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The Student Whisperer



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The Student Whisperer

Inspiring Genius

Oliver DeMille
Tiffany Rhoades Earl



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Introduction

by Oliver DeMille

I stood in line for lunch at a large conference in Virginia where I had been a speaker earlier in the day. As I waited, I found myself conversing with a gentleman and his wife. She let me know that he had come under duress—that she had been trying to get him to come hear me speak for several years. She had been trying to convince him to support the idea of Leadership Education for their children for even longer. As I recall, the man (an executive at a major international firm) had resisted because he felt that their schools were doing a fine job—and he was busy with his career and other community and family responsibilities.

“But as I listened to you today,” he said, “I saw what my wife has been trying to tell me. Our children have so much potential, and with just a few minor adjustments we can help them do so much better in school and career preparation.”

I wondered if he realized how “*not-minor*” some of the adjustments might be, but I didn’t contradict him. I asked, “What is your first step going to be?”

He warmed up to the conversation even more at this point, saying, “Actually, I was hoping to get a chance to visit with you. Would it be okay if I gave you a suggestion? It’s just an observation that I think might help those who attend your speeches.”

“I’d love it,” I said as I pulled out some note cards and a pen to capture the moment.

“Well,” he said, “In my work my main role includes helping business leaders clarify their core strategic advantage, and focus on those few things that make everything else flourish.” He explained more about how he did this.

“Yes...” I jotted down the ideas in my notebook: *Core competency, strategic advantage, and critical catalysts—the things that make everything else flourish...*

“It seems to me that great education, what you call Leadership Education, all hinges on one thing,” he paused. “If the mentor is inspiring—really inspiring—it all works. If not, it doesn’t.”

“That’s right,” I said, “In fact, that’s actually true in all education because...” I stopped, because I could see that he hadn’t finished making his point.

“So my suggestion is this: If you really want to help all these people adopt quality leadership education, you need to find a way to teach us all *how to inspire*. If we become inspiring mentors, this will work.

“But if we aren’t inspiring mentors, *nothing* else will work—no matter how closely we follow the guidelines of quality education, and no matter how hard we try. Inspiring is the critical element of great education and all successful learning.”

The Lineage of Mentors

Aristotle and Alexander the Great. Bach and Mozart. Wythe and Jefferson. The great narrative of history and the pinnacles of human achievement can be chronicled through a lineage of mentors and their protégées. Great mentoring has been around for a very, very long time, but it is too often practiced only by the few—those truly great teachers and leaders who, either by innate gift or long experience, know how to get the very best out of others and help each of us achieve our highest potential. We have reached a point in history where every student needs such parents and teachers. We need help to become such leaders and to catch and pass on a vision of greatness and a cause worth living for.

We can’t pass on vision without mentoring. We can tell stories, and a few people might listen. We can take bold actions, and some people might admire us, or even try to follow our example. But to really pass on vision we must mentor protégés over a period of time.

Are you destined to be a mentor? Do you have a vision that matters? Not all of your students will catch your vision, and a few people you don’t personally mentor *will* catch your vision, but if you’re not actively mentoring over a long period of time, your vision probably won’t get passed on. If your vision is important, you need a mentor—and you need to *be a mentor*.

This book is designed to help you become a *great* mentor—a true Student Whisperer and leader at the highest level. It will also help you work effectively with

such mentors as you pursue your goals and life mission. This book is part deep teaching of the vital principles of great Leadership Education, part self-help workshop, part example through parables, and part exploration of the great ideas that make mentoring and quality learning most effective at all ages.

What, Exactly, is a Student Whisperer?

Defining great mentoring sometimes feels like trying to tell someone what salt tastes like, or how love feels. It is not easily articulated or explained to people who haven't encountered it, but we know it when we experience it.

The story of our mentors is the story of our lives; and the lineage of the mentors is the story of our generation—even our civilization. Fortunately, somewhere along the line, virtually all of us have experienced great mentoring—a time when we fell deeply in love with learning, or felt highly inspired to exceed ourselves or do hard things. Think of a time you had such an experience: Perhaps a person inspired you, or an event, a movie, a story, a piece of music, or something else. It can come in many forms. That feeling, that experience of wanting to change, to be better, to...*whatever* it was you felt—is what Student Whispering is all about.

Neither by Force Nor Chance

Perhaps silver bells and cockleshells worked for contrary Miss Mary, but master gardeners do not “make” their gardens grow. And yet it is clearly not by chance or accident that they succeed. They understand the principles that govern their success, and they know their role in the process. Whether explicitly or intuitively, they understand natural law and they orchestrate circumstances to cooperate with it for an optimal crop.

While it is possible to “cheat” Mother Nature in order to achieve a more uniform and marketable harvest, it just so happens that vegetables cultivated in an environment of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, preservatives and lengthy storage in unnatural conditions usually don't taste as good or have the same nutritional density as those lovingly raised by the master gardener in rich soil. Those superficially “beautiful” vegetables with such a long shelf life and lovely, predictable shape and color are often not even able to reproduce. One might ponder long to consider all the layers of meaning in such a comparison.

Like a master gardener, a great mentor knows how to set the stage for transformational experiences—as often as they are needed. She knows how to create the environment where such feelings and experiences are frequent, how to use such experiences to help us discover and improve ourselves, and even how to repeat and reinforce such feelings so that our motivation and efforts are sustained. A great mentor cares—and she is effective.

Three Levels of Mentoring

Students set out to learn by listening, studying, memorizing, applying and by utilizing these and other techniques to acquire and use knowledge profitably in their lives. Indeed, learning is a pre-level of mentoring that must never end. When a person learns well how to learn, she is capable of benefiting from mentors, and of becoming a mentor. There are at least three levels of mentoring, the first of which is **Teaching**. At this first level of mentoring, the teacher simply instructs students on how to use learning techniques to learn. When a person knows how to effectively help others obtain and retain knowledge, she is a teacher.

At a second level, **Mentors** go a step deeper. Like teachers, they help students learn—but they also help students connect themselves with the knowledge they obtain. Mentors help students see:

- Why they are learning
- How it relates and correlates
- How it can be used in the real world

Mentors don't just pass on knowledge and skills. They help students discover their life's mission and their inner genius—and then fully prepare for these.

Indeed, mentoring is much more than teaching. Teachers or professors transfer knowledge and skills. Mentors help students build knowledge, skills, purpose, self-discovery, self-mastery and impact on the world. Teaching, as defined here, is the process of facilitating student literacy and helping students meet pre-established standards. In addition to these important things, mentoring helps students personalize the knowledge and skills and use it to benefit self, others and the world.

As a third level of mentoring, **Student Whispering** does all of these things and more. Student Whisperers consistently mentor at an inspired level. They know how to invite in the spark of inspiration whenever it is needed, because they know how

to deeply understand each student and help him discover things he doesn't even know about himself. They know how to ask questions and help others have experiences that bring floods of insight, motivation and inspiration.

Above all, Student Whisperers are experts at empowering others. Instead of taking students where the experts think they should go, Student Whisperers help empower mentees to know where they should go from the mentee's own understanding. They help bring out the leadership and genius in everyone they touch. They know the questions to ask of themselves, and of their mentees (which we will cover in great depth in coming chapters), to instigate meaningful progress.

While many Student Whisperers do these things naturally through instinct and intuition, others learn to do it by asking the right questions and taking the right actions. Neither type is superior, and each has its advantages and weaknesses.

For example, while the intuitive Student Whisperer can often make effective mentoring seem natural and effortless, she often relies on a "magic" connection that somehow materializes with a mentee. Without further training, she may have no idea how to generate such a connection where it does not metaphysically appear—no matter how much she would like to, and even if the student is her own child. This book will help such a mentor to bridge that gap. Whether you are instinctual or explicitly trained, you will benefit from the lessons here.

In short, the difference between Student and Teacher is that the Teacher helps others learn knowledge and skills. The difference between Teacher and Mentor is that the Mentor helps learners individualize and personalize the knowledge and skills they learn with direct application to one's personal genius, passion and missions in life. Student Whisperers do all that Teachers and Mentors do, and add the following dimensions: frequent sparks of inspiration, the ability to lead innovatively, the skill of taking wise risk, and the habit of tenacious implementation. This is leadership.

Inspiration

Student Whisperers innovate, with every student and in each situation. They don't settle for anything less than truly great educational experiences. They aspire for every study session, every class, each project and every day to be characterized by epiphany, tenacious progress, and deeply transformational learning. They want learning to be multi-faceted, profound and moving. They want study periods to take place in the energy of vibrant quality.

They believe that learning is inherently great, and that each learning experience should feel and be great. They shun the rote, institutionalized, average and mediocre. They believe in quality, excellence and passion. They know hard work is vital to success, and they also know that time spent in hard work is exponentially more effective when done in the flow of inspiration. Rather than, “Don’t work hard; work smart,” they teach and exemplify, “Work smart *hard*.”

The greatest teachers and mentors are therefore opponents of systemization, over-structured curricula and many objective measures created by experts—these things systematically shut down energy, passion and excellence. It is true that discipline is vital to progress and excellence. There is a huge difference between flat, uninspired discipline that bores the creative mind, shuts down the heart-connection and consistently puts glaze on student eyes, and deep, passionately inspired rigor. The student in the latter circumstance continues to do the hard things even *when* they are hard—not just in order to measure up, but because he is truly in love with studying and zealous about the goals he means to accomplish through his efforts.

Skeptics may fear that this method might lead to chaos, inconsistency or indulgence. This of course belies the skeptic’s core values of order, uniformity, and standardized requirements. They doubt that many students will really love learning, or that those who do love it will be disciplined to do the really hard work. Certainly there are some students who will fail in these ways—but some fail in *all* models of education. Yet, how can we suppose that a deep personal commitment and high level of inspiration will lead to *diminished* achievement on the part of the student? Indeed, we have personally witnessed this level of dedication and its amazing outcomes in thousands of students—of all ages.

As we have stated here and elsewhere: when a student is given the opportunity to gain an education, the ultimate responsibility for success or failure rests with him, and it is the role and obligation of the adults in his life to provide the best possible opportunity to gain that education.

Any rational consideration of the models of education must conclude that effective mentoring is *not* the factor that heightens the risk of failure. Any analysis of the data on bureaucratic/compulsory models leads us to challenge the assumption that the conveyor belt is an effective mitigation against the risk of failure. The fact is that where there is great mentoring, students are *less likely* to fail and *more likely* to get truly excited and do the hard work of achieving true excellence.

Find a great Student Whisperer who transcends the system by giving consistently personalized and inspired guidance, and you will find increased activity of students truly excelling and a significant number of them doing literally world-class work.

The thing that is often missing in education is greatness! Greatness is easily recognizable, but it often eludes empirical measurement and rote policy. Greatness is the natural result of personalized, interactive quality with passion, discipline and inspired leadership. This is entirely learnable and duplicable, but it is nearly always sabotaged by too much systemization and institutionalism. Education needs greatness, and Student Whisperers are the experts on inspiring and bringing personal, powerful greatness to each student's learning.

The Highest Level: Student Whispering

Student Whispering, the highest and greatest level of mentoring, includes three central things:

First, Student Whisperers know the voices that speak to the mind of each student. One thing we will cover in much more detail later is that each student struggles with the voices that propose to guide his education. For example, nearly every student frequently hears, among other voices, the voice of self-doubt from the Inner Critic. Student Whisperers are familiar with these voices. They know how to help students discern them, tune out the wrong voices and focus on the voices that facilitate true growth and success.

Second, Student Whisperers know how youth and adults typically respond to each voice, as well as many non-typical responses. They know how to Whisper because they know the other voices that are Whispering. More, they think about these constantly and know how to read student behavior and perceive which voices are winning the student's inner battle.

Third, Student Whisperers know the language of Whispering and how to communicate directly and effectively with students. Very few people have learned this language or use it to communicate with youth—or with others, for that matter. Student Whisperers use this language every day, and because of this they cut out unproductive and unnecessary trial and error and help students focus on what really matters to move more quickly and effectively toward superb learning.

For example, the authors have both experienced students who decide the key to their education is to demand numerous one-on-one meetings with their mentor. We have also worked with those who prefer to be entirely self-contained and seldom interact with their mentor in any meaningful way. While typical mentors may decide to just work with the student's preferences in such cases, Student

Whisperers go deeper. Student Whisperers spend literally hours pondering, writing and brainstorming what such students most need from their mentor.

Sometimes the result is that Student Whisperers help the “meeting, meeting, meeting” students become a bit more independent while they ask the self-focused learners to meet more frequently. This can leave the “meeting, meeting” student feeling ignored and the self-absorbed student feeling pushed. Often this is exactly what they need to feel, and over time their weaknesses are addressed and their strengths expanded accordingly.

In other words, being mentored by a Student Whisperer is not always comfortable, but it is profound and effective. Student Whisperers don’t always tip their hand by showing the student exactly how they are mentoring, but they do spend significant time thinking and planning for each student or protégée and then implementing the plans to help each mentee truly succeed.

This may sound counter-intuitive, or even abstract, to non-Whisperers—which is one reason there are fewer great mentors than we need. Student Whisperers are paying attention to things most people ignore, and asking questions most people never consider. As a result, they are aware of things going on with students that others don’t see.

Indeed, parents could become Student Whisperers in order to better understand their children. The same is true of every spouse, employer, friend, employee, citizen and leader. Human beings communicate so many things that aren’t understood by others, and the point of Student Whispering is to explicitly attend to these communications.

In this book, readers will learn how to more effectively and consistently think, hear, speak and act like Student Whisperers. Student Whisperers are needed today, perhaps more than ever before. Every great education is influenced by at least one truly great Student Whisperer. The future of education—and of human achievement, prosperity and happiness—depends on having more of them.

Two Books in One

This book is specially designed and organized with a dual purpose:

1. To help readers experience and recognize what it feels like to be greatly mentored
2. To concurrently outline the principles of great mentoring and help readers turn them into personal skills and even habits

The first part of this book (**Book One**, covering Chapters 1-5) is told as a personal narrative, and immerses readers in a series of life events as a student learns from her mentors and grows in the process. We hope readers *feel* what it is like to experience working with committed and demanding mentors as they go through Book One.

The second part (**Book Two**, comprising Chapters 6-16) contains information that is vital to becoming a great mentor (and to working with great mentors), and guides the reader through several exercises that help turn the concepts and principles of great mentoring into personal skills and strengths.

The authors have worked together (first in a Mentor-Mentee relationship, and later as colleagues) for nearly two decades—as many of the stories in Book One show. Oliver used the methods taught here in mentoring Tiffany and many other people, and Tiffany has applied and expanded on the same principles and methods in her mentoring through (The Leadership Education Mentoring Institute) LEMI for well over a decade.

Over the course of these many years, we have learned what works (and what usually doesn't) through direct mentoring, and vicariously through mentor-protégées. This book imparts what we have come to understand of truly great mentoring—what we call Student Whispering:

* Chapters 6-9 provide foundational information valuable for all mentors and those who are mentored.

* Chapters 10-13 help readers throw off past biases about teaching and establish a transformational foundation for great mentoring. Topics include:

- The two major balances (first between the Manager and the Artist, and second between the Warrior and the Healer)
- The various voices nearly all students listen to, and how to speak the language of each most effectively
- Seven key questions Student Whisperers ask about each menteeⁱ
- How archetypes are central to great education and Student Whispering, and how to apply this knowledge as a mentor

* Chapters 14-16 deal with further transformation. This includes workshops on:

- How to get the most from *your* mentors
- How to become a great mentor
- How to plan your strategy of becoming a Student Whisperer so that it encompasses life as a place of learning...and more

Special Thanks

We want to thank our respective spouses, Rachel DeMille and Rick Earl, for their deep involvement in and support for this book. Writing is a challenging endeavor, and our spouses and children have put up with a great deal as we've worked on this project. Beyond the role of spouse and partner, Rachel DeMille has read every word of this book multiple times and provided more suggestions, ideas and changes than we could ever count. This book would not exist without her efforts and expertise in Leadership Education. Many others have helped with this work, especially numerous readers and seminar participants who made suggestions and recommended changes, and we deeply appreciate their contributions.

We also thank our many mentors over the years who have taught, scolded, shared, instructed, demanded, pushed, laughed and even wept with us. We have gained so much from the on-going dance of mentors and the mentored. We feel so humbled and blessed to have worked with truly great Student Whisperers in our lives.

Finally, we want to thank you, the reader, for your interest in learning, improving and becoming a Student Whisperer. Whoever you are: we were thinking of you individually and warmly when we wrote this. This book is dedicated to you. We hope you can feel how much we really mean this.

The world truly needs more Student Whisperers, and we are convinced that many who have great life missions can learn a great deal from the material in this book. It has been an educational experience and a labor of love for us to go through the many dozens of versions that brought us to this point. We hope it will help you in your own labors of love to truly make the world better. It is why we are all here, after all.

BOOK ONE

*" Press on. Nothing in the world
can take the place of persistence."
-Calvin Coolidge*

1

Mentors

by Tiffany Rhoades Earl

I sat on the colonial-style sofa in the lounge nervously wiggling my foot. *Why am I nervous?* I thought. *I've known Oliver for years! He's my friend and my teacher. So why am I nervous?* I couldn't fool myself, though. I knew why I was nervous. This was my first formal non-academic mentor meeting.

I knew clearly how this could change my life. I knew what a difference mentors make. Take Isaac Newton, for example—the genius, Isaac Newton. Newton had been in and out of school until he was eighteen. There were times he left school to help with the farm, but he'd end up hiding so he could read and fill notebooks with his inventions, models and calculations.

By age eighteen he was at Trinity College—discouraged with his studies, friends and learning environment, and on the verge of giving up formal schooling forever and going home. The roadblock just seemed too big. He had tried over and over, without success, and this time felt like all the others.

Then he met Isaac Barrow—an eminent mathematician, philosopher and Greek scholar. Barrow recognized Isaac's capabilities and started mentoring him. Almost overnight Isaac Newton changed. Instead of being lackadaisical, he became an eager student who delved into Copernican theories, the writings of Galileo, the works of Kepler, and the science of optics. Newton got on The Path and went on to give the world a deeper understanding of physics, invent a branch of calculus, and bring greater light and knowledge to the world around him.

I knew his story, as well as the stories of Thomas Jefferson and his mentor George Wythe, George Washington and his mentor Colonel Fairfax, and numerous modern business mentor stories like Andrew Carnegie, Sam Walton, Buckminster Fuller, Dexter Yeager, and Robert

Kiyosaki. I knew that successful people get on The Path—which means that they start by getting a great mentor.

I wasn't kidding myself. I *knew* the power of a mentor, but it wasn't just that. I had high hopes. Being a stay-at-home mom who was working on my Masters and building a business wasn't necessarily the normal "mentee" stereotype. Nevertheless, I knew I needed a mentor, and I knew he was the one.

He knew me too. He'd seen my work, my dedication, my strengths and weaknesses; but how would he deal with my situation?

So here I sat, nervously waiting for my first formal mentor meeting.

I thought back to the past few weeks, to the events that had brought me here. The more I thought about it, the more I realized I had been preparing for this meeting for several years.



I looked up from the pile of bills and held back my tears. I had given up getting angry weeks ago—now I was getting emotional. The choking feeling I felt oozing its way up my throat made me feel sick inside. I clicked off the screen and leaned back in my chair.

"Rick, we are barely making it this month. In fact, there are some purchases we are going to have to put on hold."

My husband had run his own business for most of our marriage; and like most everything else, we shared the load.

I re-worked the numbers. I looked over our business strategy. At the time, we had two main clients who bought our manufactured kits wholesale. I looked over our marketing plan. I studied our product line. I read through the business structure. I looked over everything. *What are we doing wrong?* I was grasping for straws.

Should we put more emphasis on retail sales and improve our presence on the web? Should we raise our prices a little, both wholesale and retail? Or would that drive our buyers to our competitors? Should we pay our employees less, or lay off some of them? Should we create a new product? Should we buy the new rock-breaking machinery so we wouldn't have to break everything by hand? Should we network with some other businesses so we can move more product? Should we hire a better salesman?

Should we quit?

I had asked about fifty “should-we’s” when I finally let out a huge sigh and shut the books. It was past midnight and any more efforts at solving our business crises would have to wait until morning.

Or so I thought.

I tossed and turned, and at 3:30 I finally got out of bed. I walked over to my dresser, fumbled around in the dark until I found my journal, and quietly exited my bedroom.

I found my way to the den, flipped the light on, sat in the easy chair, and leafed through my journal...

Rick and I both believe we have a personal mission in life. Rick is an inventor at heart. He has what I call the '101 Ways To Do Anything' talent. He loves the process of figuring out how to do something in more economical and technological ways.

I flipped a few pages and kept reading,

I've finally determined that even though Rick and I share our major goals and commitments about life, and even though we love each other dearly and support each other in all worthy endeavors, there are some things I feel extremely passionate about that aren't his mission. They are my mission, and I must do them.

I smiled as I read that, thinking about the time he rigged a copper-pipe water heater around our wood-burning stove to save on electricity costs. He'd forgotten to account for the pressure of steam and finally took it down after it blew a hole through my hutch. Yes, we didn't necessarily have the same gifts and talents, but we both had something to give.

I flipped some more pages and resumed reading,

In some ways I'm just like everybody else. I care what my friends think of me, I enjoy a really nice restaurant, and I think about what happens in the world.

In other ways, I'm not so similar. I must reach the youth. They have so much potential—and yet too few live up to it. They become disillusioned as they hit the "realities" of life. So many people in their later years still talk about high school or college as "the best years of their life." How tragic. People don't live their dreams because they just don't know how.

In another place I wrote:

I always believed my teachers when they told us we could do anything we put our minds to. I believed my parents when they told me I had a purpose in life.

I kept flipping pages and reading:

There are some things I just KNOW—some things I desire so strongly that I can't keep myself from pursuing their course. There are even things that are as good as done even though I haven't begun them yet. I will help people know how to be happy, how to choose their dreams, how to accomplish their missions.

I paused here and pondered, then looked back down. It was good to remember. I read on.

I know that the kind of education I get is crucial to me accomplishing my personal mission . . . I know that I need to build a successful business in order to reach the people I feel called to reach . . . I know youth will sit up as I speak, and be changed . . . I know people will read and be changed, and make choices that will make all the difference . . .

I stopped. I couldn't go on. I knew all these things. They seemed so close, yet so far away. How was I going to accomplish them when Rick and I couldn't even get his business to produce a healthy income for our family?

I closed my journal, and as I did I thought about Abraham Lincoln. I thought about how he'd spent all night on his knees the night before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. *He had a work to do*, I thought. I wonder how he felt when his business partner defaulted and Lincoln had to spend years repaying both halves of their business loan.

If he could overcome such challenges, so could I.

I thought of Robert Morris and how he financed the Revolutionary War at a critical moment in America's history, and how he spent the end of his life in debtor's prison instead of on a rich man's lane.

This is bigger than me, I thought. *This isn't just about machinery, products, payroll, marketing and suppliers. This is part of the formula to help me accomplish my mission.*

I opened my journal again and wrote:

No matter the roadblocks, I will succeed! I will do whatever it takes to accomplish my personal mission. I will make the necessary decisions, engage the right people. I will write, I will speak, I will work with the youth, I will make the business successful.



We loaded our small son into the pickup and headed up to Three Peaks. About eight miles in on the dirt road was an old mine on the mountainside—perfect for gathering lodestone, or magnetite. I loved “gathering days.” I rarely went with Rick anymore, but every once in a while I'd pack a picnic lunch and Rick would bring Jacob and me along.

Today I had something specific in mind. Today I wanted to get out of the house, away from the desk and telephone, out of the normal routine. I wanted to work *on* the business, *on* our lives, *on* the big picture.

Today I wanted some answers, and the beautiful hills behind Three Peaks would be perfect.

Rick took a five gallon bucket in his left hand, a piece of string with a paper clip tied to one end hanging out of his mouth, and a two-pronged pitch fork and shovel in his right hand. He headed up the mountainside.

We'd driven as far as we could with the truck and it wasn't more than a mile to the top.

Little Jacob grabbed his plastic shovel and bucket and followed his daddy. We gathered magnetite, Rick testing its strength with the paperclip. I asked Rick if he'd keep an eye on Jacob for a while. He would.

I headed energetically to the top of the hill. By the time I made it, I was gasping. I leaned over with my legs bent and my hands on my knees, breathing deeply.

It was beautiful at the summit and I sat down on a big white rock. I gazed around me. I could see down the mountainside where we'd parked the truck and I could see another mountain to the north of me. The truck looked small from here. *This is what I needed—to put life in perspective.* The clouds were bright and billowy. The ones to the south were dark gray storm clouds, but where I stood the sky was bright blue with a few fluffy white clouds.

I was here to clarify my vision and to decide some things. Somehow the outdoors and mountains can put things into perspective. The air is cleaner, the world is clearer, and God feels nearer.

I had one important question on my mind, and it was time I made a decision. I knew about The Path of All Success. For the past four years I had immersed myself in the classics in several fields and The Path was laced throughout each of them. It didn't matter if I was reading Plato, Confucius or Galileo, or listening to Mozart. It didn't matter if it was economics I was studying, or business law, or Shakespeare. In all of them, The Path was clear.

I knew what choice lay in front of me. Either way, I was at a crossroad and it was time to follow Frost's example and take "the road less traveled."

But could I do it? Because I *had* immersed myself in the classics—walking the streets of France with Cosette and Jean Valjean, seeing the landscape of Russia with Prince Andre and Peter, sitting in the corner of the top floor of the library with Reuben and Danny's father—I knew it wasn't easy. Hamlet had to decide whether to ignore the ghost or test its origin. Once he made his choice, it didn't mean the rest was easy.

I knew this. I knew this choice was vital, but it didn't make easy what lay ahead.

I thought back to the many people who had made this choice and succeeded on The Path. *What gave them the strength to make this choice?* I wondered.

What gave Gandhi the strength? What gave Churchill the strength? What gave Eric Liddell the strength? What gave Socrates the strength? The list went on and on in my mind—and all at once I knew. Or to be more specific, I *remembered*.

I remembered what gave them the strength: It was the personal conviction that they each had a mission to fulfill. It was The Call. It was having a vision of what was expected of them, believing that they had a personal mission, and desiring to be chosen.

The Call. Ah, yes: *The Call*.

It would be really nice if I could tell you that an angel or something came to me, like Joan of Arc—but that didn't happen. What did happen is that as I sat there on the top of the hill looking out on the sweeping southwestern vista, I felt something. It wasn't the first time I felt it, nor the last. But it was *different* somehow. Different because intertwined with the feeling of having an important work to do was something else: a decision. The decision to pay whatever price was needed to accomplish my dream.

The Call came to me like I suppose it comes to a lot of people, packaged in the form of desire—desire to accomplish something really important . . . my unique contribution. The Call is recognizable as a sense of direction, the urge to commit to a course of action—be it as small as starting a fall garden or as great as organizing a school system in rural Africa.

I sat on the white rock and took a deep, cleansing breath. To get back on The Path was going to take some time. I had felt The Call years ago, but I kept hitting roadblocks—and every time I made the wrong choice, I either tried to work things out myself or I picked the wrong mentors to help. So I was always stuck in The Path of Mediocrity. I knew better, but here I was. *Again*.

I took another deep breath. “Okay,” I said aloud, “this time I'll do it right. I'll make this Vital Choice correctly. I'll get the right mentor.”

*But it won't be easy, I thought. I've tried easy—and it doesn't work! I'm going to do this **right**. I'm going to go back in my mind to the beginning, back to the first time I felt The Call. Then I'm going to go through each time I came to a Roadblock and felt The Call, and I'm going re-experience them again, here, now. Then I'm going to look at the future honestly and make a different choice.*

I closed my eyes and let my mind float back to the first time I felt it—the time The Call came when I was thirteen years old...



It was a rough time for me. It had been about two months since I lost several of my friends. I was searching for meaning in life, and I was questioning what it was that I really believed. I was trying to decide if Mom and Dad were on my side.

I slammed the door shut and threw my backpack onto the sofa. Mom looked up in surprise. I stalked off to my bedroom and slammed that door too. My mom never was one to be stumped over the literal. True, I'd broken rules on three accounts. I slammed the door, I didn't put my

Artist-Warrior Quadrant

Mentees who need the **Artist-Warrior** Quadrant of mentoring are typically creative, talented and accomplished, and they benefit from:

- Real discipline to go to a higher level of quality
- The focus to be on excellence through the basics, and doing the small things, the “wax on, wax off”^{xxxvi} things that greatly impact quality

Student Whisperers need to really work within this student’s talent fields and help get the basics right on. A helpful tool in this process is to have the mentee give feedback on the mentor’s projects, as well as vice versa.

Students in this Quadrant are usually:

- Fully in Scholar, Depth or Mission Phase
- Ready to benefit from a high-quality, mentored formal classroom experience and/or a private coaching environment with high accountability
- Not in a transition between phases

Artist-Healer Quadrant

When a mentee needs the **Artist-Healer** Quadrant of mentoring, he benefits from:

- Being given a great deal of freedom
- Knowing that his mentor cares for him on a deeply personal level (not tied to achievement, talent or potential)
- Knowing that his mentor will be there for him if he needs any help
- Knowing that his mentor is busily working on things that are important to the mentor
- Feeling that his mentor will encourage and support his wholesome choices
- Feeling that his mentor is completely happy to let him go at his own pace
- Structure on only the most basic level of personal needs (mealtimes, necessary chores, reasonable cooperation on family schedule)

This is the “summer break quadrant,” where the mentee can pursue projects that are fun and interesting without the constant oversight of “authority” or high-touch accountability. He needs to relax, have fun and learn to *enjoy* things.

For older mentees who are moving out of a successful Manager-Warrior period, a week or more of sun, sand and quiet reading or surfing television channels is in order. A little romance is helpful for anyone old enough for it during this time. For younger mentees, this means having a wide variety of resources and unfettered creative play, while intersecting with expectations on such things as moral choices, personal grooming, sibling/peer interactions, family work, etc.

Most people need Artist-Healer mentoring at certain times in their lives. It is common to find in the Quadrant:

- Young children aged 0 to 8 or 9
- Students “detoxing” from a Hate of Learning
- Students recovering from trauma, ill health, or adapting to major change (adoption, foster care, death, divorce, blended family, move to new home, loss of friends or social status, etc.)
- Special needs students
- Students with highly exceptional, prodigy-level aptitude in a given area or areas

Regarding the last on this list—prodigy-level students: Such individuals often possess a high degree of introspective wisdom. They often feel isolated, misunderstood, and that they have no true peers. An objective consideration of their abilities, gifts and social needs reveals that these personal assessments are actually quite accurate.

They tend to identify more with older, accomplished people, and yet find that such people do not acknowledge them as peers. Yet, even when they are accepted as a peer in the area of their exceptional achievement, the lack of social skills or emotional maturity can tend to leave them ineffective at creating emotional or social bonds with those who respect them on an artistic or achievement level. In fact, one of the more challenging aspects of mentoring this type of student is that the mentor is often *not* as talented, intelligent, creative, etc., as the student—and there are no likely available mentor candidates that are.

To really help this student fully develop both as an artist/creator and as an individual, the best thing for a mentor to do is to create a strong emotional/social bond, and to be a true peer/friend on the social level. Note that in most cases this is the worst possible thing, as it interferes with the student's ability to accept meaningful counsel or to grow from praise/reprimands when they are called for; but in this case (where the mentor is not actually at a higher level in the area of the student's expertise, and *is* on a higher level in terms of relationship skills), it is of more enduring value for the student's development if they learn to function in a healthy friendship.

For this latter kind of student, the best mentoring includes giving her a lot of freedom, setting an example of the mentor self-guiding lots of learning, and meeting with her once a week (but usually not more often). Meetings should not be used to give assignments (which such students won't do anyway) or to make them feel guilty. The mentor can and should share his own personal triumphs and challenges, and revel in the achievements of the student—however small.

Such students respond positively only to honest affirmation, so praise is really the mentor's only effective feedback tool. Such students nearly always tend to be wary of praise at first, then warm up to it over time, and finally to seek it (if secretly). Continue giving honest praise, even when it looks like it does no good. Keep in mind that you are building rapport and trust with these affirmations, so any inflated or insincere praise could be disastrously counter-productive.

It is important to note that such students often purposely test the authority of mentors and parents, as well as their commitment to the relationship—usually by doing things that certainly deserve punishment, and even by denying that they've done anything of value. Their comfort zone is isolation and disappointment, and they are uncertain what may happen if they don't repel or disappoint the adult who is making overtures—so, even though they do long to be understood, appreciated, loved, etc., they are conflicted about whether they want the relationship to work. They feel safer not hoping for or counting on it.

The only effective response to misbehavior that requires a reaction (and be restrained and wise in determining if it actually does) is for mentors to be relaxed, even-tempered, and give firm, caring consequences without anger.^{xxxvii} Parents and mentors must treat consequences as just natural, and separate them from the way the mentor feels about the mentee. Anger or passion on the part of the mentor

sabotages growing trust and the will to try. The goal is firm, obvious and reasonable consequences applied by relaxed mentors who follow up immediately with quick smiles and genuine care.

Some people might argue that this kind of hands-off mentoring is just neglecting the student. While this may appear to be so at first glance, in reality a high percentage of this type of student constantly struggles in structured public and private schools. They generally fail to accomplish much in their youth (though they may have played the game in earlier years only to later become disillusioned, rebellious and/or inactive) no matter how much attention they are given, even in boarding and military schools.

One reason so many prodigies are at risk in our educational system is that their precociousness too often leads to a neglect of Core Phase. Their high aptitude impels the adults in their life to urge them to scholar-level accountability that completely eclipses the development toward Love of Learning.

Then, when they discover their personal power at the age when they should have been transitioning to Scholar Phase, they gain the perspective that they have been objectified by their most trusted adult caretakers and mentors, and that their “gift” is the bane to their happiness. They have missed out on early learning of critical social skills, they have not developed peer relationships, and their relationship with the adults that did not teach them to meet their spiritual and emotional needs grows contemptuous or distant. All of this leads to a most dangerous type of genius: the wounded idealist.

I once attended a seminar on educational psychology where an expert, one of the presenters, mentioned that in counseling incarcerated juvenile delinquents he noticed that nearly all of them were creative, artistic, or casual types. He wasn't sure what exactly to call this group, but as he researched it he learned that the place where schools most often failed their students were those who struggled with authoritative types of learning.

My point is not that this type of mentee is more likely to fail or to be delinquent, but simply that, of all types of students, those needing the Artist/Healer Quadrant fail to thrive in an environment of regimentation and pressure. What does this mean for a Student Whisperer? Through patient, personalized and inspirational

mentoring these sensitive non-conformists not only *aren't* casualties of the system, but they can actually achieve brilliance.

What's more: once their emotional needs are met and they mature into a more complete individual (not defined solely or primarily by their virtuosity), they can ultimately choose to grow to a place where they can benefit from other types of learning environments and mentoring approaches. With appropriate nurturing they do not remain forever in their first (or second) developmental home, so to speak.

When wiser mentors give the Artist-Healer/freedom approach a try, the results can be astonishing. It often turns out that such students are among the very best and brightest of their generation! I have personally worked with dozens of this type of student, and I have only seen the freedom fail once—and the failure occurred because of long-established habits that led to legal problems for the student and removed him from the mentoring environment before the process had come to fruition.

Quadrant Mentoring Exercise

To start establishing the habit of identifying each mentee's Quadrant and planning for her needs, please complete the following exercise. As with past exercises in this chapter, I urge you to complete this exercise before moving on. It is designed to impact the Whispering mind and help prepare you to be an effective and even great Student Whisperer.

Time to Record



- Using the same mentee you started with in the Manager/Artist and Healer/Warrior exercises, clarify which Quadrant of mentoring the student needs and brainstorm additional ways you can improve your mentoring. It may be helpful to use the suggestions for each Quadrant above.