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Mentors Accelerate You

This post was written as part of the #Mentor series, which is tied to LinkedIn's student editorial calendar. Follow the stories or write your own.



Written by John Frank

A great story about one of my mentors--his name is Warren Donin, a dynamic history teacher at Stuyvesant High School. I wound up at Stuyvesant by luck. At the time, I was teaching Bilingual History in Spanish at Graphic Arts High School in Manhattan. The principal told me about an opening at Stuyvesant where they needed someone to teach both Spanish and History. I happened to fit the bill. When I arrived, Mr. Donin had been teaching there for more than twenty years. Every morning, he'd see me when he walked in. Every evening, he saw me when he left. One day, he came over and said, "John, you have access to all my lesson plans. Please, take them, use them, change them. They are yours." His lesson plans were literally treasures. He had file cabinets of them that he had painstakingly created and crafted. They were marked and remarked and had sprawling notes in the margins. He denoted what worked and what didn't. Over the years, he perfected his lessons. They were, in a word, phenomenal. They were mostly structured as great debates and I loved to debate. His lesson plans were the perfect match to my personality. My classes took on a new tone and texture.

Students loved my antics, but more so than anything, they loved to argue their points of view. Very quickly, my American history class became a sought after commodity.

There's more to this story, to this man's selflessness. Each graduating class of seniors votes for who they want as their Faculty Speaker for the commencement ceremonies at Lincoln Center. The votes were tallied and, it just so happened, Warren came in second and I came in third. The winner, Mr. Orno from the Physics Department, declined to give the speech because he had given it so many times. By default, Warren was offered the honor, but because he knew I was next in line, he also declined, allowing me to make the speech. It was one of the biggest and proudest moments of my life.

Warren Donin didn't even know me when he opened up his treasure trove of lesson plans. He simply wanted to help a rookie teacher be the best. Mr. Donin allowed other teachers access to his files. There is no way that my classes would have been half as interesting or entertaining if I didn't have his lesson plans as my foundation.

Mr. Donin allowed me to be more than I could have ever been in a short period of time. That's what mentors do. They accelerate your development. They help you go from zero to sixty in record time.

And like all things, one thing leads to the next. Mr. Donin showed me what it was like to give selflessly. I try to pay it forward and give to others where I can. This is one of the reasons I became a Big Brother for BBBS of New York City.

John Frank is an Alumni Big Brother at Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City. To become a volunteer mentor or to learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, log onto www.bigsnyc.org/BeABig or call 212-686-2042.