Joseph B. Walton Teaching Philosophy

Background

My 'teaching philosophy' is borne of an innate interest in connecting with people through their context(s) and subtext(s) to help them in finding what they are looking for through the means of our relationship. This can and often is informal – or casual in a formal setting – or in formal environments via direct delivery.

From the earliest times, I can recall being in a position to consider other folks' situation(s) and offer thoughts and advice I have tried to be helpful without disturbing their sense of autonomy and discovery. Perhaps this originated as an upperclassman in high school in Industrial Arts ('shop class'; I loved the classes and my teacher!). Many of the other guys in class were a little younger and looked up to me as a friend in shop class. I'd make all kinds of crazy stuff and try to explain what I was doing and help them with their projects. But I didn't want to 'do it for them', rather, I wanted to lead them to figure it out on their own.

After high school, I temporarily eschewed formal post-secondary education despite scholarship opportunities and struck out on my own in the professional world in technology engineering and ultimately consulting. It was as a consultant that I found the opportunity to do professionally what I had enjoyed and been successful at interpersonally: *help others*. This was often contrary to commercial success but I was the happier for helping folks learn, understand, or get to where they needed to be despite 'billable hours' concerns.

By the late 90s, I returned to community college, then VCU for undergraduate studies, and proceeded to pursue my Master's where I was exposed to Edgar Schein's seminal book *Process Consulting Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship*. I was immediately struck by Schein's reach with various social science disciplines into the often banal world of consulting. This re-affirmed my pursuits in consulting but now with the bulwark of academic leadership theory. For these and various personal reasons, I was determined to pursue a terminal degree to be able to engage more fully in the world of academics and learning for my own benefit and too so I could help others. I realized that a higher level of intellectual achievement grants – but more importantly generates – an immeasurable intellectual authority.

Since then I have found the pursuit of a Doctorate of Philosophy in Public Policy to be an immensely satisfying way to syndicate all the best traits of excellence in intellectual inquiry and social science. Moreover, it puts me in the position of having deeply learned the pursuit of excellence personally and communally from the inspiring thinkers and intellectuals from the various fields of which Public Policy and my research has required. How does this help me with

others? **I am better able to inspire and motivate them towards fulfilling their own intellectual curiosity.**

Having discovered for myself the joy intellectual curiosity gives me an even greater interest in and proficiency to inspire others to fulfill their own intellectual curiosity to whatever extent they may desire. The best thinkers I have met or read were experts, of course, but achieved that expertise through intellectual curiosity and determination. Stimulating intellectual curiosity, I firmly believe, should be the goal of any teacher. To spark a 'eureka' moment in the mind of another person is the ultimate goal of teaching and it is that which I have pursued for myself and have enjoyed sharing with others.

I often see the Yeats quotation of 'not filling a bucket but lighting a fire' and I consider that to be a useful metaphor for the cognoscenti but I prefer to call it intellectual curiosity when I am attempting to motivate others. Those who are curious about their world in whatever realm but hesitant or think they lack the ability to understand need to be told directly that they are on the verge of the wonderful world of intellectual curiosity. Explaining to them about 'learning to fish' or 'lighting a fire' is less empowering than suggesting it is *curiosity* which is at work.

In a minor sense, this could be someone baffled trying to figure out the parking meter on the street or, in a more significant sense, someone struggling to understand the difference between rational and non-rational decision-making models. The point is to sentiently lead the learner to the brink of having their intellectual curiosity piqued and then let them pursue it.

In closing, I believe that which I can offer a student, mentee, or peer is the ability and space to get motivated to understand their problem and how to solve it to find their own happiness. I do this by respecting and believing in their inherent ability to be able to do so. I model excellence and virtuous traits otherwise to give them an understanding of what they can expect to achieve through their own efforts. Indeed, I have two wonderful daughters (8 and 4 years old) and this is the philosophy I employ with them.

Inspiration and Iconography

I. Greek tradition of Academy (symposia, colloquy, dialog, Mentor, et al.)
II. Monastic tradition of University
III. The Enlightenment
IV. Nobel Foundation and Prizes
V. Modern public educational equality
VI. Explore Your World campaign by the Science Museum of Virginia with this as one of the marketing images:

Meaningful Theories and Frameworks

This section is a collection of motivational and enlightening mental touchstones which have varying degrees of currency for various teaching, leading, and mentoring scenarios:

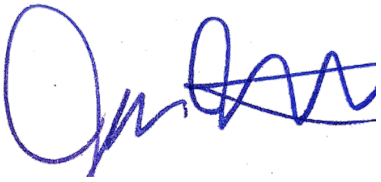
1. Discover, Connect, Engage (from the Wilder School Office of Student Success)
2. Blending leadership, professionalism, expertise, collaboration, innovation, and common purpose to inspire and enlighten
3. Leading by example
4. Don't forget common sense
5. Excellence and Virtue; Ethics; Moderation
6. Strategic versus tactical
7. Process consulting, problem-solving, systems analysis, and consensus-building
8. Considering various leadership models for different scenarios
9. Trust and control are delicately balanced to create value
10. Gut, instinct, and intuition versus objectivity, deliberation, and the passage of time
11. Art versus science
12. Critique without criticizing
13. One can command respect but it is better to earn it
14. Honesty | Self-control | Perseverance
15. People need time alone to cogitate and process
16. Ask, don't assume
17. Think of the consequences

18. Treat others as you treat yourself
19. Offer thoughts not advice
20. Take not nor seek credit

Methods and Examples

1. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" appendix to *The Sociological Imagination* – C. Wright Mills, OUP, 1959
2. *Process Consulting Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship* – Edgar H. Schein
    a. Always try to be careful
    b. Always stay in touch with the current reality
    c. Access your ignorance
    d. Everything you do is an intervention
    e. The Client owns the problem and the solution
    f. Go with the flow
    g. Timing is crucial
    h. Be constructively optimistic with confrontive interventions
    i. Everything is a source of data, learn from failure
    j. When in doubt, share the problem

Sincerely,



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