

My Parents, My Mentors

As the daughter of two public school educators, I never anticipated becoming an educator. Armed with an undergraduate degree focused on accounting and computer information systems, I entered the financial software industry immediately after college. When I began consulting, I realized that I genuinely enjoyed training so much that I looked forward to those assignments more and more. I started dreaming of a career change to pursue teaching full-time.

When I finally became a business educator, the two people I turned to the most for career advice were my parents. Their advice was timeless, and it related well to business education.

Here's what they taught me.

Constantly evolve

My father warned me not to get in a rut. Your students are rarely the same from year to year, or even class to class, so recognize these differences and grow with your students, he told me. To him, this meant I might have to “implement a new curriculum, learn a new technology tool, change my delivery, or even try a new classroom management approach.”

I'm now in my twelfth year at my current school and constantly make changes in my courses. I keep a journal for each course and take notes on what worked well and what should be updated for next semester. I set aside time each summer to make more significant changes for the courses as well. I'm always bookmarking new sites for curriculum, learning new technology tools, and saving current event articles that can be used in both my Entrepreneurship and Personal Finance courses—so that the information presented to my students remains fresh and current.

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Show students you are human

My mother recommended letting my personality shine through the lessons I deliver to my students. “It's perfectly acceptable to let students know that you have a life outside of school, but be careful to know your limits,” she said. She reminded me that students should never forget that you are the adult in the room and they are the students.

My students know that I have a passion for school-related interests such as entrepreneurship, financial literacy, technology and STEM. They also know that I love to cook, crochet, and spend time with my family and that I am a Red Sox season ticket holder. I wear a different “geeky” t-shirt every Friday and Tweet it out with the hashtag #GeekyShirtFriday. Many of my project examples revolve around Larry Bird, Elvis Presley or Wonder Woman. These are all great conversation starters with my students and build community in my classroom.

Learn from your mistakes

Both my parents were quick to tell me to learn from my mistakes. “No one is perfect! Don't be afraid to say that what

you tried to accomplish didn't work,” they said. If you don't do that, students will see right through you and the respect that you want the students to give you will be lost.

They encouraged me to seek advice from colleagues that I respected, to reach out to my Professional Learning Network, and to adopt some of what they are doing into my own teaching style. Every teacher has tried a new technology tool that didn't work as expected or implemented a lesson that wasn't a success. Not only can we learn from these mishaps—we can grow from them. ■

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VOLUME 73 • NUMBER 1 • OCT 2018 • www.nbea.org

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PR 12/18 104237

