3. ACTIONS

While all three traits are equally important, this is the one I hope challenges and encourages you the most.

**Here's the challenge** — what we truly believe in is evidenced by the steps we take, not by the words we say. In other words, as leaders, we can talk about what is most important until we're blue in the face, but our words are empty if we don't back them up with action. This doesn't mean we never make mistakes, but it does mean that the people we lead need to be able to look at our lives as a whole and see that we believe what we say.

**Here's the encouragement** — Often we think mentoring is a time-consuming endeavor. This causes us to wonder if we have the margin to do it. Yet I can honestly say that none of the men I mentioned gave me more significant time than they gave others. What I can say, however, is that they were fully present in the moments we had together. So investing in my life wasn't time consuming; it was something they naturally did while they were going about living their lives. Because they took this approach, all three men impacted dozens (and probably hundreds) of people besides me.

## You Can Be More Than a Mentor Too!

As I reflect on the three hero-mentors in my life, my goal is to carry on their legacies. I am committed to developing the same attitude, practicing the same articulation, and taking the same actions as these men.

I hope you will do the same!

Together, we can be more than mentors too and have the same kind of impact with those we lead.

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