



Showing Up is Just One Trait of a Great Mentor. When Mentoring, be Quick to Laugh



In this series, professionals thank those who helped them reach where they are today. Read the posts here, then write your own. Use #ThankYourMentor and @mention your mentor when sharing.



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I met Donna in high school. I was 15 years old, mouth full of braces, terrified of boys, and uncomfortable in my own skin. I was basically your average 15 year old.

Donna was 65 years old, head full of vibrant silver hair, owner of a loud joyful laugh and a youthful energy that simultaneously radiated wisdom. She was unlike any 65 year old I'd known.

Donna chose to spend a substantial part of her retired years investing in the lives of high school youth. Her mentoring took place largely through my church's youth group, as she led small groups and local & international service trips. As a teenager, I thought she was pretty lucky to get to hang out with my friends and me, as I was very sure we were hilarious, clever and brilliant. As an adult, I can recognize and appreciate the amount of patience that she had.

Of the many folks I've been blessed to be mentored by, Donna stands out in three specific ways:

Donna was never dogmatic in her worldview. While she did mentor me within the context of the church, she still opened up space in every conversation to allow me to feel out, express or grapple with my own evolving beliefs. At the time, I had been surrounded by peers and leaders alike whose worlds had been made small by religion. Donna's free-flowing, exploratory and compassionate faith stood in stark contrast, and profoundly shaped me.

Donna was quick to laugh, long and hard, at both the mundane and the absurd. Even if she was the butt of a lighthearted joke, she appeared to find great joy in making us laugh. She is one of the few people I know who can properly employ sarcasm without using it as a weapon (something I am still working on).

Donna was consistent in her commitment as a youth leader. Whether it was weekly small group or a coffee date when I needed someone outside of my peer group or family to talk to, Donna made herself available. Showing up is 80% of life, as they say. Plainly put, Donna showed up.

In my current position at Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, I have the pleasure of supporting our Bigs and Littles (mentors and mentees) when they are first introduced to one another, set up their first few outings with nervous excitement, and ultimately establish meaningful relationships. The best mentors I have worked with are the ones who do what Donna did- they let their Littles be fully themselves, while gently guiding them to be the best version of that self.

My involvement with BBBS has spanned over eight years, across two coasts and three BBBS agencies, as an intern, Big Sister, and employee. I look to the mentors who have shaped me, such as Donna, and know that they are a huge part of what continues to draw me to the profound work being done by this organization.

Amy Holodak 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.bigsnyc.org/BeABig or call 212-686-2042.