



September 16, 2007

MY BIG BREAK

Parents and mentors key in choosing nonprofit path

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Some breaks cannot be fully appreciated until many years later. My initial break felt more like a burden than the opportunity it became.

My very community-minded parents rejected my plan for an after-school job in high school.

Instead, they suggested my time be given away at the charity of my choice. And so I worked with inner-city youth at Christamore House and disabled toddlers at Crossroads. I dipped candles at Conner Prairie and sold polished rocks in the gift shop at the Children's Museum.

Through these volunteer experiences and others, I learned what my parents knew and modeled so well for me -- the character, commitment and contribution of public service. I also learned I loved the nonprofit sector. Over the years I have had many opportunities to expand upon those experiences and have held positions as staff, board and volunteer.

It has been my good fortune to have had many mentors who have given me "breaks," opportunities to learn and grow.

Nancy Frenzel hired me fresh out of college as a glorified secretary in a mentoring program with juvenile probationers, and her faith and friendship taught me confidence, idealism and to follow my heart.

Former Marion County Prosecutor Steve Goldsmith, for whom I coordinated community projects and supervised victim services, taught me vision, boldness and strategic thinking.

Carolyn Connors, founder of the Dyslexia Institute and fellow parent advocate, taught me how to build an organization on a desire for a better world . . . for our children.

Seven years ago, I reconnected with my friend, the founder and then president of Trustee Leadership Development, Katherine Tyler Scott. I began the journey that has proved to be my biggest break yet.

Through her mentorship, training and ultimately choosing me to succeed her as president of Trustee Leadership Development, she taught me the leadership lesson of trusteeship. This is the lesson of community service . . . to hold our organizations, our clients, our staff and our community in trust . . . for someday we shall pass the baton to others. Our ventures will someday be our legacy of leadership.

Leadership Ventures (formerly Trustee Leadership Development) is designed and dedicated to building a community of leaders in the nonprofit sector. My latest break is having the privilege to be a part of this amazing community.

-- By Ruth Purcell Jones