From the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine.

**My Advising Session**

George D. Harris, MD, MS

(“First of all, I want to apologize to you. I did not take your course seriously enough and did not participate in the small-group discussions as you suggested.” As I sat across from the student and heard these words, my mind was quickly changing the approach I needed to take in addressing the student’s final grade in my course.

I came to the meeting planning to relay to her how disappointed I was in her performance. She had not met the minimum requirements to pass my course; she did not provide adequate, dedicated time to studying my course materials that should have resulted in a passing grade for her. I was planning to remind her that students are required to attend class, study daily, have dedicated time outside of class for my course, and learn to integrate and apply the information. Students are not to strictly memorize information 1 or 2 days prior to the exam. However, my feelings changed from “the stern headmaster” to the sympathetic mentor as she continued to talk.

I continued to listen as she identified the series of errors she made as the semester progressed, the bad decisions, and the misdirected advice she accepted from her peers.

I became more nurturing and empathetic to her self-awareness. As a course director, no, as her mentor, I wanted to identify some teaching points and assist her in her self-discovery and personal growth. I definitely wanted to take advantage of this valuable teaching moment.

As she completed her thoughts, she looked directly at me and waited for my response. My first words were “Thank you. You have demonstrated wonderful insight into your situation, personal growth, and self-awareness that cannot be taught, only learned.” I informed her that she was fortunate because many of your peers at this stage of their education have not experienced what she had already grasped. The student looked surprised, relieved, and perhaps even pleased. “I’m proud of you and you should be proud of yourself. You’ve figured out what you did well, what you did not do so well, and how you can move forward to improve.”

We continued to discuss several areas the student had identified as in need of change, as well as their larger ramifications: (1) the importance of taking each course seriously; something can be learned in every situation, 2) giving each class your full attention and time; learning the art of “presence,” (3) learning organizational skills, good study methods, and time management techniques to avoid feeling overwhelmed, becoming an efficient professional.

Just as each patient needs adequate time to tell the physician his/her story about their chief medical concern or complaint, I learned I need to give my students time to talk, time to reflect, and assist them in identifying their areas of weakness but also their strengths. Often we have already prematurely summarized for ourselves how the conversation will and should proceed. Unfortunately, this approach can prevent a positive interaction from occurring and place us in an awkward position of retraction, retreat, and reformation of our intent and thoughts.

As I teach my students and residents, in order to L-I-S-T-E-N, they must be S-I-L-E-N-T. Rearranging a group of letters just as my mind rearranged my thoughts and approach to the student, allows each of us to be better learners and teachers to each other. This day, my student and I both gained new insight.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** Address correspondence to Dr Harris, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, Sports Medicine, 2411 Holmes Street, Room M5-421, Kansas City, MO 64108-2792. 816-235-1850. Fax: 816-235-1851. harrisgd@umkc.edu.

From the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine.