Alumni Spotlight

Bill Paquin '95

One day, as an undergrad on spring break, Bill Paquin had an epiphany. He realized he was not living up to his potential. His grades were up and down. While he enjoyed his time at University of Maryland, the school he was currently attending, he spent more time enjoying extracurricular activities than learning. Having spent 3 years spending his parent’s money, he decided he needed to take college more seriously and felt that paying his own way through school was the boost he needed. He returned to New Jersey and dove into his studies wholeheartedly now that he had decided to take ownership of his future.

Paquin began his studies at Ramapo as a commuter student who worked full-time while taking an accelerated class load. He completed two years of credits in a year-and-a-half. He thrived on the level of engagement professors had with students and constantly challenged them and himself throughout his career here. Paquin liked that they were concerned with teaching and mentoring.

Initially, he wanted to become a writer. Paquin credits Ramapo for fostering his love of reading, poetry and writing. Serving as editor of Trillium, the College’s literary magazine, further fostered that love. Paquin worked on the College’s 25th Anniversary issue of Trillium and recalls having published an “awful” poem that he had penned.

He has the highest respect for Dr. Anthony Padovano, whom he describes as a great writer, and Professor Carol Hovanec. He remembers reading Finnegans Wake, the comic fiction of James Joyce in Ed Shannon’s class. Viewing Michael Moore’s film Roger & Me in a class significantly impacted him. He says it “opened his eyes to the intersection of business and community and that he wanted to be sure that any company he was involved in was on the right side.” A Russian literature class in which he read Anna Karenina at about the time of the fall of the Soviet Union humanized Russia for him and fueled his interest in international politics.

Paquin will tell you he had nine different careers, not just nine jobs! Recognizing that he didn’t have the skill set to be a writer, but wanting to remain connected to the publishing field, he began his career selling textbooks at Prentice Hall, now Pearson Education. He then became a literary agent in New York City, representing a stable of speakers including Candace Gingrich, Newt’s daughter; Geoffrey Canada, an innovative educator from Harlem; and John Hockenbery, a disabled writer, who spoke on contemporary issues. Paquin said, “I loved the job. I toured college campuses and corporations with the speakers.”

He next landed a job with a larger agency and arranged speaking engagements on college campuses for Danny Glover, New York Governor George Pataki and Kareem Abdul Jabar.

Paquin started his own agency, sold it and went on to a sales position for a venture-backed Silicon Valley start-up company. This was in the rah-rah days when the stock of Yahoo and eBay was doubling in price every three days.

The impact of 9/11 left Paquin with the loss of several people close to him and the need to move on. He accepted a job in Connecticut but left shortly after. He returned to New York City and joined the management team at Medsite, a service that helped pharmaceutical companies facilitate online education and virtual product demonstrations with physicians. The company was sold to WebMD in 2006.
Paquin then started a new venture, Vertical Health, a Web publisher of health information. Vertical Health, of which he is CEO, is the largest trainer of spine surgeons in the country and runs the consumer health portals spineuniverse.com and diabeticlifestyle.com, among others. The company employs more than 30 people, including doctors. In addition, the company hires interns on a regular basis.

The self-described entrepreneur advises students to regularly “set goals”. Set small goals, weekly, monthly and annually. Then, review them at the end of those periods. How did you do? It makes such a difference. If you don't know where you are going, how are you going to get there?” Paquin believes in continuous learning and strives to improve himself through books, conferences and other learning tools.

Paquin would advise any student to “find what you love and find what you are good at, marry the two and devote yourself to becoming the best at it. It could be anything….music, teaching, sales, writing, or coaching for example.” He offers that “you need to find your place. Try different jobs, different careers.”

Finally, Paquin says, “most people try to figure out what they’re not good at and try to improve. But, it’s better to find the thing you are good at and become great at it instead! If you do what you are great at you will be rewarded and you’ll do well with it. It is important to re-educate yourself to your craft.” It is a philosophy he lives by and practices himself.

He was recently appointed to the board of Children’s Aid & Family Services. He serves with Sarah Beane Ricca, a member of the Ramapo College Foundation Board of Governors and the President’s Parents’ Council.

Paquin is married to Wendy, his high school sweetheart, from Ramsey, NJ. They have two children and a rescued dog.