

“Learn from the mistakes of others because you don’t have time to make them all yourself.” These are words often heard from the lips of our mentor, Payton Wong. He places high importance on detail while machining and safety in the shop. He gives anecdotes of potential risks if safety protocols are not followed so that we remember to stay safe while we work. He is incredibly dedicated, having been a mentor on our team for 15 years because he sees his time spent with us as a worthwhile investment in our members’ futures. He fully embodies the ideals of the quote: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Instead of machining complicated parts on the robot himself, Payton teaches students how to do it, and he says that his favorite moment is “watching the light bulb go on” in students’ heads.

Payton is an extremely capable teacher, using practical examples in the shop to relate to our members. He emphasizes creative ways to solve problems, such as in 2018, when we needed a quick way to know if screws came loose. Payton recounted a memory of the time when he worked on motorcycles and used nail polish to mark screws so that whenever the screws came loose, the nail polish would crack. It was an easy way to check the security of our robot’s screws.

Payton has grown alongside our team ever since he started helping us in 2004 when the team was working out of garages. He joined to help machine parts and spent large amounts of his time to help students use heavy machinery. As the team grew in size, he helped further by taking students to the company he worked at, Cardiomind, and taught them how to make parts with more advanced machines than the bandsaw and drill press we had at the time. He embodies the ideals of FIRST in all parts of his life now, working with many other mentors and FRC alumni as well as judging at regionals and offseason competitions. Payton is always the first to volunteer on behalf of our team.

Payton has an amazing impact on our team that ranges from teaching students with his mechanical expertise, to creating a fun and more welcoming environment through jokes and friendly conversation. Many alumni recall what Payton calls his proudest moment with the team when our team won its first regional, the Buckeye in 2014. On the flight back, he gave a note for the flight attendant to read over the loudspeaker congratulating our team. He made sure that we all felt proud of all of our hard work.

Payton is an excellent mentor and a dear friend to all of us. He connects with the members of our team on a personal level and creates a friendly, welcoming environment where fun is encouraged and new experiences are eagerly anticipated.