

Last year, as I was preparing for the Saturday luncheon keynote at NCSA/NAWD, I learned that I had been selected as one of the finalists for the Earl Reum Award. It was an incredible honor just to be nominated, but to actually win the thing was something beyond my comprehension. As I was organizing my thoughts, I tried to put my finger on a central theme that ran through Earl's life and work, and I kept coming back to the myriad of ways in which he showed us how to bring out the best in others.

Earl showed us how to lift people up, to honor their achievements, and to personalize the way in which we recognize their contributions. My hope for the speech was that I might be able to challenge the advisors in the room to take some of the energy they pour into bringing out the best in their kids and re-focus that same energy on bringing out the best in their colleagues. The power of that idea, in my opinion, is what made Earl's impact on the world so profound.

I met Garrison Keillor once and he told me that the greatest compliment you can give to someone you admire, especially if they're famous, is to simply say, "Like your work!" For Earl, that golden nugget of wisdom was personified anytime he held up the number "10". Earl didn't invent the "Perfect 10"; he saw how powerful the moment was when Nadia Comaneci scored a string of perfect 10's in the 1976 Olympics and then he incorporated the spirit of that moment into a simple act, repeated on a daily basis, until the gesture itself became a one-of-a-kind piece of magic.

For Steve Spangler, Earl's adopted son, the "Perfect 10" is personified every time he challenges teachers to "Be Amazing!". For Mark Scharenbroich, a speaker who was profoundly influenced by Earl, it's evident in his "Nice Bike!" principle. I thought NAWD-ies needed a unique phrase to share with their colleagues, so I suggested "Hasta Barista, Baby!", mostly because it was something you could say in the bastion of negativity we all know as the teacher's lounge and support with the inexpensive metaphor of a cup of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or Thera-flu.

Say it simply; tie it to a symbol; anchor it with a slogan. Earl Reum didn't invent that sequence; he found someone who modeled it in everything he did (Mr. Phil) and then he created a platform for that person to share his magic. The result? That sequence is now a part of the DNA of student activities.

Last year was the first year Earl was unable to be with us at NAWD, and I thought the new people in the room needed to understand the spirit of the Reum. Elliot Mathis once gave me a copy of that 1948 issue of Life Magazine that captured Earl's spirit as a high school senior. I thought it would be fun to pass that on to one of the more junior people in the room. I chose Sarah Jones, because I've had the pleasure of watching her work selflessly, double-duty, as a high-school teacher and the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Student Councils. Sarah is a master of the art of the "gentle nudge" away from mediocrity and toward substance, measurable outcomes, and overall excellence in leadership development. She's also not a huge fan of the goofy games, cheers, and hokey-pokey chicken dances of leadership. I thought the Life magazine might give her a gentle nudge toward embracing more of the goofiness as she continues to strive for excellence. What does she do? She turns the whole thing into an amazing idea, the Keepers of the Flame Society. She says it simply, she ties it to a symbol, and she anchors the whole thing with a memorable slogan.

Hasta Barista, Sarah! Like your work!