The Joy of Learning

Aaron Hipscher can’t wait to get to the classroom every day. “I am always learning from my students,” he says. Through a remarkable career that spans 30 years at Ernst & Young and his current role as Clinical Professor of Accounting at New York University’s Stern School of Business, Professor Hipscher relishes his numerous opportunities to connect with young people, as a teacher and a counselor.

The enthusiasm is mutual. In 2006, he was presented Stern’s Teacher of the Year award for the second time, and named Professor of the Year at NYU’s undergraduate school, where he teaches Financial Accounting and Financial Statement Analysis.

Professor Hipscher found his inspiration as an educator and mentor early in his career at Ernst & Young. He joined the firm after graduating from Rutgers with a B.A. in Economics and an M.B.A. in Accounting. After his first few years at the firm, he began teaching accounting to new graduates, found the experience immensely enjoyable, and continued teaching for eight more years.

He became an audit partner, and having honed his people skills, was asked to take on a recruiting role. He made his mark once again, serving as New York Office Director of Recruiting for 17 years and as the firm’s National Director of Recruiting for two years. He had great instincts. “I could spot untapped talent in individuals and apply this in our recruiting efforts,” he explains. For example, “We had a program at the firm for non-accounting majors. I recruited a number of new graduates who, while they lacked the accounting background coming in the door, had great potential.” He cites as prime examples Steve Howe, currently Americas Area Managing Partner; and Carmine DiSibio, Vice Chair and Managing Partner of EY’s Financial Services Office.

“As Director of Recruiting, Aaron’s integrity and enthusiasm was immediately apparent,” said Steve Howe. “To me, Aaron represented our firm’s culture offering growth and challenge in a collegial atmosphere. It is not surprising that he continues today to inspire students at NYU.”

Today, as Faculty Advisor for Stern’s chapter of Beta Alpha Psi, the honor society for finance and accounting majors (Stern’s is the largest chapter in the country at some 200 strong.), Professor Hipscher has a distinct perspective on 21st century students and graduates. Unabashedly, he claims that his students are “naturally smarter than I was when I was in college; they also want to be challenged more.”

Nevertheless, he believes that in an increasingly complex business environment, young people need practical guidance, both in the classroom and in their first jobs. To those professionals in management roles, he counsels patience to coach young people in interpersonal skills and working effectively as part of a team.

At a time when accounting and finance graduates are in demand and can entertain jobs in investment banking, Professor Hipscher encourages young people to go into accounting. “I tell them that when I went into accounting I was learning all the time and I received financial support to continue my education. Look at the varied experiences and different types of clients you
get when you go into accounting. It certainly hones your interpersonal skills because you deal with different types of people.” And it’s challenging.

“Critical thinking is extremely important.”

Professor Hipscher is probably the best advertisement for choosing accounting, a field that remains vibrant and stimulating for him after more than three decades. He is having so much fun, he says, that retirement is not in the picture: “I could do this till I’m 90.” He can be reached via email at ahipsche@stern.nyu.edu.