

Mentoring: A Moment Can Last a Lifetime

By Adele B. Lynn

As I sat in the cubical treatment room waiting for the doctor, I tried to amuse myself by looking at the artifacts on the walls. First my eyes went to the right where I noticed two framed chalk drawings done on what appeared to be black construction paper. Their unusual style drew my attention, but even more, my eyes were drawn to the signature and the date. The name, Chevalier Jackson, boldly appeared in the light chalk against the striking black background. The year was 1950.

Then, my eyes moved left on a random search of the small room. The usual framed diploma, (always a comforting fact in a doctor's office) proudly displayed the name of Sidney N. Busis. I noticed surprisingly that Chevalier Jackson had signed the diploma. A photograph of a distinguished looking gentleman sat prominently next to the diploma. In small print at the bottom of the photo, was the name, you guessed it, Chevalier Jackson.

Now, I sensed significance. Straight ahead was a group photo taken nearly a half century ago of a group of young doctors including, Dr. Sidney Busis. In the group photo, dead center front row, the very same older gentleman appeared in the photo to my left, sat proudly. The class picture was signed at the bottom, Chevalier Jackson.

“Was Chevalier Jackson your mentor?” I asked as Dr. Sidney Busis entered the room.

“Jackson,” he said with authority and pride, “was a genius. He was way ahead of his time. He was a doctor, an inventor, an advocate for children, a painter and a sculptor. And,” he added “he was ambidextrous.” I could hear the excitement in Sidney Busis' voice as he continued.

He is responsible for many of the modern tools we use in our profession today. Before Chevalier Jackson, if a child got something such as a pin, stuck in his esophagus or lung, he may have died. There was no good way to remove the lodged object. And he not invented these tools, his father was a machinist and together, they made them. He was also an advocate for the need for warning labels on products that were poisonous and caustic in nature – the precursor of the Mr. Yuk sign. He was a great man. I was fortunate to have spent a month in his company doing post graduate work.”

I sat in amazement as I listened to the accomplishments of this great man. Yet, I was more struck by the impact, nearly a half century later, that his great man had on Dr. Busis. Chevalier Jackson had served to inspire and profoundly impress Dr. Busis through his greatness.

Throughout our lifetimes, many people may serve as our mentors. Sometimes both the mentor and the protégé are well aware of the role that each is playing. However, sometimes, mentoring takes place from afar as we watch, admire, and emulate our heroes. Sometimes these heroes are well known, accomplished professionals in their fields of expertise like Chevalier Jackson. Other times, these heroes may be ordinary people whose everyday greatness and brilliance shine forth and impress and inspire us to be our best. In fact, you could be one of these everyday heroes in someone's life. Leaders especially, from front line supervisor to CEO, are in a place where they may be called to mentor without ever being aware of the assignment.

Therefore, it is essential to be aware of your impact and to do your best each day. Your call to greatness may come when you least expect it. What may seem like a routine moment, may prove to be a memorable event some fifty years from now for some unbeknownn protégé. Are you prepared for that type of impact? To be ready for the challenge, you may want to ask yourself each day:

- * What have I done to show my greatness today?
- * Have I said anything that will inspire others today?
- * What have I done to set a positive example today?
- * Have I done my best today?
- * If someone were to think about me fifty years from now, what have I done today to make those thoughts positive and memorable?
- * What legacy have I left today?

Awareness of our impact is truly one of the most important aspects of being a great and honorable leader. If you approach each day as if you were asked to mentor those around you, perhaps your actions would be different. Perhaps you would give just a little more thought to your words and deeds. Perhaps you would consciously try to show your best, not to impress others, but to inspire them. The rewards may be intangible, yet profound. You may live on in the heart of a protégé serving to inspire that protégé to greatness, just as Chevalier Jackson did for Dr. Sidney Busis.

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