



Making My Mentor Proud

This post was written as part of the #Mentor series, which is tied to LinkedIn's student editorial calendar.

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As a young professional, I was in great need of a mentor. I had interned at a private equity firm and now worked there full time as an executive assistant. I knew I did not want to do this job forever but it was a great learning experience. It was a time in my life in which I was confused and struggling to figure out my future goal(s). Chris was a member of the investment team and took me under his wing from day one. Chris and I had many closed-door discussions to figure out what was beyond this life for me. Chris saw in me what I did not yet see in myself, drive and passion.

Social work was the next logical step in my career given my undergrad degree in psychology. With Chris' support, I began researching masters programs and weighing the pros and cons for each one. He constantly made the comment that he was so happy for me but would be sad to see me go. He knew I was applying to programs and asked for updates every week. Finally, I received an email that stated I was accepted to Columbia University's School of Social Work, my number one choice. I was moving to New York City and beginning the next phase of my life. Even though I knew Chris would be happy for me, I was nervous to make the call. He was traveling for work and I was not sure how to break the news to him. For the past 5 years this mentor had been my sounding board, my biggest supporter, and my friend. When I called and told him I had been accepted to Columbia and was going to enroll, I had to pull the phone away from my ear – he was screaming his congratulations. He was by far the most excited I had ever heard him. His excitement was infectious and as the adrenalin wore off, one phrase went through my mind – I did it.

Could I have made these decisions and gone for my dream without Chris? Perhaps, but I not only wanted this for myself, I wanted it for him. He was another person in my life I wanted to make proud. Nothing can compare to the feeling one gets from achieving a goal, but success is bitter sweet if you have no one to share it with.

It's ironic that my first job out of my master's program was at Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC. While the average time to stay at a position is two to three years, I have been here for five. The reason? I see the change our mentors make on a daily basis, whether it be helping their mentee participate in an SAT prep program, teaching their mentee how to ride a bike, bringing their mentee to a borough s/he has never been, etc. It is not the huge steps that make the difference, but the smaller steps leading up to the big decisions in life. These mentors help these mentees achieve success because success is shaped for each individual. I continually tell mentors getting into an Ivy League college may not be how each mentee defines success, so that cannot be how the mentor defines it. These mentees want someone in their corner. They need the individualized attention to be able to understand their full potential and believe their goals are in their reach.

Through any mentor-mentee relationship, the mentee may seem to be the obvious party to “get something” out of the relationship, but the mentor does as well. However you may define success, the mentor feels it. Making a positive impact in the life of someone with so much potential; their goal becomes your goal, their success becomes your success. You have made a friend for life and inspire each other for years to come.

Lauren Prague is a current staff member of 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.bigsny.org or call 212-686-2042.

