

# The Wise Legacy

BY DANIEL J. SIEGEL

**I**n my last editor's column, I promised to explain why becoming an editor has never been my passion. The story also explains why I am writing "The Wise Legacy," a book about my college professor and mentor, Sidney Wise, whose legacy includes hundreds of former students who serve in government, business and other leadership positions, in most cases because of his insight and inspiration. The following is one story of how Sid influenced my life.

Dear Dan:

I was so pleased to hear of your becoming a partner. Surely it must be one of life's great moments, somewhat more significant than becoming an editor & less significant than becoming a father. Congratulations & best wishes – you earned it & deserved it. You realize of course that your wife deserves the lion's share of the credit.

Stay well,  
Sid Wise 7/25 [1992]

As a freshman at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster in 1977, I had much of the baggage every student probably carries. Confident in my abilities, I questioned other skills, especially the ability to work with and lead others. When I arrived at F&M, my schedule included one science course, either chemistry or biology; I knew that if I took the course – filled with pre-meds – I would not be happy, and neither would my grade. So I went to meet with my designated advisor, Government Professor Sidney Wise. I had no idea who he was.

I remember entering Professor Wise's office, a small smoke-filled room with floor-to-ceiling bookcases. He met with me, asked why I was there, and I explained why I needed to take a different class. He looked at me with some disdain, and inquired why I was so certain that I did not belong in that class. I do not remember my answer, but was thrilled and relieved when he approved my switching to a course known as "Baby Physics."

For whatever reason, still unclear after all these years, Professor Wise took me under his wing and suggested that I join *The College Reporter*, the college's weekly newspaper.

During my freshman year, much happened on campus. I quickly rose through the ranks of *The College Reporter* and

was appointed news editor. In addition, my assignments included covering the filming and world premiere of "The Boys From Brazil," a movie directed by F&M alumnus Franklin J. Schaffner. During every Schaffner-related event, be it a news conference, the granting of honorary degrees to Schaffner and film stars Gregory Peck and Laurence Olivier, or the film's world premiere on campus, I was there reporting the events, with Sid almost always at my side.

By the conclusion of my sophomore year, I had become *The College Reporter's* managing editor, and everyone expected me to become editor at the end of my junior year. That was not to be, and therein lies the genesis of Sid's note card.

Rather than following the tradition in which the outgoing editor selected the incoming one, the college surprisingly decreed that the staff would elect the incoming editor. Things did not go well. While the staff respected my writing skills, some questioned my leadership skills, and I was not elected editor. I was distraught, and sought the solace of Dr. Wise. He consoled me, explaining that what happened was wrong and had nothing to do with me, my skills or leadership abilities. As a 20-year-old, I could not see beyond the rejection, and vowed never to seek an editorship – of anything – ever.

Dr. Wise then made a suggestion that changed my life, although I did not know it then. He suggested that I apply for a job as a stringer, i.e., a part-time freelance reporter, for the *Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal*, the local morning newspaper. I was hired, wrote sports and features, and loved the job.

My work on the *Intell* (as it was known) turned out to be invaluable. There, I learned to write well, quickly, succinctly and on deadline, skills that have proven invaluable as a lawyer. It is safe to say that not becoming editor was the *best* thing that happened to me professionally. I also matured and learned skills I could never have acquired at *The College Reporter*. These talents have been essential to my career, which focuses on writing briefs and other documents not only for my clients, but also for other lawyers and their clients.

I graduated from F&M in 1981 with honors in government; Sid was my advisor for the thesis. We stayed in touch, and he took a keen interest in my personal and professional lives. He answered calls, responded to letters, and was always there for me.



In addition, I took to heart Sid's perspective on government – that you accomplish more, and are more effective, by being cordial, by listening, by being willing to compromise, by not being negative, by not being hostile, and never burning bridges. Still, at times I questioned my leadership ability.

In 1989, I was elected president of the Associated Stamp Clubs of Southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware (SEPAD). My election was controversial, as were some of the actions taken by the Board under my leadership. First, I eliminated those who created most of the controversy. Second, I changed the organization's name to the Philadelphia National Stamp Exhibition, arguing that the name needed to reflect who we were to non-collectors. Finally, I hired a public relations company, something no other national show had ever done.

The results were tangible. Attendance increased dramatically, dealer sales improved, and one leading philatelic commentator honored our "imagineering." I was hailed as a leader, the trait I had doubted because of *The College Reporter*. I called Sid to tell him of my success. His reply: "I always knew you could do it. You had to learn it for yourself."

As always, Sid's message could not have been clearer: I needed to recognize my strengths and weaknesses, and work hard to improve the weaknesses so that they could become additional strengths. In addition, I should not worry what everyone else says because at times life is not fair and critics are wrong. Instead, I needed to have confidence in myself and my leadership abilities. Learning this lesson took a long time, and I continue to learn it.

In 1992, I became a partner in my law firm. Again, Sid was there, this time with his note card, which reminds me of what matters most: my wife, Eileen (the same name as Sid's wife), and now my two sons, Bradley and Douglas (Douglas was born in 1994, the year Sid died, and his middle name, Steven, was chosen in

Sid's honor).

In 2005, I opened my own law firm and a technology consulting firm for lawyers. I was scared. My confidence would wax and wane, and every time it did I remembered Sid's words.

There is more to the story. I was elected a commissioner in Haverford Township in a 2008 special election, and re-elected for a full term in 2009. For those who voted against me to become editor, my election must have been a surprise. But because I try to utilize the skills Sid emphasized – especially civility and compromise – I am proud to be viewed as reasonable, and as someone whose voice is sought.

To bring things full circle, in July 2011 I became the editor of this magazine.

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Until now, I never told anyone what Sid's note meant, no matter how many times people asked. Not only was Sid correct about me, he was also correct about each of the people in my book – whose careers demonstrate the need for leaders to listen, compromise and have confidence in their abilities, no matter how difficult the situation or the opposition.

Sid always knew which buttons to push, and how to inspire students and colleagues to reach levels they never realized they could attain. He not only instilled confidence in his students, he helped them discover their inner strengths and allowed them to foster their leadership skills. That is truly the "Wise Legacy," inspiring others to reach inside themselves, to discover their most important skills, to become leaders, and to utilize those skills to help others, always in a civil and caring manner. ■

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