

The One A Kit Kat Essay by D. Brent Mulgrew January 21, 2014

In reviewing recent Kit Kat presentations I discovered an interesting trend. Some Kats continue to select fascinating subjects of personal interest in art, literature, history and policy. The subjects are both well known to many and occasionally obscure to most. Yet by the end of each presentation we are informed and intellectually challenged. Sometimes the obscure subjects became my favorites like: Jim Ginter's *Whose Fish are they anyway?*

On the other hand, A few Kats have shared stories of intimate personal events that caused their lives to change dramatically. Rich Simpson's essay described the personal impact of his bicycle ride across America. Rick Richard's essay *When Did I Choose* discussed his feelings when he learned his son was gay. Last year Rick doubled down in his second essay: *Out of the World*, describing his out of body experiences.

This year the other "Brent" described the impact of being on the Kent State Campus that sunny May 4 at 12:24. Perhaps most compelling in retrospect was George Meiling's personal homage to his father: *Vignettes*, given the December before George suddenly died.

These essays were intense, powerful, and personal. Each essay gave us a window into an event experienced by a fellow Kat. I believe we are all better for their willingness to let us learn from their experiences. So what does all this have to do with my essay tonight?

The One, the Many (yes it's a modified new title!)

The core value of belonging to Kit Kat is this meeting. In this room, every third Tuesday evening, each of us have the opportunity to enjoy the company of and learn from this distinguished group of individuals with little in common but an appreciation for each other and the art of intelligent conversation. Each essayist strives to prepare an essay that **hopefully** will be enjoyed during its presentation and reflected upon after it.

I am sure that when Tad Jeffrey presented his essay *Manufacturing Matters: A second look*, in 2009 he did not envision how his essay would affect me. His analysis of the changing American social and political world was critically stark. Now five years later I am not sure it was adequately alarming.

Within his essay were comments that resonated with me.

He quoted from Gabor Steingart's book, *The War for Wealth*:

"Winning the future is simply a process of reevaluating, regrouping and letting go...Those who are capable of changing continue on, while those who stand still lose."

He closed his essay by saying his contribution to increasing our understanding of the challenges facing us was to send copies of his essay to his grandchildren!!

I walked out of the room thinking this action may be a start, but it was not enough.

For several years I had been struggling with the challenges facing the alleged health care delivery “system” and the role of the physicians I represent.

By the time I heard Tad’s essay I had spent thirty five years with the Ohio State Medical Association advocating for physicians to improve our health care delivery “system”.

Our present “system” can provide acute medical interventions of a technological nature inconceivable to most human beings. Yet the same “system” fails everyday to effectively and efficiently provide basic preventive health services to vast numbers of Americans.

Tad Jeffrey’s essay started me thinking that perhaps I needed to change the way I thought about the challenges facing us as citizens of our country. What could I do to make a difference?

Perhaps then I could learn how the OSMA could be more successful in our rapidly changing social, economic and political environment. Tad challenged me to look into **my** mirror rather than through our organization’s rear view mirror. How could I better articulate that defending the status quo is not an option!

So in 2010 I set off on what one of my friends entitled “Brent’s Vision Quest” or “Brent’s Excellent Adventure”. I decided to investigate the fundamentals of organizational change outside the world of medicine. I asked my friends to introduce me to individuals throughout the country who had dealt with the challenges accompanying fundamental changes in their organizations.

During the next two years I interviewed over fifty individuals—from artists to college presidents, even one who was both!! I interviewed those outside the medical field because I wanted to expand my search beyond my parochial experiences.

In each interview I asked questions about the organization and its ability to respond to a forced change both prior to and in during a crisis. I then asked what they had done **personally** to help their organization respond more effectively.

I met individuals who had successfully struggled, and some who hadn’t. Some who had been successful through intensely personal efforts and others who were successful in changing their organization’s culture or structure.

I also asked if they could remember an individual who had a transformed the way they viewed themselves and their capabilities. Could they identify someone who caused them to look at the problems they were facing in a different way?

The more individuals I talked to, the more I became convinced that they had learned how to be effective by remembering what they had learned from their interaction(s) with one or more individuals. Many could immediately recall specifically how those individuals helped them understand how to deal with challenging change, before it became a crisis.

Through these interactions they learned **how** they perceived a problem was as important as their response to it. Their ability to perceive answers to complex issues was enhanced from the learning they had achieved through interactions with “**their One**” or “**their Many**”.

Tonight, I want you to take a moment and reflect upon this question. Are you “The One”?

Are you the person that helped someone understand what he or she could become? Have you intentionally shared what you have learned to help another? Have you shared your insights and even your wisdom in a way that helped someone overcome their obstacles, obstacles you overcame getting to where you are?

Tad Jeffrey’s admonition to **us** to better understand what’s happening in America is only the first step.

The second and more important step is for us **to do something about it!**

I believe we can do **that something** by helping someone that we don’t yet know become the best person they can be— both at work and in life.

Why do we need to do this?

Because these **others**, I am talking about are the future leaders of our industries, our organizations and even our country.

The decisions they make will profoundly affect the lives we live when we are no longer most powerful and appreciated generation!!

Many of you already have already made this commitment. I thank you for your past and present work with those for whom you are “**The One**”.

Tonight I want to share with you a simple yet powerful notion:

Each of us can have a positive impact in another’s life if **we only make** the time.

I am not suggesting that these efforts are easy. But they will be personally fulfilling. Your decision to help will change your life.

How can we do this—by becoming a **Mentor**. By Becoming “**The One**” in someone’s life!!

I want you to think about the person or persons that have helped make you who you are, and then those you have helped as a mentor.

When I began to work on my essay I had no idea of the breadth of literature, programs and even intellectual disagreements about the concept of mentoring. There are organizations that train you to be a mentor.

There are certificate and qualification programs. Currently there are thousands of individuals who make all or part of their living as professional mentors, business and life coaches.

In Central Ohio there are more than two dozen structured mentoring programs sponsored by colleges, professional organizations, employers, communities, schools and faith based organizations.

Mentoring even has an official month: January!!

Because I am a recovering historian, I began by researching the origins of the term "mentor". The first mention of "mentor" was in Homer's epic poem: *The Odyssey*.

In this work Mentor was a friend and advisor of King Ulysses. He was given the responsibility of keeping the King's household intact while Ulysses was off fighting the Trojans. Mentor was also to supervise the education of Ulysses's son Telemachus. However, in his paper, "Homer's Mentor: Duties Failed or Misconstrued," Andy Roberts writes that Mentor failed to perform his tasks adequately and that our current understanding of the role of a mentor was performed instead by the goddess Pallas Athene, goddess of war and wisdom. Throughout the poem it was Pallas Athene took on multiple forms to intervene in Telemachus's life to help him understand the world and his duties within it.

Most scholars agree that the next written exposition of the role of a mentor was written in 1699 by Francois de Salingnac Fenelon entitled Les Aventures de Telemaque. Fenelon had been appointed to train the grandson of Louis XIV, the Duke of Burgundy, heir apparent to the French throne. His book was an extension of *The Odyssey* wherein Fenlon takes Telemaque through a series of adventures as a method of training the potential monarch.

Several other French books followed in the mid 1700s discussing the role of mentors in the development of younger individuals. The learning situations they described were performed primarily in education settings, where an older more experienced "mentor" would watch the mentee participate in created situations. The idea was for the older mentor to guide the younger mentee to reflect upon those event(s). The real learning then arose from their joint reflection.

In 1979 American author Daniel Levinson wrote The Seasons of a Man's Life. In his book, like the French works two hundred years earlier, the focus was on an older man helping a younger man transition to full adulthood in contemporary work and society.

In Gail Sheehy's book, Passages: Predictable Crises in Adult Life, written in 1976, she identified mentors as an important professional advantage, available far more frequently to men than women, to the disadvantage of women in similar roles or professions.

Since 1990, discussions of the power of mentoring have exploded. There are now hundreds of books and thousands of articles on mentoring, coaching and sponsoring. Good mentoring is now understood to have a major role in cognitive, emotional and social development of both men and women.

For a contemporary definition of mentorship, I referred to the source of **all contemporary knowledge**, Wikipedia: "Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more

experienced person helps guide a less experienced person. However true mentoring is more than answering questions...it is an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue and challenge.”

Notice there is no reference in this contemporary definition to an older person mentoring a younger one, only on the level of experience. Mentoring occurs today without reference to age.

Now that we have both a historical perspective and a contemporary definition I want to discuss the attributes of a good mentor.

As you listen to the rest of the essay, I want you to think about your experience being either a mentee or when you were “the One.”

What did it feel like?

What caused the personal interaction to be memorable?

Brad Johnson and Charles Ridley in their book, The Elements of Mentoring identified “57 key elements for effective mentoring”.

No I’m not going to review all of them tonight!!

However there are several “themes” I believe are essential to being a successful mentor. During my interviews each of these characteristics of being a good mentor was mentioned.

They are: 1) to have interest in the person; 2) to listen critically and carefully; 3) to be available and dependable; 4) to be helpful but not directive; 5) to be patient: and 6) to be a good example.

First, a good mentor must have an interest in their mentee. He/She should see the mentee as an individual. The interest should go beyond a desire to make sure the mentee does a good job.

Most mentees do not have a direct reporting relationship with their mentor. Often the mentor does not work for the same employer or organization.

The organized mentoring program of the Ohio Supreme Court strongly encourages mentors to be from other organizations or firms.

My guest tonight, Larry Lanham wrote in his article on mentoring published in Columbus CEO that “...young professionals should seek mentoring relationships that involve more personal and thoughtful guidance...depending on the relationship the emphasis may be on improving critical thinking **or** providing social and political insights for better navigation of the relevant profession or organization.”

It is the mentor’s responsibility to appreciate the needs of the mentee. As the relationship develops the mentor then helps the mentee understand and meet those needs.

As Larry said later in his article, “...the goal is to grow not to become dependent.”

Dr. Janet Davison Rowley was a clinical researcher who discovered the genetic links to cancer. Her discovery formed the basis for personalized molecular targeting of a tumor and then the ability to create a medical treatment that is far more effective and less toxic.

“Dr. Rowley was truly an icon, not just for her scientific discoveries but also because **how she served as a mentor** at a time when women had few female physician or scientist role models. She mentored over 100 faculty members.

Dr. Rowley is remembered because she encouraged her mentees to embrace their own professional development through the **example** of her scientific work and her **personal relationship** with each of them.

In a recent discussion with Jim Petro, former Ohio Attorney General, he immediately identified the “one” that gave him the encouragement to start his career in public service. He remembered that while serving as the City Law Director in Rocky River, the mayor offered to help him evaluate his future options. Petro told me that this offer and the subsequent counsel gave him the confidence to run for public office. Throughout the rest of his life the mayor ran Petro’s campaigns and was always available. He provided critical advice when Jim most needed it.

The relationship continued because of the respect Petro had for the mayor, even as his career far surpassed the achievements of his mentor.

In Columbus, Judge Charles Schneider recounted a similar mentee experience with Hilliard Mayor, Butch Reynolds. Judge Schneider remembered meeting the mayor at the PTO in their children’s school. During the next few years Mayor Reynolds gave Schneider several opportunities to increase his knowledge, visibility and community service. By giving Schneider not only opportunities and encouragement, but also advice and counsel, Mayor Reynolds assisted in the development of a good lawyer who now leads our court as Chief Administrative Judge.

How many of us can remember an individual who took time to encourage us, to support us and to listen to us?

Artie Isaacs can. He told me he still remembers fondly that quality in an eighth grade teacher. “He was the first person to take the time and listen to me as if I were an adult.” And look what that encouragement has wrought!!

A good mentor should listen more than he/she talks. Intense focused listening is powerful for both parties. The effort to listen carefully shows a level of personal interest that most individuals rarely receive. Consider the experience of Lisa Ryan, MD., the current president-elect of the Maine Medical Assn. In her small town, she was the only girl in eighth grade “shop”.

When it came time to move from blueprints to hands on work with the machines the assignment was building a bird house. She approached the teacher and said, "I don't want to build a birdhouse... I want to build a table."

The shop teacher pondered a moment and then said ok, but with a caveat, "I'll help you but you have to figure out what to do and then how to do it by yourself!" Throughout the next few weeks they built her table, she did all the work and he watched her carefully—offering suggestions but never telling her what to do. "Throughout the process he listened but he never directed." she said. She finished the table, and still has it in her home today.

To her it's a physical symbol of her belief (and his) that she could do as well if not better than the boys if given the freedom and encouragement to try.

That encouragement from an 8th grade shop teacher gave her the strength to believe she could become a physician.

Can you remember the person who took time for you, expressed specific interest in you and really listened to you?? Was he The One for you?

The next requirement of being a good mentor is to be committed to your mentee and to mentoring. "One of the faults of institutional mentoring programs is they lack depth and personal investment needed for real transfer of knowledge, experience and style" stated Larry Lanham in his previously mentioned article.

If you are participating as a mentor simply to check a box or if you feel that you are too busy to really focus, you shouldn't be there.

In all of my conversations the most significant perception was the mentees' belief of the interest their mentor had in them.

David Parnell, coach and author says, "Few things are more demotivating than "Phoning in" your time and efforts; it takes a sincere interest in the betterment of your mentee to avoid this. So if you can't muster a sincere desire right from the beginning, you'll do better if you find a more suitable fit, because you may do more harm than good."

In his autobiography, Eddie Rickenbacker cited Columbus auto designer, builder and racer Lee Frayer as his first mentor. Frayer took Rickenbacker with him when he was hired as chief engineer at the Columbus Buggy Works in 1907. Throughout the next three years Frayer encouraged Rickenbacker and constantly gave him new and interesting tasks that were beyond Eddie's training. Rickenbacker exceeded his own perceptions of his abilities in trying to meet Frayer's expectations. He said, "I knew someone I respected for his ability and knowledge had an interest in me. It was an inspiration and an incentive to prove to him that his confidence in me was deserved."

The correct level of involvement, is driven by the mentee's needs and your circumstances.

In her recent book, Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg, CFO of Facebook relates a story of mistaken perception of the responsibilities of a mentor. "For years I had my eye on and assisted a young woman at Google each time she faced a major decision. I invested a lot of time in her development so I was surprised when she said she never had a mentor.

When I asked her what a being mentor meant to her she replied, "Someone to speak with for at least an hour a week."

Sheryl thought, "That's not a mentor, that's a therapist."

Most mentors are busy and mentoring is not handholding. She said, "Using a mentor's time to validate feelings may help psychologically, but usually the time is better spent examining specific problems for real solutions."

It is your responsibility as the mentor to determine your capacity and capabilities. Good mentors are often well known and often in demand.

You do yourself and your mentee a disservice if you over commit and under deliver. Excellent mentoring requires consistency and reliability.

According to several research studies, the number one trait desired in a mentor is dependability.

Remember, in this relationship you are not the day to day supervisor. You are a valued resource to be consulted when scheduled or in a few cases when necessary, but not abused through overuse.

Those of you who know me well know that **patience** is not a primary characteristic of my personality. I am known as an Irish hot reactor and am often considered unreasonably impatient by many of my friends and colleagues.

However, I have learned that in the mentor relationship, like most important interpersonal ones, **patience is critical**. Having the patience to not answer the asked question immediately or not solving the problem for the mentee is an essential factor in the mentor-mentee relationship. Combined with commitment and active listening, being patient is a powerful catalyst to the development of a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

The organizational consultant Seth Kahan tells the story of starting a men's discussion group at his church. Furman Riley was selected as the co-chairman of the group. He was significantly older than Seth and both had competitive alpha male personalities. Seth said, "I thought we were going to butt heads..."

Before their first meeting Furman listened carefully to what Seth wanted to accomplish in getting the group together. Riley invited Seth to open up and share his motivations. He engaged Seth from the heart and each exposed their vulnerabilities. Furman showed him a different way for competing men to resolve their issues through patient discussions.

By not asserting his greater experiences and waiting until Seth realized they needed to work as equals did Furman create a shared role of leadership that lasted for five years.

Another mentor responsibility is to lead by example. David Parnell says "Your goal is not only to provide direction and advice, but to get your mentee to act upon them...while conversations can be motivating few things are more impactful than to lead by example.

In a recent conversation with Marisa Weisel, an OSMA intern, she stated she had never had a mentor. But as our conversation progressed she identified a powerful woman she had watched work at her former organization. This woman knew that the five men who were equal in the corporate structure would gang together to try to reduce her effectiveness in meetings.

Marisa watched her prepare for those meetings with data that would refute the concerns of the others even before they were made. She learned the value of preparation and organization by watching this individual.

Later she had discussions with her about the company politics and its culture. Only upon reflection did she realize that this senior woman had become her mentor (to a limited degree) by letting her observe her actions.

I have been blessed to have several mentors in my life, including Herb Leicy, my first boss who taught me that I was meant to do more than manual labor and Hart Page who hired me at OSMA. Hart spent the next ten years defending me and making sure I could grow within the organization no matter how many mistakes I made with both my mind and more often my mouth.

Just as important I have had a multitude of friends and colleagues who took time from their busy schedules to help me better understand how best to respond to the issues facing me where I live and work. I believe I am a better person because of them.

I know that the majority of you have been mentored and many of you have been mentors. If you haven't been a mentor to another I encourage you to just DO IT.

There are programs that need you and there are programs that can train you. All you have to do is type mentor into your search engine and the list of local organizations that need mentors will overwhelm you.

Mentors are needed for children, teens, returning veterans and a host of others.

There is even a Small Business Administration program for retired executives to mentor new executives.

In these programs you can commit as little as an hour a month, more if you can. Being a mentor can have a most profound effect --on you and your mentee.

Not all of us see ourselves as being able to be "The One", but if you do, JUST DO IT!!

Books

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