

We Have Got a Lot to Learn about Learning From Students

Shelley MacDougall and I just had the great privilege of speaking at the CMAA Student Conference in Atlanta. It was an amazing experience and although we received a lot of feedback from them about the difference we made in their lives, we can tell you with no hesitation that we learned so much from them. Here are some of the lessons that club managers could benefit from as they attend chapter education.

Being Present

There is something to be said about being where you are. It seemed like the students were there to learn and not being somewhere else, seemed to help them. It ran counter to what so many say about this generation. We noticed that two students seemed to be playing some game in the back row, but we didn't seem to be competing with their e-mail or texts.

Being Open

It seems like sometimes needing to prove that we already know something gets in the way of learning. We had some students give us the feedback that although they may have heard something we had said before, they hadn't been moved to take it to action before. They seemed to get that learning is not just about taking in information. They seemed willing to let go of something that they believed if they learned it wasn't serving them. Maybe as we get older, we could all benefit from that lesson.

Being Vulnerable

In our Extraordinary Leader Program we just interviewed Dr. Brene Brown. She talked about the power of vulnerability. Club managers and men in general have learned that being vulnerable is a sign of weakness. It is probably because they connect vulnerability means showing their emotional side. It can be that, but the truth is that innovation, creativity, standing up on a stage, sticking your neck out on an issue are all forms of vulnerability. They are all examples of courage. We did some training with club managers and it was hard to pull out answers to our questions. We were told that people were reluctant to put their opinions out there because the manager of one of the top clubs was in the room. We found the opposite reaction with the students. We couldn't get to all the people that wanted to weigh in on the topics. Sometimes our fears get in the way of learning.

Being Grateful

The second session we did was the last session of the conference. After three days of sitting in a classroom environment with a full schedule of social events with their new friends from around the country and limited sleep, they didn't seem to want the last session to end. They lined up to thank us for what we had given them. We received e-mails from an impressive percentage of the conference attendees, thanking us again for

the contribution we made to the conference. They thanked to conference organizers. They thanked the managers that took time out of their schedules to be with them. They acknowledged the new friends they had made from other schools. They thanked their chapter leaders for convincing them to make the trip to Atlanta. They didn't seem to be overly focused on the challenges that taking time away from classes or study schedules were causing, or the upcoming paper or exam, they were focused on how lucky they were.

Being Passionate

Although not all of them had made a decision to commit to club management the ones who had seemed to be passionate about the industry. Even the ones who were undecided seemed to be passionate about learning. It was as if they knew that what you learn can be transferred to other industries or even their lives. They were like passionate learning sponges. They were learning from what was said. They were learning from the way a buffet was set up. They were learning from the way they were served. They were learning from the wisdom of the managers who were in attendance. They learned not only from the words we said, but they paid attention to the way we said them.

Being Fun

They appreciated music. They laughed. They joked. A few danced. They wanted to get their pictures taken. They didn't take themselves too seriously. They were ok with looking a little silly. They made it fun for us to be at the front of the room.

Being Studious

They took learning seriously. When we asked what they would be doing on the little spare time they had, we often heard words like homework, studying or working on a paper. Although I mentioned that there was fun and humor, there wasn't disruption. Nobody was getting in the way of anyone else's learning. They didn't criticize or diminish the ideas of others.

Being Youthful

It was interesting to observe that even though they were playing in a grownup world, their youth and enthusiasm shone through. They were dressed professionally, they were playing the roles of young adult professionals, but they sort of sparkled when they did it. They saw possibility! They saw an industry where they could be who they are and make a difference. They saw wonderful clubs that might look very different from an assembly line in a manufacturing facility.

These kids were as imperfect as all of us are, but they did exhibit some amazing qualities that could make a huge difference in our learning if we were brave enough to adopt them. Chapters go to great efforts to deliver education. All individual chapter members have to do is receive it. I hope some of these observations can support them in doing so.