

Mentoring Dumbledore Style: Importance of Mentoring as Seen in Harry Potter

by Peter Brooks

WARNING SPOILERS!

The most critical moment in the latest Harry Potter book (*The Half Blood Prince* by JK Rowling) centers around events in one of the waning chapters of the book. Harry and Dumbledore are on a mission to find and destroy a priceless artifact. During the mission Dumbledore explains that Harry must complete the mission at all costs. This presents a very emotional challenge to Harry who at one point has to force Dumbledore to drink a liquid that causes paranoia and fear. Harry and the weakened Dumbledore head back to Hogwarts where the building is under attack by followers of Voldermort. And although the attack on the school is thwarted, Dumbledore is killed in the action, leaving Harry without his mentor.

For many readers of Harry Potter, this part was very overwhelming and left many questions, probably the most important being: What does Harry do next?

Professionals remember when you left your undergraduate institution. No doubt that you left behind at least one mentor who educated and developed you, planting seeds of confidence and wisdom inside of you, hoping that they would grow as you matured through the profession. Additionally, I bet when you headed to your graduate institution or full time position, your first supervisor or advisor was nothing like your mentor. After all, that can only be one Dumbledore.

This is not a tragic occurrence, but one that can send as deep ripples in our lives as Dumbledore's death does for Harry. A part of you is lost and gone. Aspects of yourself that were once validated, may not be anymore. You may even be challenged to grow, feeling personal resistance toward someone whom you feel does not know you.

As in many transitional issues, we always look at everything that is going on in our life. But looking big picture is very different from deconstructing the small, so to speak. Instead of looking at the whole person who is not there for us anymore, focus on looking at the little things, deconstructing a situation to see all of the small parts.

Losing a mentor at any level is difficult. And we all process the steps of loss at own rate and in our own way. What can help is to look at your mentor and ask: What was it about him/her that made her/him so special? Look for characteristics, personality traits, small things that they did or said, small aspects of their style (how they approached different situations, etc.). Make a list of these characteristics for yourself and figure out which of those characteristics are you ok with not having, which do you need in a direct supervisor/advisor, and which can you find elsewhere.

Mentoring is not just a linear process moving from Mentor to Mentee. It's a free flowing learning process moving from you to those who you work with. Open yourself up those around you, and you will be mentored by your students, colleagues, and superiors. That can be hard to actualize when we are comfortable with getting multiple small things from one source. So think of it this way:

Dumbledore who is a pillar of strength and wisdom to so many, was probably not always that way...he too had to have had a mentor who saw something unique in him and brought it out in him...he too probably struggled with losing that mentor...he too went through the process of realizing that those around him (especially Harry) possessed the small characteristics he sought in his mentor.

Take some time this week to make that list for yourself. Then look at those who are around and see whom share those characteristics. Open yourself to be mentored as you mentor others and you will find that internal magic we envision our own Dumbledores having.