

House Director Journal... Patterns and possibilities... 10/8/20

We are halfway through this strange semester. Classes have gone from online to hybrid (about 35% even allow attendance), there are more people on campus (60% of dorm capacity), and we are still under the state, city and university rules that close the bars, punish “dangerous” behaviors, and make everyone nervous about gathering, much less partying.

We are settled into our patterns. The Library and most of the first floor continue to be study areas during the day. Jackie continues to manage her kitchen efficiently and feed us all well. Our new cleaner, Joy has been a major upgrade and the guys continue to assist her and take part in our weekly clean ups. And, yes, the regular Thursday, Friday, and Saturday gatherings (not going to call them parties) are still there, less formal and somewhat subdued... don't need an Oxford ticket or a University summons! So it seems a good time to take a look at my role and how I “fit”.

I know I make a difference but that does not mean I matter. I'm a man, I have an ego... I want to matter. Here at the House, it's easy to see short term impacts from the things I say or do... but you don't get the full perspective in the short term. And by the time you get a feel for how we are doing, the in-House group changes each year and we are starting over. It's an interesting perspective that I think every parent or teacher has felt at one time or another.

Part of this hit me when I was golfing with my friend Danny. I remembered playing the character of Jack in a play called, “The Boys Next Door” at Aurora Community Theater... it's one of the productions and performances of which I am most proud. The warm and funny story revolves around a group home for 4 mentally challenged young men, ranging from Down's syndrome to schizophrenic. I played their social worker and at one point, Jack faced the audience and expressed his frustration... “They don't change! I change. I have new problems and challenges every day, but they just repeat the same patterns.”

The comparison is as imperfect as my memory of the exact lines (apologies to the author) but the feeling is the same. The behaviors we see and the problems we face at the House tend to become variations on a theme. Yes, we have made progress in many areas and I am grateful for the overall cooperation and fellowship... the guys are probably tired of hearing “continuous improvement” from me. But there are days that feel like “Groundhog's Day”.

Maybe that's why I was so pleased with last night's Chapter Meeting. These weekly sessions are usually long on laughs with a focus on business and a decent dose of tradition. I try to keep my “rants” to a minimum. But last night the primary task was electing New Member Educators, the guys who will lead our next “pledge class” (archaic term these days) after selection and through to initiation.

Five guys stood for the position, ranging from sophomores to seniors and from well prepared and thoughtful to an “aw shucks, I think I'd be good at this”. The common themes were appreciation for their own pledge experiences, a desire to give back to the House, and a sincere interest in leading the new group. And the guys in the audience asked solid, sincere, probing questions... they took the election seriously and shared the goal that guys should be brought into the brotherhood in a manner that would be meaningful for them. They sincerely wanted the process to build a strong new group that would want to contribute ... and there were even cautions to and from the group to make sure that the term “hazing” was not welcome in the program.

In the end, the guys selected were a good pair, differing perspectives and complimentary skills, but with zero doubt they were committed to building a solid program. This was all about the guys... I was an observer... but I was proud of their intense process and solid decision making.

So in this case, other than my presence, I didn't make a difference and I didn't matter. But in discussing this thought process with another friend later, I recalled another memory. I was getting ready to go onstage as King Arthur in the musical "Camelot" at the same Aurora Community Theatre... a dream role coming true for me. Our Lighting Director approached me... "Ross did you have a Teacher named Miss Carrothers at Rowland Elementary School?"

"Jack, how the hell did you know that?"

"She's here tonight. She taught with my wife and when she saw your name in the program she had to ask. She just retired and she's moving to North Carolina tomorrow."

Beverly Carrothers was my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher and my first "crush". In her first-year teaching, she took us outside and read "Charlotte's Web". She cast me as one of the leads in a musical play she wrote that was only performed in our classroom for parents and classmates. But she instilled in me a lifelong love of learning, reading and theater. She later sent me pictures and a copy of the program from that play. And on the eve of her retirement, she was able to see that, at least to me, she mattered.

Guess it's time I got over myself. Patience. Do the work. Help where you can. Trust the process. In the long run, we'll all figure out what "matters".