

**[Recording starts 0:00:00]**

VICKI: Happy Motivation Monday. One of my favorite people, Kevin Honeycutt @kevinhoneycutt is here with us and, you know, Kevin is so inspirational. It's hard to imagine that he was one of those kids. Yeah, one of those kids who struggled. So, Kevin, tell us a little bit about your struggle when you were younger?

KEVIN: Growing up, I was that kid who came from the crazy family. The family where the police were at their house maybe once a week, at least once a month and everyone knew it because it was in the paper. Gosh, we weren't at your school very long, we might have been there a week or two weeks and then we just disappeared and we went to some other school and tried it again.

So I wasn't a bad kid. I wasn't going to stand out because I was told not to, because people notice kids and they notice families and they notice other things that we didn't need them noticing – if that kind of captures some of it. I was also the class clown because that was the safe thing to be. The other [humorous] kid doesn't want to fight, he jokes, and if I'm better than him I don't get beat up. So these are all little pieces, little hints of what you might have seen in me then. If you looked closely you'd see I was very artistic, I drew all the time, I spoke to myself in multiple dialects and infinite worlds that lived in.

VICKI: But I guess the young Kevin on the inside, you were just somebody looking for hope or somebody to notice you, what were you looking for in your teachers?

KEVIN: I think I wanted a teacher that I recognized, that seemed like a human being. It seemed like in the '80s when I went to school there was some kind of a movement to be so professional that you were antiseptic. They had some things called a [set of discipline] where they would do [broken record], where they would first walk over to you, put their hand on your shoulder, squeeze your shoulder; that was called proximity, basically, that was a mild threat. And then you just kept saying the same thing over and over again. I need you to go and sit down. This was actually taught to teachers.

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So when I saw and run up against this behaviorist approach it felt like the opposite of welcome, it felt like an all-out attack. And so how does an animal that's already wounded respond to an attack? So it was the crazy teacher that was bending those rules or breaking those rules, flouting those rules, I was still loyal to that teacher. I would have done anything for that teacher. The one who bent the system to match the kid, they didn't bend me to match the system. They were usually an art teacher, a band teacher, you can spot them, they're just a little different. They don't quite clean up right, there's something wrong with them a little bit and that wrong is what

their right really is and what attracting me to want to be a teacher too because I knew, if those teachers could the freedom to be themselves and to be a watchtower or a lighthouse, a beacon that you could see from miles – I think kids who are damaged, people who are damaged can spot their own kind every time. They almost always do this. They pair up according to dysfunctions sometimes.

VICKI: Kevin, as you were talking about the two kinds of teachers I could hear the hope in your voice when you talked about those teachers who were a little bit different. Do you have a story about one of those teachers who actually reached through and saw that you were a lot more than you seemed on the outside?

KEVIN: Yeah. Mr. Austin, my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers as lanky, just a bag of bones. He reminded me of Shaggy on Scooby-Doo but old. I guess I would say not the rock star teacher that you would expect. And often, the teachers that were the biggest influences in my life weren't the ones who you might have expected who stood out and wore the right clothes and had a very a certain funky style.

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None of that. They just seemed interested. They seemed interested in me. They asked questions. They seemed intrigued. And I know the difference between those and the ones who seemed tired and seemed like they can't wait till the clock finally ticks to 3:35 so that they can knock me down on the way to their car. I could sniff that out too and I just bothered those teachers, I knew, they weren't into it so that was cool. But it was the ones who spent the time who had asked that other question. Have you ever been with someone and were talking with someone and the person you're with doesn't really dig the person you're talking to and you ask another question and the person with you knows it's going to be 15 more minutes of conversation because you asked that question and they want to kill you? But you're actually into the conversation.

That was that teacher that asked that one more thing, that was trying to compile enough notes to have a plan. And I knew they were working, I knew they trying to get me to do this and get me to do that. But something about their work ethic on me, specifically me, not just how hard they worked at school, none of that matter to me. You know, you're a kid, it's about what happens to you, it's your narrative.

But the ones who took an interest in me, I took an interest back. It's almost reflection. You ever do that exercise where you're standing across from someone and you try to be the mirror reflection of them?

VICKI: Mm-hmm, yeah.

KEVIN: We used to do this in martial arts class. That's how they would teach 50 kids at one time. He'd say mirror me and we would all mirror movement. And you could do that without thinking. And I think there's something like that and you could even find it in brain research. They're called mirror neurons, empathy neurons, neurons that fire in your brain when you see someone else do something. And there's probably some

instinct for survival in all of that where we needed to react to situations really quickly before we thought about it. And so I guess I'm tying this back to those teachers who made those incursions into my space, who asked those questions.

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And sometimes I would pretend to be mad because people who did that were typically looking for information so they could victimize you further. They were the bullies, the people who pretended to be your friend on the first day so that he'd go to everyone and take everything that they learn from you which is kind of true, just true enough that it hurts really bad when they bend it and stab you with it. When you've been through that enough times, then some teacher coming to you acting that same way looking for information. Better tread lightly. It's best to let them come with you. I keep coming back for *Dances With Wolves* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dances\\_with\\_Wolves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dances_with_Wolves) and I hate to do that, it's such a cliché movie with *Two Socks*, call me mismatched socks and that teacher leaving just that little piece of meat there and acting like he or she did not care until I had come all the way over there.

And then not overplaying that hand. Seeing me thereafter, they still don't quite care. Maybe they dropped piece of meat, they didn't make a huge deal out of it. It let me come to them and gave me the freedom to make that first move.

VICKI: So, Kevin, as we finish up, one of the things that you do better than really anybody I've met that's kind of in the speaking space is while you get up on stage and you're brain-gauging, you really have way of making the person right in front of you feel like you're the only person in the room. And I think it's a great talent for us teachers to have that because we do get distracted and we are tired and sometimes we do want to go home. But what is your quick one-minute pitch for how do I and all the other teachers listening wanting motivation look at that student and help them feel like they are important and they are the only person in the room?

KEVIN: Okay. One of the things every speaker does is quickly learn their audience. They also know who's in the audience and they feed the audience accordingly. So I feed the gym teachers, I feed the math teaches, I feed the science teachers, I make sure everyone is fed at least once before I move on and ask them to go somewhere with me.

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So you can make a questionnaire for the whole class and you ask questions; what are your hobbies, what's the favorite vacation you ever took, that's your favorite thing to eat, what would you do if you were a millionaire even if you didn't need money? Ask like ten incisive questions like that that have specific answers. Get your questionnaire back, take the answers to those questions and out them on your seating chart above the name of each student in the room. So as you're looking at those kids in the room, you can include the things they're interested in – you can

play it like it's an accident and you just have so much in common or you can play it like you intentionally know and that kid is going to go, "Oh my gosh, it's like she knows me." And all you did was take the time to do a questionnaire and get to know your audience a little bit and try to sort of tailor-make – because that's how I spotted those teachers; I could tell they had already learned about me and reflected what they had learned back on me. And it created a, sort of, tunnel that gave me access to them and to their class. That maybe a simple way to kind of get started.

VICKI: So teachers as you've listened to Kevin, I just want you to remember that every child had a story. Don't think that you know kids so well, that you can automatically truly understand because we don't know what's going on in someone's home or someone's heart. Every child matters and they're all worth reaching.

Thanks for listening and get out there and be motivational on this Monday for your students!

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