

## **H. KEITH HUNT: VISIONARY AND MENTOR**

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When I am developing a project related to dysfunctional consumer behavior or otherwise looking at an article on consumer grudgeholding (that's right, no hyphen!), the first name I look for in the references section isn't mine. And that isn't always easy. Because, you know, to be honest, alphabetical order has been kind to me in this profession. No, the name I seek out is that of H. Keith Hunt. I seek validity in the recognition of the scholar who created the field.

H. Keith Hunt. A man of wisdom, of vision, and of great generosity. Keith Hunt is an icon and a presence, and Keith has impacted me in a handful of important ways. All for the better, and all related in many ways and yet also distinct. Let me explain.

*The Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*... our journal... Keith's journal.... was the first journal to accept an article from me. And during what I'll call the first phase of my post-doc career, it was the only journal to accept an article from me. It was called "Consumer Grudgeholding: Toward a Conceptual Model and Research Agenda."

**IMPORTANT NOTE TO YOUNG SCHOLARS:** When you publish only one article during the first phase of your post-doc career, don't be too surprised when, by necessity, there's an early second phase of your career. And so there was for me.

Here's how Keith's influence on my career and on my life, both direct and indirect, really take hold.

When Academic Career Phase 1 was brought to an early and wholly justifiable end – my chair advised me not to go up for tenure and I heeded her advice - I reached out to Keith for a friendly and experienced ear. I couldn't really turn to anyone else in my department. I was already Denied Man Walking to both senior- and junior-level colleagues (though I must add here, in case you missed it the first time, that I wasn't officially denied tenure because I didn't apply for it. You say "tomato...."). I had not built much of a network or safety net by this point of my career, either. So I contacted Keith and his response was a multipage letter addressing my myriad fears and uncertainties. I know I still have that letter somewhere, but you know how it goes... us professors and our old files.... That letter is somewhere. I know where I can always find it, though.

It's in my heart.

Keith's input and his belief in me meant the world to me. He helped me through this stressful period of being lost in the academic wilderness. At this time, too, I had an over-worked wife, three kids, aged 16, 13, and 10, and a transition year that bore no job offers. Keith advised me, mentored me... believed in me. That was vital to my finding my next job and starting Academic Career Phase 2.

Let me go further back in time for a moment. In my pre-PhD career, one thing that led me back to school was dissatisfaction with my corporate life. After earning my MBA I worked in retail and online retail environments. In two jobs, one in brick-and-mortar mall management and one in online shopping mall management, I had no traction. Lousy bosses. No guidance. And no mentors. Or maybe I did have a mentor, but I didn't realize they were there. Maybe the bosses weren't all lousy. Maybe I was the common denominator in my dissatisfaction. Nah, at least a few of my bosses were objectively lousy.

I ended up with an interview at an R-1 state school and my interview was noteworthy in its irony. A marketing professor named Geoff walked into the conference room where I was waiting, dressed

in what I remember as “summer academic casual” (polo shirt and shorts), sat across from me and started... started!... our conversation by saying this, and I quote:

“Dave, I looked at your resume and you have taken some bad advice.”

Hah! You are wrong, sir! I have not taken ANY advice!

AUTHOR’S NOTE: Hang on, I’ll start talking about Keith again in a moment.

As it turns out, I did get hired, a one-year gig as a visiting professor for the next school year, and my only obligation was to teach many sections of undergraduate consumer behavior.

Just a few weeks into the fall semester at School 2, Geoff and Tim, another senior faculty member, came to me and expressed interest in my work on consumer grudgeholding. They thought I had something interesting to work with. They offered to collaborate.

Of course, I thought of Keith.

And things started to make sense.

And here I recognized something that I had not experienced before in my professional career, from my past bosses (lousy and otherwise) or my past department chairs or colleagues: Someone cared about my success.

Geoff and Tim were demonstrating the same kind of interest and compassion that Keith had shown me.

I could finally see it. If not for Keith, I don’t think I would have seen it.

This is how I understood how to make the most of what I call this mentoring intervention. My collaborations with these two tenured professors changed my entire career trajectory. Like Keith, my new colleagues had had little to gain... professionally, anyway... by lifting me up and working with me.

But they did anyway.

That one-year position led to my next job, one that I’ve held for 16 years.

Keith Hunt showed me what professional, personal, and passionate guidance looked like. He was the first real mentor to me, when I needed one most. What’s that old line about when the student is ready... or when the junior faculty member is desperate... the teacher will come?

Keith’s influence, as well as that of Geoff Gordon and Tim Aurand at Northern Illinois University, saved my academic career.

As a researcher, as a teacher, as a member of a university faculty, as a mentor, and as an empathetic member of this, my chosen community, I owe it all to Keith Hunt. Thank you.