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The Gift Of Being Seen

Intro

The summer before eighth grade, I was two months post ACL surgery. While all of my teammates were practicing and hanging out together while playing in tournaments every weekend, my world had become much smaller. The only places I would regularly go to were physical therapy appointments and my bed. As someone whose summers were normally entirely revolved around softball, I felt like I had lost the biggest part of who I was. When it was time to pick an elective for the upcoming school year, my mom convinced me to enroll in a sports medicine class. I had never heard of sports medicine, but I had always been interested in healthcare and sports. Since I had just had ACL surgery, I also took interest in understanding the rehabilitation process that I was experiencing firsthand. I didn't know it yet, but that elective that I chose out of curiosity without any clear purpose would become one of the most important turning points in my life. It introduced me to Dr. Richard Anderson (better known to me as "Doc") a chiropractor, middle school teacher, and high school teacher who saw potential in me long before I saw it in myself. What began as a relationship of an 8th grade elective teacher evolved into years of mentorship and Doc helped shape my confidence, guided me through the challenges of being a first-generation college student, and ultimately inspired my dreams of becoming a physical therapist.

My First Class With Doc

From my very first day in my intro to sports medicine elective, I knew that the class was going to be forever memorable. Dr. Anderson stayed after class to answer questions, encouraged us to think beyond the textbook, and spoke about healthcare with an enthusiasm that made every lesson feel connected to real life. Not only did he teach us sports medicine, he also gave us a lot of advice about college, how to develop growth mindsets, and our career paths. As a first-generation college student, I grew up in a family where neither of my parents or family members had gone to college. I had no idea about the application process and had no type of future plan for my career. Doc truly opened my eyes to how little I truly knew not only about sports medicine but also my future. He was always willing to talk with us after class about anything and everything.

Throughout his class, I became fascinated with the hundreds of different career paths we were introduced to, as well as the anatomy and physiology that we were exposed to. From that point on I knew I wanted to do a career path in sports medicine. Especially after recovering from ACL surgery, I was able to learn exactly what was done during my surgery, what muscles and ligaments were affected due to my injury, and what I should do to recover most efficiently. I developed a greater appreciation and understanding for the physical therapists that were working with me for my recovery process. I excelled in the class by committing to the assignments and reading even more than our assigned readings due to my eagerness to learn more. By the end of the school year, I had the highest grade and had already built a strong relationship with Doc.

During the last few weeks of school, he reached out to me asking if I was willing to do a summer internship for him. I was overwhelmed with excitement, and immediately accepted the offer. I told my entire family, and they were all very happy for me because it was a very big deal. I felt so proud of myself to have been recognized for my hard work and to have been the only student in the class to be offered the internship. At the time I thought I had simply been offered a summer internship, but looking back I now realize it was much more than that. It was the first door that opened toward the career I am currently pursuing, and the beginning of a mentorship that would shape nearly every stage of my life.

An Internship That Turned Into a Lifelong Mentorship

What I originally believed would be a single summer internship quickly became one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. I returned to work with Doc every summer from the summer before my freshman year of high school until the summer before I entered my first year of college. What began as my first job gradually became a second home, where I learned lessons that extended far beyond sports medicine. While I helped in many different areas in the office both directly with the patients and other office work, I was exposed to my very first interactions with patients and learned how to communicate professionally, build meaningful relationships, and earn the trust of others. Watching Doc care for his patients taught me that healthcare is about much more than diagnosing injuries or relieving pain. Every person who walked through his doors was treated with compassion, patience, and respect. He showed me that the most important part of healthcare is making people feel heard, valued, and cared for during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

As each summer passed, Doc trusted me with more responsibilities and challenged me to grow both personally and professionally. Through the internship, I developed confidence, responsibility, professionalism, and communication skills that have stuck with me throughout my education and career to this day. Looking back, I realize I wasn't simply gaining work experience—I was growing into the person I hope to become. That internship was not just my first job; it was the first step toward the career I am pursuing today.

Our mentorship continued long after each summer ended. I was fortunate enough to have Doc as my sports medicine teacher again during my freshman and sophomore years of high school, and during my junior year I had the opportunity to serve as his teacher's aide. Even after those classes ended, I found myself walking into his classroom whenever I needed guidance. Whether I was overwhelmed by school, struggling with friendships, facing difficult life decisions, or simply needed someone to listen, his door was always open. He never judged me or dismissed my concerns. Instead, he listened with patience, challenged me to think differently, and encouraged me to become the best version of myself.

As a first-generation college student, navigating the college application process often felt overwhelming. My parents loved me unconditionally and supported every dream I had, but because neither of them had attended college, they simply could not guide me through a process they had never experienced themselves. I felt like I was completely alone in the process and had no idea what I was doing. Doc became the mentor I needed in that area of my life. He answered countless questions, guided me through college applications, was more than willing to write my letters of recommendation, and encouraged me through every step of the process. One of the

biggest decisions I faced was whether to continue playing softball in college. I doubted whether I was capable of leaving home to play in Washington and questioned if I should give up being a collegiate student athlete altogether. Doc reminded me that growth rarely happens inside our comfort zones. His belief in me gave me the confidence to take a chance on myself and pursue the opportunity I had worked so hard to earn.

A Relationship Long After High School

Before I left for Washington to begin my college career, Doc showed up to my graduation party. My mom had all of my family members and old softball coaches send me away with a combined video of words of encouragement. Doc was the only teacher who was also a part of the video. His encouraging video where he described how proud he was of me, and how he had seen potential in me since 8th grade and knew I was going to do great things is something that would stick with me to this day. Doc has always seen more in me than I have seen in myself, stating in the video he made me that, “ since I first met you in junior high school and I saw the amplitude that you had for medicine and for being a good student I just want to thank you for doing good there”(going away video 4:20-4:28). Even after I left for college, our mentorship never ended. We have stayed in touch throughout my undergraduate years, and to this day, whenever I have questions about school, my future, or life in general, he is still one of the first people I call. He always makes time to listen, offer honest advice, and remind me of what I am capable of when I begin to doubt myself. When my college softball team traveled back to California, he came to watch me play, just as he had supported me throughout the years. As I prepare to graduate from college next fall, and move onto my Physical Therapy Doctorate program, I hold his promise that

he made me during my first year at his internship, that he will be there at my ceremony when I become a doctor. He continues to celebrate my accomplishments as though they were his own, and his unwavering support has never faded.

Conclusion

Looking back, I realize that Doc gave me far more than an internship or a classroom education. He gave me confidence before I had it, guidance when I felt lost, and a belief in myself that changed the course of my life. He has been my teacher, my mentor, my role model, and one of my biggest supporters for the past seven years. He will always hold a special place in my heart, and I will be forever grateful that our lives crossed paths. As I continue my journey toward becoming a physical therapist, I hope to offer my future patients—and perhaps one day a student or intern of my own—the same encouragement, compassion, and belief that Doc gave to me. His influence did not end with me; it will continue through every life I have the privilege of helping.

Work Cited

My going away video, Dr. Anderson's part is from 4:19-6:07

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10nUhqtIjwjMgbBrCPtNOb0x_LehUp2UW/view?usp=sharing