

Share your wisdom

DISCOVER A NEW SENSE OF JOY AND PURPOSE.



It was a moment when I felt deep satisfaction and the pain of loss, mixed in equal measure. Bill, a young man I had mentored for 10 years and who had become one of my closest friends, was now leaving my company. Although our friendship would endure, we both knew that my time as his mentor was coming to an end.

On his final day, he gave me a gift that would become one of the most powerful symbols in my life. It was a small wooden box that held two simple items: a candle and a bar of soap.

According to ancient legend, when a martial artist reached the point of mastery and was ready to begin the role of teacher, he was given this same gift. Its contents were to remind him of his true purpose on the journey that lie ahead.

A candle because the teacher's purpose is to bring light to those he teaches — the light of illumination, of wisdom and of spirit. And a bar of soap to remind the teacher that knowledge and discipline are to make things clean, to wash away the grime of ignorance and intolerance.

But for the teacher, the deeper meaning of these two gifts is the most important: In being used for their destined purpose, both the candle and the soap disappear. They are absorbed into the bodies, minds and hearts of the student, where they remain forever.

Through this gift, Bill was expressing his thanks for the teaching I had offered over the years. But he was also expressing the more important

message that those lessons had been absorbed and were now a part of him, ready to be offered to those whom he would help along the way.

I was humbled by this deeply meaningful gift and all that it represented. The joy I felt in knowing I had been helpful to this remarkable young man was matched only by my gratitude for all those who had also taken the time to help me over the years.

You can have this same combination of joy and gratitude, if you will do these three things:

Never stop learning. Every circumstance and every person you encounter has something to teach you. Learn to be grateful for all that they can offer. The harshest leader I ever worked for taught me the most about the value of kindness and respect — the qualities that have helped me be successful. If you consistently adopt the mindset of a student, you will humbly avoid thinking you know it all, and you will enrich your own store of wisdom and experience to share with others.

Teach what you know. Like the candle and soap, your experience is most valuable when it is actually put to use in helping the people around you. Look for opportunities to share your talents and experience, whether through teaching a class, writing a blog or becoming a mentor. One day, all your accomplishments will

be forgotten, but even the smallest contribution you made to another person's growth will be passed on indefinitely.

Be willing to disappear. The ultimate goal of every true teacher is to be surpassed by the student. Whether this involves years together or a single conversation, make this your constant objective. If you're not careful, the gratitude and appreciation of the person you mentor can be addictive and can lead you to subtly sustain the relationship, even after its purpose has been fulfilled. Instead, like the candle and soap, be willing to share what you have to offer and then gracefully relinquish your role as teacher, allowing the relationship to evolve into a new one.

None of us stands alone. Moreover, there is no accomplishment for which we can take sole credit, for behind us is a long line of teachers who have shaped us in some way. Whether they taught us formally or through the message of their ideas and their example, their lessons are deep inside us.

When you are willing to take your place in this never-ending cycle, you make a contribution that will last long beyond your lifetime and you will discover a new sense of joy and purpose in all you have learned. <<

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