

STANLEY LEARY

People & Location Photographer

How to Make the Most of a Mentor

www.StanleyLeary.com

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Give Stanley a call for your next project at 770.998.3504 or email him at stanley@stanleyleary.com.

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How to Make the Most of a Mentor



Don Rutledge editing from one of his trips.
photo by Bill Bangham

From Kung Fu TV Series

"I have three treasures which I hold and keep. The first is mercy, for from mercy comes courage. The second is frugality, from which comes generosity to others. The third is humility, for from it comes leadership." -- Master Po

"Strange treasures. How shall I hold them and keep them? Memory?" -- Caine

"No, Grasshopper, not in memory, but in your deeds." -- Master Po

What makes a great mentor is an inquisitive mentoring associate. I often think of the old TV series Kung Fu where as the main character has flash backs as a young boy we see the boy ask many questions of the master. We do not see the master pushing the boy as we see the young boy seeking the master. If you truly want to learn and are open to criticism you can learn a great deal.

Mentoring is not an avenue to be employed by the mentor. It is a way for professional enhancement, education and friendship. I do believe the key is not to use mentors for only career development, but seek them out as friends.

I watched as Don would get out of the car and introduce himself to the subject. He would talk for a while with the person in a casual conversation which was really an interview. He was listening and learning all he could. What would make a good photograph and what would be some good quotes for the story. Did I mention his cameras were either in the car or in his bag during this time?

After each story during our car ride I would ask lots of questions and learn even more about what Don was thinking as he was working. When the contact sheets came back from the lab we would go over the photos again.



This is my most favorite image Don Rutledge ever made. Despite the extreme poverty you look past this and see the joy in their hearts. Don Rutledge was the master of always keeping the dignity of individuals and telling their story. (photo by Don Rutledge)

I only knew of a few photographers who sat down and looked through Don's contact sheets and learned from him how he worked. Most were only interested in guidance about their work.

What I learned changed my life. Today I am also willing to help anyone, because Don showed me it was important. It wasn't until I had been helping others for a few years did I learn why Don did this himself. It is in giving that we receive even

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 Volleyball Magazine

I watched one of my mentors, Don Rutledge, mentor many people. I was privileged to work with Don and down the hall from his office. Don Rutledge was a staff photographer for Black Star and later worked cover missionaries around the world for Christian magazines. He traveled in more that 150 countries and all of the continental United States.



Don sharing a story with other photographers.

I watched noticing that no matter who came by, Don made the time to sit down with the person and talk. They would bring their portfolios and mostly just want a job doing what he was doing. Some were so bold as to go to Black Star trying to take his job.

I would often be invited with these photographers to lunch where Don was truly trying to be a friend. Most of these folks were just using Don. Don invested time and energy helping these folks. Many went on to prosperous careers and never called to thank Don; not only for his wise counsel, but also didn't thank him when he helped them to make contact with others in the industry for jobs.

Like everyone else I sat down with Don and had him review my work. I learned so much from Don going through my contact sheets. He was so helpful.

Had all I done was sit down with Don and had him review my work I would have missed out on what I considered even more valuable. Don invited me to come along on some of his coverage's. We took trips together where I would just watch him work and occasionally hand him a lens. This is where I was able to learn from a master of the craft.

more than when we are only receiving.

When looking for a mentor, find someone who is at the top of the industry and has a personality and work that you admire. Take them your work on a regular basis and ask for advice. Ask if you can watch them work and ask to help them. Most importantly, become friends with them for a lifetime. Don't use people for your career development. Give back, by mentoring someone yourself. You will be surprised how much more you will learn.

I also got to meet Don's wife Lucy. What a wonderful lady she was and still is.

"But Master, how do I not contend with a man that would contend with me?"-- Caine

"In a heart that is one with nature, though the body contends, there is no violence, and in the heart that is not one with nature, though the body be at rest, there is always violence. Be, therefore, like the prow of a boat. It cleaves water, yet it leaves in its wake water unbroken." -- Master Po



My Uncle Knolan Benfield has been my mentor, friend and my cheerleader. He has contributed more to my success than Don, because without Knolan I would have never met Don or understood Don as well.

How did I learn about Don Rutledge? My uncle Knolan Benfield worked with Don Rutledge from 1969 to 1979. Knolan told me so much about Don that when I met him I thought I already knew him. Don had impacted Knolan and changed his photography.

My master's Thesis was on Don Rutledge and you can see it on-line here <http://www.stanleyleary.com>

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Today I teach in colleges and workshops. I enjoy sitting around and sharing my experiences and answering the questions of new photographers. Now I can see why Don gave so much—it is truly the most rewarding thing to do by giving to another person.

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