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# Marvelous Mentors

**Eight Business Guides Who Freely Share The Wealth Of Their Wisdom**

WORDS BY **JULIA PAULUS OGILVIE**

**W**hat makes a great mentor? What inspires them, even as they inspire others? For their mentees they provide guidance, ideas, a sounding board and, very often, emotional support.

Successful leaders often talk about the importance of having great mentors. Typically those mentors aren't looking for attention. They prefer to play a behind-the-scenes role and let their mentees shine.

With that in mind, it is time to give mentors a turn in the spotlight. In the following pages, SBM presents the stories and insights of eight remarkable guides.

Joel James of  
Signature Medical  
Group, one of the  
2017 Marvelous  
Mentors.



## Providing Guidance to the Community

**Cliff Holekamp, Washington University/Cultivation Capital**

Even with a successful job at IBM in Nashville, Tennessee, Cliff Holekamp desired a more entrepreneurial career. The best avenue, he decided, was to attend Olin Business School at Washington University to study entrepreneurship. “I graduated with a fantastic business education as well as a business plan for a new chain of foot health centers called Foot Healers,” says Holekamp. “I sold Foot Healers to a private equity group in 2007 and joined the faculty of Olin in 2008 to teach entrepreneurship.”



Since then, Holekamp has been the driving force behind building out Olin’s entrepreneurship program. “I co-founded a social entrepreneurship curriculum and partnership with the Brown School of Social Work, created the MBA Entrepreneurship Platform, reworked the BSBA entrepreneurship major and minor, and founded several new courses including ones in Hungary and in Israel,” he says. “Both our undergraduate and graduate programs are now nationally ranked.”

Getting to mentor bright young people was, and is, one of Holekamp’s prime motivations for being a professor. “I see mentoring as the elevation of teaching,” he says. “Teaching students the knowledge and skills they will need in their business careers is just the start. The opportunity to mentor students as they apply these lessons to their own life decisions is what makes teaching rewarding.”

Ben Burke, a previous student of Holekamp’s, was not only mentored by him during his time at Olin but continues to be inspired by him today. After they met when Burke was a student, Holekamp recruited him to join Arch Grants, where Holekamp was a board member. “Since, we’ve collaborated on numerous projects, and to come full circle, his inspiration led me to now teach

the same social entrepreneurship class at Wash U, where he is a guest speaker,” says Burke, who is the director of entrepreneurship at Arch Grants. “Cliff is a very sharp and strategic-thinking person. He goes out of his way to provide guidance and expertise to entrepreneurs and community members.”

Like Burke, Holekamp’s hope is that he can help his students have happy and productive lives and that they have the opportunity to leverage their potential as business leaders to create opportunities for others.

Outside his work at the university, Holekamp engages in creating business leaders as the co-founder of Cultivation Capital, an early-stage venture capital firm and one of the most active investors in the Midwest. “My activity in the startup scene gives me amazing opportunities to get my students connected into career and educational experiences in the venture capital and entrepreneurial communities,” says Holekamp.

While he tries not to give advice but rather to help people make better decisions for themselves, he also sees the different ways through which potential business leaders can propel their careers. “For some, pursuing a graduate degree might be a good option, as it was for me,” he says. “For entrepreneurs, there are great mentorship organizations such as ITEN. Organizations such as EO and YPO offer amazing peer-based mentoring experiences.”

In most cases, however, potential mentors are all around you, according to Holekamp. “They are the people with whom you have had prior work experiences and whom you admire and respect,” he says. “Sometimes you don’t realize that great mentoring can come if you just open up to the people who are already in your life.”

## The Opportunity to Fail and Learn

**Joel James, Signature Medical Group**

Ever since Joel James began managing people and staffs of all different sizes as a leader in communications, public policy and government relations for the banking industry, he realized it was his responsibility, and that of anyone who manages people, to mentor his staff. “Often this is part of professional development,” says James. “I worked a few places with mentor programs, and I signed up.”

James discovered that providing mentorship was not only rewarding but also useful for learning about other employees and their experiences. “Then I sought other opportunities since,” he says.

After spending more than 20 years in banking, James made a leap in his own career 3 years ago to health care. While he still works in marketing, communications, and government and media relations, he found himself learning a new industry when he joined Signature Medical Group Inc., a multi-specialty group of physician practices serving St. Louis, greater Kansas City and Bolivar, Missouri.

While his foremost goal is to give his staff the resources they need to get their jobs done and develop professionally, James also sees that no matter what an employee’s age, there is always room for learning and education. “Our CEO mentored me to a large extent when I came on from banking,” says James. “Melissa Gall, who works under me, has taught me a lot about social media that I didn’t know. It’s not always about seniority. It’s a two-way street. There are so many opportunities for that.”

According to Gall, Signature’s digital marketing strategist, James shares his extensive knowledge and provides his staff with opportunities to fail – and learn. “Failure then gave me the lessons needed to turn around, strategize, rebuild and ultimately achieve my goals,” says Gall. “Joel has gently guided me through the years and provided thoughtful insights to my future. But it’s not just me that he’s provided such experiences for. He has served as a mentor on the Asthma and



Allergy Foundation Board and various other platforms throughout St. Louis.”

Through his board seat at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, James has been connected to formal mentorships. “I am mentoring two young women now, one in advertising and one in health care,” says James. “I am trying to help them navigate the beginning of their career. It’s also good for me because I am learning how they work. It’s good for those of us who are older and managing the younger generation. You will see: What’s their learning environment? What’s the most productive way to work with them? This is how mentoring is a two-way thing.”

James says his hope is that anyone he is mentoring has the opportunity to progress and that a mentee has an aspirational goal, then he is helping him or her in some way to get to that. “If one thing I say helps them personally or professionally to deal with something or to be more successful, to me, that’s a real success,” he says.