

## **Mentoring really does make a difference**

During graduate school I was fortunate to have two excellent mentors who took the time to help me understand the world of business, an academic career and all the intricacies and duties of the job. Both were professors at the University of Memphis. As a graduate assistant for Dr. Malra Treece, I learned how she taught her classes, prepared class materials, and also learned a great deal as I watched her write and edit several popular business communication textbooks. Dr. Elmore Alexander taught me how to begin, and more importantly, finish a research project and how to submit articles to professional conferences and for journal publication. Even before graduate school, I had several bosses, many of whom I still keep up with, that were invaluable to me in introducing the world of business, practices, and procedures.

Thanks to the role model of my various and important mentors, I've had a chance to pass along the experience. My most recent example is Lily Dong. Lily's story is an interesting one and covers several continents. Lily was first introduced to me as a tour guide in China. I was one of several faculty accompanying a group of students to several cities in Mainland China. Because of the need for an expert tour guide and translator, Lily stayed with our group the entire two weeks of the trip. We must have asked her thousands of questions about culture, language, practices, and anything and everything that appeared new and different to us. Lily coordinated plant visits, interpreted in restaurants, businesses and tourist shops. She helped the group buy key souvenirs

including pearls, Xian warrior statues, and custom made stamps engraved with our "Chinese" name. My father also accompanied me on the trip to China and only at the end of the trip did Lily finally realize I was the professor and he was the guest. The roles of men and women in China were very different and are only slowly changing. In addition, Chinese show extreme respect and honor for the eldest members of a group or family.

Lily asked many questions of us and became more and more interested in the field of business and possibly pursuing further study in the U.S. She realized the growing potential of business in China. With her foreign language expertise and work as an interpreter she understood the value further graduate study would bring to her career. After our group returned to the states, Lily continued to stay in contact and finally completed the necessary paperwork to enter graduate school at in Tennessee. She left her husband and only child "Happy" behind and traveled to the US arriving with only a small suitcase and wok strapped to the outside of the case. A group of UTC faculty and students gathered up clothes for her and belongings and supplies for her apartment. She worked as my student assistant and later her husband and then five-year old daughter joined her in the states.

Toward the end of her master's degree, Lily began to consider further study in a doctoral program. After writing several recommendation letters and making a few phone calls, Lily was accepted to the doctoral program at the University of Kentucky. She has excelled at her coursework and together we have written several papers that have been published. Her daughter Happy is now 13 and is making top grades in school. Happy loves art and music but her mom continues to stress the extreme importance of top scores

in math and science, making her practice extra math problems after school. Her English is perfect although she reports her Dad's English sounds more like Tarzan.

Lily has been interviewing for a teaching job and I helped with many letters of recommendation. In the last several months, I've had numerous phone calls from academicians inquiring about her strengths and abilities for a faculty position. Over the holiday break, Lily and Happy were passing through North Georgia and stopped in for a visit. Lily just accepted a tenure-track faculty position at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks for the coming fall. She's pictured with me in the photo with her signed contract for \$90,000.

Over dinner she told me about her recent visit home to China. Many of her relatives questioned her newfound success and the job offer. They felt she was too skinny to have secured such a good job. (In China the more wealthy you are the larger your physical size because you can afford enough food.) Her city relatives who once looked down on her social class and status in China said they would now gladly accept a check from her and would not refuse other financial assistance. Comparing the cultures is always interesting. After our visit, I realized Lily had really mentored me in my understanding of China.

When you accept the chance to mentor others, you never know how the story will end or where your paths will continue to cross. DSC has an excellent co-op and internship program and a growing number of students who would welcome the chance to

learn from you. If your business has a project or need for a student intern, we have an excellent group of junior and senior-level business students who need experience for their resumes as well as a chance to implement some of the ideas they are learning in their bachelor's degree program. I also guarantee you'll personally benefit from the opportunity to mentor and share your skills and expertise with others.

For information on DSC's Co-Op/Internship program, please contact Karen Marks at Dalton State College at 706-272-4430.

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