

An Inspirational Mentor

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It is a privilege and an honour to know Dr. Paul Wong. I first met Dr. Wong as a student in the Masters of Counselling Psychology Program at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC in 1996 where he was the head of the Department. I recall the first gathering of students at the beginning of my first year where Dr. Wong provided an address to all of us. As he spoke of the potential impact of everyone as individuals and future professionals, he also gave an important talk about the collective impact of all of us together in the world and how we would potentially have a positive influence on others. In addition, I believe it was at that first meeting that he offered prayer and shared his faith as a Christian. In particular, I was impressed with his description of Jesus as “Number One Rebel”, obviously a role model for Dr. Wong as he has demonstrated many times, in word and deed, the importance of standing up for Truth and what one believes. Dr. Wong’s candour and passion for life and for his work as well as the work of others was obvious and inspiring. I liked the idea that, as Christians, we are to be activists rather than passivists. As I was to get to know Dr. Wong through the next few years as a student, I continued to be inspired by his teachings and by his example as a fellow Christian.

Dr. Wong has had an influence in my life on a personal as well as a professional level. I recall as personal challenges seemed to be overwhelming for me at times while studying at Trinity Western University, how I would be encouraged by his words. In particular, I remember him saying “The best revenge is success,” and he likely has no idea how much that has helped me over the years as well as others with whom I have shared this simple message. It helped me to get back on track and to stay focused despite having emotional turmoil. And those words continue to help me in difficult times. In addition, he mentioned during a directed study class on Multicultural Stress and Coping that, as a professional, I would be a “good catch”. Thus, he boosted my confidence in myself as I am sure he has done for others on countless occasions. Throughout my career to date, if I have moments when I question my abilities or the quality of my work, those words return to keep me moving forward. Truly, his impact has been significant in my life personally as well as in my chosen vocation. I also realize, based on these experiences, how important our words and actions really are and how we can encourage or discourage, build up or tear down, our fellow human beings. By example, Dr. Wong demonstrated the positive impact of encouragement, determination, and perseverance to me and, undoubtedly, to many others through the years. These are priceless gifts that I cherish and hope to continue to pass on to others.

Along with the encouragement came challenges. Another lesson here was the importance of self-examination in terms of values and beliefs as well as the importance of not giving up despite difficult experiences. During a self-directed study in particular, I was encouraged to deeply imagine what the experience would be like to belong to a different culture, a different race, or socio-economic status. The course on Multiculturalism and Stress and Coping was not to be simply a transfer of teachings but a deeper experience involving self-reflection, writing, and other challenges including assistance with completing a chapter in a book he and his wife, Dr. Lilian Wong, were editing with respect to Multiculturalism. I was also privileged to be able to accept an invitation to assist in presenting on this topic (“Stress and Coping: A Cross-Cultural Perspective” at the APA conference in Boston, USA in my graduating year (1999).

I remember, as a student at Trinity Western University, being both impressed and motivated by what seemed to be Dr. Wong’s endless energy, which I believe is related to his

faith and life work pertaining to improving the lives of others. As mentioned earlier, his role model is Jesus, whom he conceptualized as the “Number One Rebel”, so I suspect that Dr. Wong is also no pushover, so to speak. Nor was Christ, who was, again, the example and motivation concerning the importance of taking a stand for what seems to be the next right thing to do and also for others who may not be able to stand up for themselves.

Thus, my intention is to capture the idea that my experience as a student of Dr. Wong’s was one where I was not only provided with excellent course materials related to Counselling Psychology but also with many invaluable life lessons. I am grateful for these lessons as well as the educational opportunities that I experienced at Trinity Western University that have helped me so much as an individual as well as in my chosen career path. As I know, so many others have been positively impacted by similar experiences.

By example, Dr. Wong was able to demonstrate as well that while it is wise to be serious when needed, a spirit of humour, kindness, and openness is important to cultivate. Again, much can be learned from teachers and textbooks; however, these additional lessons through teaching and example add much more in terms of depth and meaning. It has deepened my own awareness of the effect of my words and actions on others.

I understand from being a student of Dr. Wong’s and by following his work that he has continued his research and writing in the area of meaning and purpose, as another role model for him would seem to be Dr. Victor Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Due to becoming aware of Dr. Wong’s passion for helping others become more aware of the importance of purpose and meaning as foundational to their life, I found a copy of this great book to read and followed Dr. Wong in his journey of establishing the International Network of Personal Meaning which recently (August 2018) celebrated its 20th year. It was an honour to be able to attend the conference along with many esteemed colleagues and presenters from around the world. In addition, it was a great honour to be able to celebrate Dr. Wong’s 80th birthday at a banquet held in his honour at the same time.

Since graduating from Trinity Western University, I have been fortunate to have varied professional experiences from working as a counsellor at a women’s treatment centre for addictions to assisting to establish a concurrent-based treatment facility for addictions and mental health to working as a psychologist for Corrections Canada to having the courage to establish a private practice. I have had the courage to go and work where I have felt led to do so, and I continue to have confidence in my abilities based on my educational experiences and teachings as well as an openness to various training and continuing educational opportunities that have been presented over the years. I recognize that Dr. Wong played a major role in the foundation for these experiences and I am truly grateful. I still have much to learn and love the concept of lifelong learning and meaning-making.

What an inspiration! To be in one’s 80th year and still passionate about life and following one’s purpose! One can only hope to be able to achieve this—at any age—to know one’s purpose and follow it, no matter what the obstacles. To stay true to oneself and one’s beliefs and values. To have role models to look up to and to never ever give up on goals and dreams! Dr. Wong has modeled these things for me and has clearly attributed his own progress and abilities to his own role models. I will always remember that Jesus is the “Number One Rebel”! Thank you, Dr. Paul Wong!