

A Lifetime of Loving to Help Others, Dr. Jack Weller

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Abstract

This paper is based on a videoed interview with Jack Weller, Ph.D. to comprehend his life, beliefs, and actions during his time on earth. His values, leadership style, and assumptions are showcased and connected to research as a litmus test for acceptance or denial of his behaviors. His first love for helping others over many decades at the Cleveland County, North Carolina Boys and Girls Club (CCBGC) is reported on and merged into over a dozen questions from the author. A historical approach to his profession, private social work, and educational pursuits towards a Doctoral degree start at PPG Industries (PPG) and are unified across moving his family, work, and life. PPG is a famed American Fortune 500 company delivering specialty items, paints, and coatings across the world.

Keywords: CCBGC, PPG, Fortune 500

A Lifetime of Loving to Help Others, Dr. Jack Weller

Jack Weller, Ph.D. is a now retired Lutheran leader of his church and community formerly raised in the Pittsburgh, PA region and grew up in Carlisle, PA. He moved mid-career to a factory owned by his upward and massive company, PPG Industries (PPG) to Shelby, NC. The corporation realized that specific resources available could be exploited as, “natural gas also became the preferred fuel for the making of glass, giving rise to firms such as Pittsburgh Plate Glass,” (Tarr & Clay, 2015, pp. 323-342).

Upon arrival, he was ordered to assume the direct role of liaison with the Boys and Girls Club of Cleveland County, NC. This became his introduction to a life of work with tens of thousands of mostly black children that are impoverished, do not have the same culture as others, and are aware of uneven justice where, “ethnic minorities continue to be arrested and incarcerated at higher rates than whites,” (Bersani & DiPietro, 2016, pp. 510-537). Browning, Miller, & Spruance (2018) noted where now one in three black men will be incarcerated as adults, dealings with inmates, and families – but especially the kids (pp. 87-102). Jack’s focus has become more attuned over the years as “the numbers rose from one in four black men to one in three black men,” (Browning, Miller, & Spruance, 2018, pp. 87-102) that will be incarcerated by adult life. Jack also began to study the local culture and famed local revolutionary war battle that “acknowledge the strategic relevance of the battle of Kings Mountain,” (Smith, 2017, pp. 398-399). This battle includes blacks who fought at it.

The research reveals the Doctor’s unexpected behavior and approach to helping, kindness, caring, and his atypical children's group of 95% black-American children – Jack Weller is caucasian, so the difference is stark and very noted. His love for the many cultural differences between whites and blacks shines through, as “cultural differences between black and

white individuals in the South are connected to the inequitable history of the United States,” (Bersani & DiPietro, 2016, pp. 510-537). The reader may not have any interest in this subject matter or develop a distaste for his life's work. It is noted that such distaste may not only come from white people, but it could also be felt by others, including blacks. “African American males account for over 35% of the prison population; however, they comprise only 6% of the population,” (Western, 2007, pp. 30-36).

Young Black men who drop out of school are incarcerated eight times more than their college-educated counterparts, and 1 in 25 college educated African American men were incarcerated as compared to one in three for African American dropouts. (Moon & Singh, 2015, p. n16)

Dr. Weller covers his career of, “over 30 years,” learning about positive employee reinforcement, “and how can they be motivated,” (Daniels, 1985, pp. 225-236) from the famed speaker, Aubrey Daniels, and getting his Doctorate at Gardner Webb University (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018).

A Journey of Willing Venture and Ordered Mandates

Dr. Weller grew up like most Pennsylvanians celebrating blue uniforms of colonial troops and Union soldiers who destroyed enemies in red and gray – traditional, power-based, a totalitarian culture centered on aggression and continued hate over, “slaves should not be educated,” (Weissman, 2018, pp. 1-21). As children, Southerners were those swept off the map in combat, killing, and dominance from one man to another. To make matters (above the manhood issue) even more conflicting, this author also was raised in the same environment, which included the disgrace of slavery as the main cause for a civil war. Often shared was how

many, “encouraged southern states to enact laws making it a crime to teach slaves,” (Fairclough, 2016, pp. 55-68).

He “attended Shippensburg University, then called Shippensburg State,” (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018). Doing that was a willing joy, just like joining Pittsburgh Plate Glass Industries (PPG) in the Keystone State, everyone knew PPG as a proud company. When the company moved South in 1987 to be closer to their customers, he decided to willingly go with them to the Lexington plant, take a promotion, and make a new home. However, who knew in 1994 when he transferred to Shelby, NC, that he would be ordered to take over a relationship with a non-profit club upon arrival? Yes, the Boys and Girls Club of Cleveland County needed him for a long time moving forward. As President for 16 years, from 2001 to 2017, and now Chair, he has left a long-term legacy. Alternatively, some might say has stayed too long. The same leadership can often be viewed as stagnant when queries arise of, “many members and staff have questioned how the organization can be innovative and relevant with stagnant leadership,” (White, 2017, pp. 54-63).

An Apple for Teacher and a Journey from Carlisle, PA to Shelby, NC

Jack started his life after high school by eagerly getting his four-year degree and then teaching elementary school. It certainly etched upon his mind the importance of learning, sharing, serving, and watching kids grow:

So I got into Shippensburg, and they said, “Would you come in December, because we have already filled up the first semester,” and I said, “No problem,” and I graduated on time, graduated in June of 1970. Started teaching elementary school at a rural community, Cameron Valley, which was one of the largest school districts in Cameron County. Middlesex Elementary, it was all farm country. Most of the kids had chores to do

before they came to school and sixth grade. Then I got my masters, and August 1972, and then worked year and a half to get 18 hours beyond my masters to be certified as a candidate for administration or principal. I was getting ready to enter that and got started in a doctoral program at Penn State. And I had done all my coursework and had started to work my dissertation, which was going to be the effect of Act 195, which was a public employees union, and authorized that teachers could be part of a union, and how the Pennsylvania State Education Association [0:09:44] [lobbying] efforts changed after it became the Pennsylvania State Education Association, where only teachers could be [0:09:52] [involved] because administrators aren't welcome anymore because that was the enemy, they were management and teachers were labor. And I'd already started to work on that. And then PPG offered me a job as a training manager at their Carlisle plant. And my wife and I talked about it. It was one of those things that I just didn't believe what is – hold on – didn't think it was – it would be a good mix. And what actually happened was the money they offered me was so much more than what I was making as a teacher, that I took the job, and 35 years later, I retired in Shelby, North Carolina. Having moved from my hometown and done all those, had all that experience in the industrial world. (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018)

However, Jack had a lot more to learn, or is a Master's degree enough in this world? Many question as to why it is even needed to go further into a Doctoral degree when "it is estimated that approximately 50% of entering doctoral students fail to obtain their degree," (Bagaka's, Badillo, Bransteter, & Rispinto, 2015, pp. 323-342). Is there a need to prove something? For the time being his journey would take a unique, unusual, and new educational turn before getting that final scroll and sash. The Doctor's goals in life have always been large

and aggressive. He has continued on a path of education, learning, and change – even in his job to avoid being phased out himself.

Thousands working in the Industrial World Need Encouragement.

Throughout Jack's time with PPG he would be exposed to new thinking. He eventually became a Lean Sensei sharing with others how to encourage employees and to thank them for their work. "In the Lean world, we have a tendency to hearken back to the sensei of yesterday – Dr. W. Edwards Deming," (Snyder & Edgeman, 2018, pp. 1-4) whom this author studied while living in Japan for three years. Jack worked through Supervisors' frustrations in the 60's, 70's, and 80's of somewhat anger-based management over why people needed a pat on the back when they had already been hired? His movement into the 1990's honed his inspiration and love skills to empower the average worker to make decisions and repair things:

We were trying to reduce the number of supervisors by using more [0:14:22] [quality] teams or teams that would work together to get things done. And the way we employ for all those; this is a win-win, is because they would – they had more people that would make adjustments and changes on the machine rather than bothering a supervisor to come along and talk about it. So from there, I was named the personnel manager at the Shelby plant and people in 1994. And I did that for about three years. And then people decided to go on to lean manufacturing. So I became a lean Sensei. (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018)

The author laughed with the Doctor in referring to workers' hands and manacles hanging off the front of their body only to move parts back and forth, and not think at all with their minds, or that that is not needed. The firmly held convictions of encouragement, care, and

helping would pay off in lean manufacturing moving into 2020. Reaching a person with their brain and heart is very important. “The most critical issue faced by manufacturers today is how to deliver their products or materials quickly at low cost and good quality,” (Rohani & Zahraee, 2015, pp. 6-10)

A Chance to Figure Out His Lasting Impact of Leadership.

For a long time, Jack figured out that knowing what a person was good at was very, very important. Moreover, that is what he learned in Shelby, NC with PPG. Celebrating that and encouraging it was natural. Accentuating it as a leader helped lean manufacturing so that team members who were good at what another was not - could come over and help – NOT get a supervisor.

However, Can One Translate Manufacturing to the Boys and Girls Club?

The kid's group that Jack started at as a simple helper had become his eventual Presidency of 16 years long, and he allegorically started the machines of the factory floor in the boardroom of the boys and girls club. He got the team underway by ending the Executive Director telling other Directors what to do and started teaming instead to create shared goals. According to Weller (2018), “we started this in 2015, we started the strategic planning and said, where do we want to be in three years?” (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018). The club has grown in size, and tens of thousands of children served over the decades.

A specific example is when it was explained about receiving an old computer donation every other week. Indeed that is sympathetic of people to think about donating their ancient computer somewhere and receiving an IRS write-off for the value of it. Alternatively, is it a pretended good deed and somewhat of an ignominy? Regardless, the team decided the ensuing chaos in keeping all of the machines running would better be done by getting brand new

machines of all the same kind. This philosophy comes from evolving and smart ideas in manufacturing that allow for synchronized updates across all machines, the latest hardware, and software, staying competitive, and speed. In this case clock speed and bandwidth. “Some US school districts invest more than \$1 billion in classroom computers and corresponding infrastructure,” (Falck, Mang, & Woessmann, 2018, pp. 1-38) so it is essential to pay attention to this growing spectacle.

Changing Lives for Kids and Parents

After 27 years - opening up book bags and helping get homework done is still the best thing to help the whole family. Moreover, knowing who that family is became necessary for the team, “the kids that we serve, 75% of them are on free-reduced lunches, 81% come from a single-parent home, 95% are African-American,” (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018). Weller (2018) also mentioned, “it’s the kind of thing where – if we can offer the programs with the Boys & Girls Club, which we are the first ones after school, with the first hour of everyday, those kids are welcomed and they know that” has made all the difference in their lives headed home to happy parents with all of their homework completed.

Arming the children with power bars, bananas, apples, and healthy food is a lot better than donated week-old honey buns from convenience stores. “Changing the school food environment provides an important opportunity to improve children's diets,” (Hoffman et al., 2015, pp. 1299-1307. e1292). These lessons learned often are called the “third dimension,” (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018). Having a copy machine onsite to make copies of homework and other study papers is also helpful to critically fighting a child forgetting his paper, or not having it. The same goes for the desperately needed computers, screens, and printers in a highly digital world. The child sent home to use his mother's cell phone to do

homework on is a losing scenario especially when they leave wi-fi, leave broadband, and have no access to the earth when driving away from the club center. How can a poor, little black kid do his homework in today's authoritative and digital matrix? When the child fails and realizes they will never be able to compete in today's modern society, they often go off the rails. "Now, the trend is moving towards deploying long-range WiFi networks. This long-range WiFi is also being used to provide advanced network connectivity to remote and rural areas," (Akhtar, Sheikh, & Abbas, 2016, p. 199). Many would state a billy club into a black back, Taser shot into the face, or unloaded clips are firing 20 to 30 times is what is needed. Many argue for long-term incarceration and throwing away the key while "Blacks and Hispanics are also disproportionately represented in state and federal prisons," (Nelson, Gabbidon, & Boisvert, 2015, pp. 270-290).

The Great White Savior or Whitey Hero Complex

The Doctor enjoys telling stories like, "one of the most revered American presidents," (Vito & Vito, 2015, pp. 775-787), Abraham Lincoln, and expressed another one. This time it was about three sisters with one in jail and six foster children that they got into the boys and girls club. They specifically wanted the kids to attend the club and one of them, Rakeem Sweezy, went on to become a pretty famous football player and won many state awards with his Shelby High School, NC team. He often expressed that he learned how to tie his shoes, first-off at the club. They asked him why his Mother would not teach him how to do that and he told them his momma was in jail. Later, he would get an academic scholarship to Brevard College, be named a class president for two years, freshman of the year for 2017 and act in the Brevard College Theatre Program. Nationally known attorney, David Teddy has often spoken about how the club made a difference in his life. He has been vocal about the fact that the club was never about

background or family it was just a place to have fun. Despite the stark differences of skin color and hundreds of black children photographed around white Doctor Jack Weller he exhibits no complex of trying to be a great white savior, or, “The White Savior Myth and Progress in “Post Racial” America,” (Maurantonio, 2017, pp. 1130-1145). More than likely he does not care about himself but has his focus simply on helping the kids to grow up and contribute to society. Instead of filling up penitentiaries and costing taxpayers trillions of dollars while “prison reform litigation has become a common and enduring feature of US prisons,” (Guetzkow & Schoon, 2015, pp. 401-432). Which is a challenging idea of how to handle the encounter? He is well aware of the unique challenges facing black American children.

To Help Change Lives He Would Need To Learn How To Change His Own First.

Doctor Weller is eager to express that, “attaining a Doctoral Degree is something I always wanted to do so I spoke with my wife about undertaking it,” (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018). Beyond that, though, is the author's realization that to help others from a legitimate position of authority getting a Doctoral degree is the finishing touch. One can then do so much in the world for others. It is believed that Jack also subliminally understood this. He, therefore, decided to change himself, to bring about, even more, change in society and graduated from Gardner Webb University, NC.

Conclusion and Reflection

“There’s no way they’re going to be successful,” was often thrown into our faces, in lean manufacturing and the club, and by structured, positive experiences, they’re going on, they’re passing their end of grade test, 61% of the kids are on the A, B honor roll at every school they’re at. And the others – they have another probably 30% that they have a C average. So again, kids that before were being chastised, “why don’t you ever get your

homework done, why don't you do this, and that," are now being reinforced for doing their homework and reinforced for being ready for class." (J. Weller, personal communication, November 6, 2018).

Given Doctor Weller's experiences in transitions from being a real public school teacher to moving to lessons learned in lean manufacturing for a world-class company, he indeed has applied them to the success story at the boys and girls club. His proof is in the results and numbers reported.

Some would argue differently and express hate for how 2018 factories run and generalized anger over folks becoming successful. Abhorrence for spending money on many kids programs exists, while "destructive conduct is often the result of the failure of the education system to help students feel successful," (Olivant, 2015, pp. 115-129) and advocacy that all kids have the same chance to grow up and become an astronaut, scientist, or judge. There is also the parent out there who does not help their child with homework and leaves them to fail on their own. The Boys and Girls Club of Cleveland County is entirely against any of those negative stances.

With the personal journey of the Chairperson attaining his Ph.D. now completed, the culmination of a lifetime of loving to help others is near complete. Love can change minds into giving hearts holding the hand of a child to grow up and give to the world. I learned in this paper exactly what to do with my Doctorate degree when I get it through the surprises and teachings of Doctor Weller – I can help make the world a better place.

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