



A Great Mentor Has Passed. Here's What I Learned From Him.

Description

This happens to be my last column of the calendar year. Originally, I was going to reflect on some of the top business lessons from 2020. But then my friend and colleague Dick Fulford passed away and I realized that, instead, I wanted to share some insights he taught me. They are powerful guidelines that apply not just to this past year but to every year. They are timeless.

Mr. Fulford was a remarkable person. I learned a great deal from him in my career.

A term that I hear today is “reverse mentoring.” It usually describes a situation in which a more senior person learns from someone younger than them. This makes sense. I find myself asking for more help today than ever, especially in the world of technology. With Mr. Fulford, I would use the term *reverse mentoring* to mean learning from a person one supervises.

Let me explain. On June 9, 1996 I became the Administrator of Baptist Hospital, Inc. This job consisted of the large hospital, Baptist, and the 50 bed Gulf Breeze Hospital. The Administrator of Gulf Breeze Hospital was Dick Fulford. In essence, Mr. Fulford reported to me. If you read my book, *Hardwiring Excellence*, you might recall I wrote that when I got to Baptist it became clear that Gulf Breeze Hospital was a gem. My goal became not to mess it up and to learn from it. At times that best practice is right in front of us.

I did not know Mr. Fulford, nor had I met him during the interview process. Once hired I had several weeks before I started the job. I took that time to get to know many of the people I would be working with. Mr. Fulford was one.

During my hiring process Baptist Healthcare, the parent company, decided to implement a patient satisfaction survey using Press Ganey, an outside company. Back then many hospitals measured using their own instrument. The challenge with that approach was the inability to compare themselves to others. And often the questions were not worded in a way to provide valid data. In fact, the CEO of a large healthcare system once called me in a panic when his system went to an outside survey that measured and compared results to hundreds of hospitals. Using their own tool, they looked good. He was happy to share those exceptional results at board meetings. But when the results from the outside survey came in his system was in the 23rd percentile. It was a real shock to him. His question to me was “How do I explain this to the Board?” We discussed how, and it worked well.

Now back to Gulf Breeze. Before my official start Mr. Fulford shared with me that he was apprehensive about receiving the first patient satisfaction results from Press Ganey. He felt confident Gulf Breeze was good; however, this would be the first time they would be compared to hospitals nationwide. I can understand his anxiety. When the first report came back Gulf Breeze turned out to be the best hospital in the nation in Patient Satisfaction! This was a great credit to Mr. Fulford and the team. I became a student of Mr. Fulford, even though on paper he reported to me.

What were those ingredients that made him such an outstanding leader, both in the workplace and in the community? Here are some of my learnings.

1. When you worked with Mr. Fulford, you knew without a doubt what he stood for. *Excellence*. By this I mean excellence in everything. From the sign out front, to the parking lot, to the landscaping, to every patient care touch. Disney landscaping was not as good as Gulf Breeze Hospital's! He paid attention to details. Great leaders do that.
2. Mr. Fulford recognized performance in all ways. A story I love is that while he usually attended every new employee orientation, he missed one due to a family vacation. One day soon afterward some nurses were walking down the hall and a new nurse spotted a piece of paper on the floor. When she picked it up, she heard loud clapping. As she looked far down the hallway, she saw a man clapping. Due to the light and the fact that Mr. Fulford hadn't been present at her orientation, she could not make out who it was. So, she asked the others, "Who is that?" They said, "That is Mr. Fulford, the Administrator." Her comment was, "It must be important to pick up paper here." It was. Mr. Fulford knows recognized behavior gets repeated. He was a master of reward and recognition.
3. Mr. Fulford cared enough about the organization to stand up for what he felt was right. We had regular meetings for the senior team. They consisted of myself and senior leaders of Baptist Hospital and also Mr. Fulford, due to his role at Gulf Breeze. One time it had been a tough month at Baptist Hospital. I was filled with self-doubt about me and Baptist. I tend to wear my feelings on my sleeve. During the meeting Mr. Fulford asked to speak with me privately. When we got into the hallway, Mr. Fulford told me to stop my behavior. He said that the others in the meeting were looking to me for confidence and support, not self-doubt. I walked back to the meeting and changed. Even though officially Mr. Fulford reported to me, and likely what he did was uncomfortable for him, he did it. He put the organization good above his own comfort.
4. He put people first. While that is a nice thing to say (and who does not believe it?) Mr. Fulford practiced it and emphasized it way before it became fashionable. He was doing town hall meetings, rounding, thank yous, and celebrations at a time when they were not the norm.

So, what did I learn from Mr. Fulford?

1. Details are key. If a leader ignores the little things, they set the tone that it's okay to ignore and/or let other things slip.
2. Let people know what matters. There was not an employee at Gulf Breeze Hospital who did not know patient and physician satisfaction were the top priority and cleanliness was a part of that.
3. Challenge others in the right way. Mr. Fulford challenged me to be a better leader; however, his approach was one of kindness and being helpful.
4. It is not what you say it is what you do. Mr. Fulford role modeled communication, employee engagement, relationship building, and ownership.

We lost a great one with the passing of Mr. Fulford. Yes, I called him that, rather than by his first name, because he was most comfortable calling me Mr. Studer. However, his teaching lives on in me and many others.

Since I originally wrote this column, we lost another great visionary. Randy Ramos, CEO of Global Business Solutions, Inc. (GBSI), and a beloved community influencer has passed.

Randy was a visionary in his work as a cyber security expert. He had a brilliant entrepreneurial mind that never stopped, and a love and concern for his community that raised the bar for everyone else. His cybersecurity education program was a revolutionary approach to how we train our children for the future. He didn't do it to grow his business. He did it because he felt business needed to be more involved in helping schools get kids ready for the workplace and because he felt kids needed help with the expense of college.

His solutions were a win/win in every way and one of the most innovative approaches I've seen for solving real world problems. Randy's gift was creating practical, cost effective solutions. He wasn't just an idea guy, but he was also an influencer/leader who could get his ideas implemented.

Randy Ramos had a positive impact not only in our community, but in every community he touched. He was a real difference maker and someone we will never forget.

Date Created

December 28, 2020

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