

"This is Dan Beal!"



Dan Beal with Joanna Wang and Caitlin Shankle, Photo © John Livzey, 2016

Few question the value of mentors. But some people, like WTS-LA Corporate Partnership Chair Dan Beal, take mentoring to a whole new level. Providing pragmatic mentoring to University of Southern California (USC) graduate students from the Price School of Public Policy and the Viterbi School of Engineering through USC's METRANS Transportation Center, Beal has broadened the horizons of his mentees. But to him, he's just "helping them out."

"It is an odd position for me, being a UCLA grad, but I joined the METRANS Advisory Board at USC through my prior work with the Auto Club. And they asked me to mentor students in technical fields, even though I'm not an engineer or technical person. But technical folks need to know about broader issues, too. So it seemed like a good strategy to me. We cover everything including policy and politics. And that's important.



Kate Amisshah, Photo © John Livzey

"You can have a perfectly engineered project that falls flat on its face if you don't know other factors surrounding that project. So I talk about things they consider out of the box, things that aren't generally taught in engineering school. I've got a long history with LA transportation. So I bring that background to the table. But they bring fresh, new ideas and energy to it. For example, I have little idea how social media works or what millennials consider most important, so they tell me those kinds of things. In fact, the whole process has been a wonder to me; I think I learn more from them than they do from me."

Beal understates his success. In his first round, he mentored three women from West Africa (two from Ghana and one from Nigeria). Today, they're all doing well in their careers: two work for Metro and one works for Arup in London. But his success as an advisor extends beyond the professional. Beal has become somewhat of a surrogate father, providing patience, compassion, direction, and counsel. In fact, two students—Kate Amisshah and Priscilla Appiah—invited him to their weddings. And his presence at these events was more than just a polite invitation.

Considered an “honored guest” at former mentee Kate Amissah’s wedding, for example, Beal was recognized by her family—many wearing traditional Ghanaian garb—with the greeting, “This is Dan Beal!”, the person who changed Kate Amissah’s professional life. Amissah (photographed at right at Los Angeles Union Station) credits Beal with steering her to augment engineering education with planning courses; today she is a transportation planner at Metro. To Beal, though, he just tried to help.

“Kate and Priscy are wonderful and so are their families! It was a privilege to meet them; many of them came from Ghana for their graduations and weddings. My wife and I were honored to be invited, and they were wonderful events with delicious traditional food and dancing. I’ve learned so much about West Africa from them. It really has been an education for me.”

Beal has now mentored three rounds of students and claims that they’re “all doing well despite me.” In truth, he is much prized as a mentor. Aside from his wisdom, kindness, and invaluable sense of humor, he also brings the perfect perspective to be an effective mentor.

Pictured above with mentees Joanna Wang and Caitlin Shankle, Beal says, “All of the mentors approach it differently and you have to do what’s best for the kids and what works for you. But it’s important to remember that you’re bringing your whole career to someone who is just starting theirs. So I just try to be a resource for them and help them find their way to where they want to go.”