



Navigating the New Normal through Mentoring

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The Oxford Dictionary defines New Normal as “A previously unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, usual, or expected.” Students encounter a new normal from their first experiences with the university. Whether traversing through campus, enrolling in courses, encounters with social and professional organizations, in the classroom and encounters with their instructors. Although these experiences can become routine, many students express concerns that although my grades are..... I am not sure I did enough on campus and I am really undecided with what I want to do when I am done. Encountering a new normal experience post educational experiences is expected. Their nexus from knowledge to societal success is an area of imminent concern for students, parents and programs. A well-designed mentoring experience may be our new normal challenge in addressing student achievement.



Since coming to the Oklahoma State University in 2007, I have had the privilege to teach the children of my elementary school classmates, middle and high school friends, relatives and eventually one of my own children. On the occasions when these recognitions were established, I would recollect on the connection I had with their parents. Remembering the experiences we shared, knowledge learned, popular issues we discussed and ultimately where they are today. I have had a first person comparative experience with the new normal. How we thought in school and what we envisioned for our post educational endeavors in the 70’s and 80’s has dramatically changed. Respecting the diverse lived experiences, personal considerations, unexpected values, unmet expectations and desired realities, are considerations new normal mentorship in 2018 demands. As we challenge ourselves to become prepared for this task, I continually ask myself, is this truly reflective of our responsibility in the students’ educational process.

Although dated, but very timely, I thought James Baldwin captured the answer to the essence of this question of our responsibilities as educators in his essay, A Talk to Teachers, originally submitted October 16, 1963, as “The Negro Child – His Self-Image”; and published in The Saturday Review, December 21, 1963. In it he stated, “The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity.” Baldwin continues by acknowledging that although we accept the best and brightest students to Universities, they will inevitably enter societies where they will encounter varying degrees of a “determined resistance” to paradigm changes that result from the

knowledge received from their University experience. He challenges us by stating if we are to accept the responsibility of positively affecting the minds and hearts of students, “we must be prepared to go for broke.”

It is often said that many can advise; but few can mentor. If we decide to take up the mantle of mentorship, it can provide u an avenue to do just that. As mentors we can provide guidance by encouraging students in achieving the best direction in the New Normal. Mentors consider students’ current situations, goals and motivations. As Anthony Tjan stated in his article, What the Best Mentors Do, “Mentorship comes in many flavors. It doesn’t always work unless leaders bear in mind a few common principles.” He describes the first principle as developing a good relationship between the mentor and mentee before the mentorship experience. Second, emphasizing the development of character of the mentee before the quantity of competencies achieved. Third, recognize unmet expectation and desired realities in an optimistic and supportive experience. Work tirelessly to keep the mentee uplifted and encouraged. Lastly, focus on your support and loyalty to the mentee. Approach critical decisions the mentee might face, with the ethical autonomy. It is ultimately your decision to make and these are all of the options for you to consider.

As we consider our acceptance of our encounters with the new normal and as students present their challenges with their new normal. I want to leave you with words of author and Life Coach Sue Fitzmaurice “Don’t tell someone to get over it. Help them get through it.”

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