

# MENTORING MATTERS: MENTORING AT RISK YOUTH

## THE DREAM MODEL

D - DEMONSTRATE

R - RELIABLE

E - EXPOSE

A – ADD VALUE

M - MOTIVIVATE

What is Mentoring? Mentoring is the process of direct transfer of experience and knowledge from one person to another. Mentorship is the ability to position your mentee to **DREAM** without limitations. A good mentor uses their life experiences to better others.

Who is considered **At Risk**? Any youth that has socio-economic factors conducive for failure. *Lausanne Consultation on Children at Risk* identifies these individuals as those who may have experienced an intense and/or chronic risk factor, or a combination of risk factors in personal, environmental and/or relational domains that prevent them from pursuing and fulfilling their optimum potential. Those risk factors may include but is not limited to:

1. Poverty – In 2008, The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services released a study, *Vulnerable Youth and The Transition to Adulthood: Youth From Low-Income Families*. The study opined (among other things) that youth from low-income families were more likely to consume alcohol by age 13; use marijuana before age 16; use other drugs before age 18; engage in sex before age 16; join a gang before age 18; and carry a gun before age 18.
2. Abuse (physical, sexual or emotional) – In 2013, The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services persuaded the National Academy of Sciences to study the effects of child abuse and neglect. The report found when untreated, the effects of child abuse and neglect, can profoundly influence victims' physical and mental health, their ability to control emotions and impulses, their achievement in school, and the relationships they form as children and as adults.

3. Race (particularly black and/or brown males) - In 2003, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that black men have a 1 in 3 chance of going to federal or state prison in their lifetimes. For some high-risk groups, the economic consequences have been staggering. According to Census data from 2014, there are more young black high school dropouts in prison than have jobs.
4. Family Dysfunction and/or Instability in the home (e.g., addiction, homelessness, unemployment, criminality in and around the home, etc.) – According to Rose Erickson in her article, *Parents' Effect on Child Behavior*, “dysfunctional families breed dysfunctional children. She continues by explaining that children are like sponges. That often repeat behavior (displayed by parents) even into their adulthood, which may manifest in their future relationships.
5. Parental Malfeasance or lack of oversight and/or accountability – In Sheryl Faber’s article, *How Does Lack of Parenting at Home Affect Children’s Grades in School?*, it was opined that a lack of parenting in the home is likely to have a detrimental effect on a child’s academic progress. “Tools learned in early childhood are essential for a student to be successful in school. Parents who fail to provide an environment that promotes education and encourages good grades will keep their child from working to his highest abilities.”
6. Absent Parent (particularly fathers) – According to The Center for Fathering, children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems. Boys are more likely to become involved in crime, and girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens.

## **THE DREAM MODEL**

### **DEMONSTRATE**

Have you ever heard this statement from a parent, “Do what I said and not what I do?” Most adults would answer that question in the affirmative. That statement, however, deepens a false sense of security in children. It reinforces the myth that

children are not in part shaped by what they see modeled by parents and other influential persons in their lives. As mentors, we must model what we teach. Why? Because your mentee is watching you even when you think he/she is not. Remember, a great coach was once a good player.

1. **Demonstrate Good Character/Integrity** – Integrity is who you are when no one is looking. Model the type of person you want your mentee to become. So often we find people living double lives only to be exposed for personal failures. As humans, we are imperfect people. However, as mentors, we should be striving to be the type of person we do not mind our mentee emulating.
2. **Demonstrate Action** – Be a person of few words and many actions. Make few promises and keep the ones that you make. Your word should be your bond.
3. **Demonstrate Being Present in the Moment** – Being present speaks volumes to a mentee. Nothing speaks louder “I care” than being there particularly when others (who should be there) are not. Moreover, it is not just the big moments but the small ones where there may be no expectation to be present.
4. **Demonstrate Intentionality** – Be strategic in your interactions as well as spontaneous. Make every moment count. Every interaction is a learning experience, whether you intended it to be or not. As such, capture the opportunity to impart when available. Again - Don't miss the moments!
5. **Demonstrate Personal Growth** - To become a ladder builder, you must first be a ladder climber. If you are not growing in your personal endeavors, that same mindset will be passed on to your mentee. They need to see a person who invests in their personal growth, believes enough in themselves that they take personal risks, is accountable to a mentor, and set personal goals with measurable outcomes.
6. **Demonstrate Unconditional Love** – Many at risk youth live in environments where they have to perform to be accepted to feel love. Unconditional love

says I care for you despite the behavior you may be exhibiting right now. Unconditional love says I can hold you accountable and still love you. When negative behavior is displayed, unconditional love says, I hate the behavior but I still love you the person. This type of love must be communicated clearly and consistently. Your voice must be the one they hear over the voices in their heads to which they may have become accustomed due to environmental dysfunction. ***SEE ADD VALUE BELOW FOR MORE DETAILS.***

## **RELIABLE (TRUST)**

Most at risk youth are emotionally broken. Many have been exposed to environments and traumas that have forced them to grow up well before their time. As a result, they have built defense and coping mechanism to help safeguard them from being hurt or disappointed by yet another person who was supposed to protect them. As a result, they are watching **everything** you say and do. You will have to prove to them that they can trust you. Trust is built slowly over a period of time – it is a process. However, trust can be lost in an instance.

## **HOW TO REBUILD TRUST**

1. Admit where you have failed and own your shortcoming.
  - a. Owning your mistakes demonstrates to your mentee that you recognize that the behavior was wrong
  - b. Owning your mistakes models to your mentee taking responsibility for bad choices
2. Ask for forgiveness for the shortcoming.
  - a. Asking for forgiveness demonstrates sincerity in wanting to make things right
3. Commit to not repeating that mistake again by setting things in place that assist you in avoiding that behavior
  - a. Committing demonstrates and models accountability to your mentee

The key to building trust is **CONSISTENCY!** You must build that rapport with your mentee one day at a time, one event at a time, one interaction at a time. Consistency allows your mentee to see that you are committed to their growth and

development. Above all, consistency reinforces the concept that I can count on you when it matters!

## **EXPOSURE**

It is no secret that at risk youth have already been exposed to environments that is not conducive to winning or succeeding. Those environmental factors can include:

- Addictions
- Abuse
- Parental absence and/or lack of oversight and accountability
- Poverty
- Criminal elements (particularly gangs and drug markets)

Exposing youth to positive environments that are foreign to their everyday experience offers that person the ability to expand their horizons. How can you dream about being an architect if you have never met one? As a mentor to at risk youth, we must be cognizant of the environmental factors our mentees face daily and create consistent opportunities to combat the negative imaging with which they may be bombarded. When considering positive experiences with which you could expose your mentee, you must expand your portfolio of experiences. **DO NOT BE ONE DIMENSIONAL!**

## **ADD VALUE**

A mentor is a person of value who adds value to others. You will only add value to others to the degree you value yourself. Leadership Guru John Maxwell says it best, “people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.” For at risk youth, many of them have never consistently been told their value and worth.

If you are going to position your mentee for success, you must:

1. Value your mentee – identify what is special about your mentee
2. Believe in your mentee – see things in your mentee that they are not capable of seeing and communicate that vision to that mentee

3. Unconditionally love your mentee – people make mistakes. Our job is to help them recover when mistakes and even failures occur. If you are dealing with an at risk youth, the odds are likely that they have seen failure before, particularly in those around them. Olympic skier Bonnie St. James – “people fall down; winners get up but the gold winners get up the fastest.” In other words, expect missteps but make room for comebacks. Moreover, when they get up, allow space for your mentee to learn from their mistakes. Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn.

## **MOTIVATE**

You must become your mentee’s fiercest supporter and cheerleader. For those particularly coming from broken or dysfunctional environments, you may become their only source of encouragement. It is your job as a mentor to discover what motivates your mentee best. For some, it may be attention they receive from positive reinforcement; for others, gifts; while others may be motivated by the satisfaction of accomplishing something worthwhile. Because you are not your mentee’s only influence, you must be very observant and sensitive to changes you notice about their attitude, drive, self-confidence, etc. Negative environments and/or events/interactions always manifest itself in some form or another. As such, if criminal behavior is occurring against or around your mentee, you must be alert should that behavior manifests itself in your presence. Furthermore, as mandatory reporters, you will have to find a way to protect the mentee without damaging trust in your relationship. This scenario can pose both a tricky and delicate balancing act for the mentor. However, we must remember the mentee’s safety and overall well-being must always take priority in any case.

Many at risk youth (particularly those in dysfunctional or trauma laced environments) will not be accustomed to being praised for positive behavior. For many, it will be the opposite (i.e., praised for negative behavior or even teased/berated for good behavior such as accomplishments in academics). As such, you have to be ready to counter that lifestyle with positive interactions and influence. Moreover, you must be prepared to be challenged from time to time when your infusion of normalcy stretches your mentee beyond his belief system about himself and his circumstances. For some, it will be challenging to believe they can be and live the life you are promoting as achievable. Why? Dysfunctionality over a period of time eventually becomes the new norm. As their

mentor, it is your job to expose and destroy that dysfunctionality, one piece at a time – not in an intrusive manner, which could do more harm than good. However, as you expose them to the real jewels that lie within them, it cuts away the mirage and allows them to dream beyond their current circumstances.

### **CONCLUSION: ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE?**

At the end of the day **MENTORING COMES WITH A PRICE!** It will cost you something. Whether it is your time, talent, or treasures, there is a price tag. Count the costs before making such a commitment. Why? An uncommitted mentor to youth (particularly at risk youth) do more harm than good because your lack of commitment will always be exposed through your behavior and attitude towards your mentee. This behavior could reinforce negative beliefs about themselves and others for whom they should be able to trust. However, a committed mentor has the ability to shape this next generation, one child at a time.