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By Corey McKinley and Dr. Mark Schillinger

Our children are bombarded with contrary messages about the meanings of life from their friends, the media, and schoolmates at such a high speed that we, as parents, never experienced in our younger days. It takes effective modeling from other adults besides the parents to ensure that our children learn how to live as responsible members of the community. As parents, we can be too emotionally close to our children so that we cannot clearly understand or guide them through some of their problems. There are times when we are not able to live up to the standards that we ask of them. Also, the household is often the domain of a single parent, which can cause unpredictability of behavior during key emotional growth spurts for the children. The role of the mentor is to provide consistency and stability in the lives of our children because as parents, we know that we cannot always be productive models.

Definition of Mentor

The mentor is like a relief pitcher in a baseball game. He/she has plenty of energy for a short period of time and preserves the fruitful work performed earlier by his/her teammates. If the parents have a mentor whose values and behaviors are those taught in the family, parents should routinely summon the mentor to display the principles and practices of the home. The mentor:

- *can be relentless in their expectations from the children as he/she is a person of integrity who does not negotiate morals and manners that are to be held in the highest regard.

- *is not overly emotionally connected to the younger one and does not need to be liked or thanked, making it easier to allow the younger one to experience life's losses and pains.

- *creates a safe environment so that the younger one feels completely free to express him/herself without fear of consequence for speaking what is true.

Our Mentor initiative

For five years we have been producing a modern rites of passage initiation for our sons, ages 13-20, The Young Men's Ultimate Weekend (YMUW). For thousands of years, all young men were taken out of the village by the men to undergo an initiation into manhood that would prepare them for their responsibilities in the community. Hundreds of adult men in the Bay Area have served at the YMUW, helping young men enhance their self-esteem by full participation in competitions of strength, intellect and skill, ropes courses, sweat lodges, ceremonies and open forum discussion groups teaching young men how to overcome challenges and become more independent. Specific rituals allow the young men to release their repressed grief and anger, allowing them to live with greater peace of mind and heart.

After their initiation, young men can participate in our weekly mentoring program to strengthen their understanding and practice of the principles that lead to a solid foundation for successful living. Our fundamental virtues and codes of conduct are "old-fashioned" yet uniquely delivered to the young men in their familiar street dialect. Our Principles are revealed in the acronym, "Honor what is RIGHT" which stands for:

Honor: to hold in the highest regard

Respect: to esteem with reverence

Intelligence: applying your experience and intuition into wisdom

Gallantry: heartfully engaged in acts of courtesy and courage

Humor: amusement with fun, laughter and celebration

True: living your life with integrity so that you can trust yourself and others

Success or Inequality

To earn the respect of young men we have learned to just listen and remember to be at a level the same as them: males simply sharing the fraternity of the moment. Young men expect to be "talked down to" but when we listen to the high quality insights and feelings they have, all of the males begin to experience the ancient rapport process taking hold. The mentors can sense the young men eagerly await this authentic bonding. Confirmation of connection is often no more than a grunt of understanding, a nod of the head that says, "we are sharing this territory right now as equals".

We speak the same language as them because if we cut them off based on how we think their supposed to express themselves, we have immediately lost trust. We know we have lost trust when the young men will say things that they think we want to hear., When they know they can't compete with our close-minded attitude, they take the competition one step further and simply "block us out". This is a winning strategy young men play to win this battle of egos. Unfortunately, when adults hold young men in low regard, thee young men successfully "live down" to this level, preventing them from realizing the lofty horizons of awareness and achievement natural for that age group.

Speaking their language after contently listening to them, without needing to "save" them, allows us to engage their attention with questions. The stimulating inqueries are designed to let them go inside of themselves and find the answers to their concerns and fears. We simply ask them what is happening in their lives and continually respond with deeper, respectful questions. What emerges are the solutions to their own problems! They quickly remember their youthful enthusiasm for exploration and answers. We earn credibility as they sense we are there to guide them, not control them.

Our interactions with young men is saturated with the context that we are comfortable not knowing all of the answers to life's challenges and mysteries. The young men often hear the mentors say, "I don't know" and therefore learn that being an adult male includes the acceptance of this truth. Along with this understanding, the young men experience the mentors frequently asking for help in their lives, whether it be to get some project done or to support them through an emotional crisis. We help each other channel our energies through competition, grieving, praying, and mostly by remembering to celebrate life with humor and fun. This is not the popular way of instant gratification or entitlement to know or obtain something immediately.

What a Good Mentor ?

The mentor must be confident and grounded in his/her beliefs and behaviors. The mentor is stable in their ability to be open and honest, content to keep learning about life while supporting others on their journey. This is precisely the kind of person the younger ones are attracted to and ultimately will emulate, sooner or later.

Questions & Answers

Question -- How do you keep yourself from telling the young men what to do and how to be?

Answer (Corey) -- the only thing that separates me from them is I've had time to make more mistakes and learn from them. Once I admit that I have shortcomings and have experienced losses in life, I reveal my humility . I can deliver my experiences and value system and get them to think in a way that they find how to be true to themselves. Then everyone sees how effective they are in handling their problems. The strategy is to draw it out of them.

Question -- Can a mentor encourage young men to develop spiritual awareness?

Answer -- With ceremonies and sweat lodges we guide them to ask for help from Creator, Great Mystery or from any Source they are comfortable with. This gives them a way to walk through their self-doubt and fear. This gives them a sense of gratitude for what they actually do have in their lives including their health, their families and the resources of the community. When they pray for the well-being of their family and community, they get to see the struggles that everyone has in common. They become more compassionate and realize that everyone is on the same road together. They remember that they want to do good, contribute and be a respectful and resourceful equal with everyone.

Corey McKinley and Dr. Mark Schillinger are cofounders of the Young Men's Ultimate Weekend, a non-profit organization based in Marin/Sonoma which has spread from Seattle to San Diego. The local office is at 4050 Redwood Hwy., Suite G. San Rafael, CA 94903. You can reach them at: (415) 479-4100 or info@ymuw.org. Please visit their web site at: www.ymuw.org