THE POWER OF MENTORING
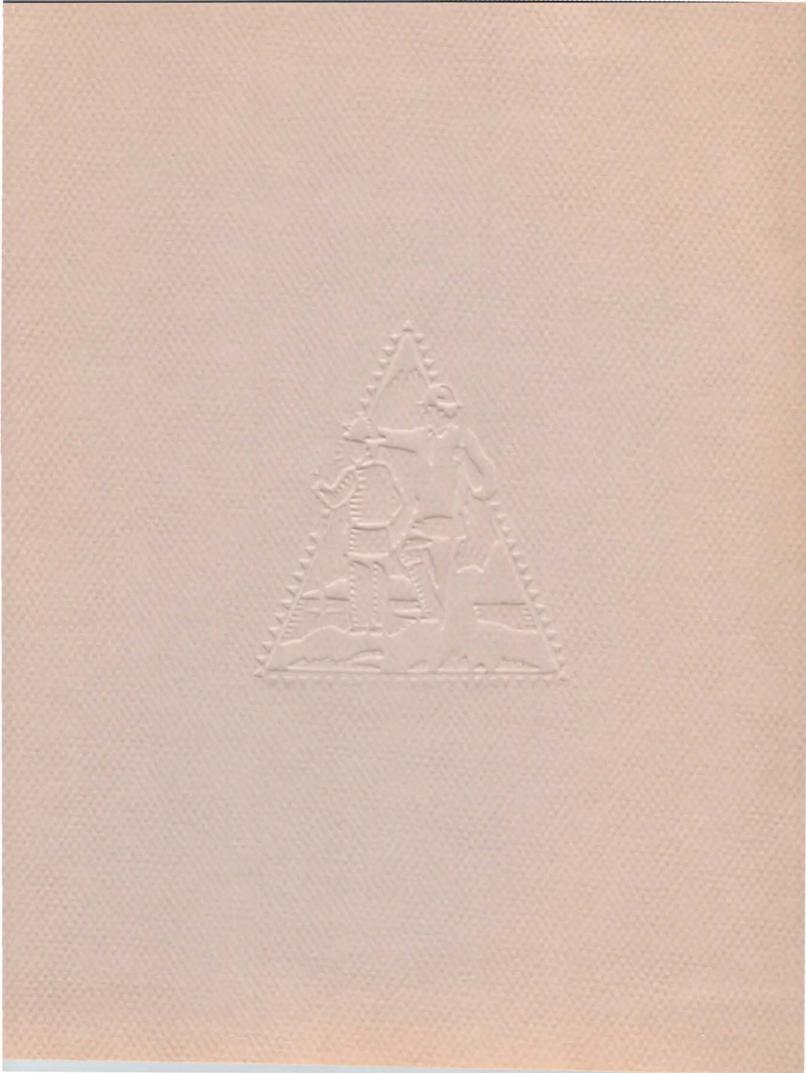
AN AGE-OLD STRATEGY IS HELPING TODAY'S YOUTH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY LEE IACOCCA

ONE
PLUS
ONE

THE POWER
OF MENTORING

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AN AGE-OLD STRATEGY IS HELPING TODAY'S YOUTH

OVERVIEW

This booklet is one of several published by public television's "One PLUS One" project, a special media emphasis on mentoring and its effectiveness in helping young people. "One PLUS One" is a dimension of Project Literacy U.S.—PLUS—a co-production of PBS and Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.

The articles that follow reflect a growing consensus that helping young people the old-fashioned way—with generous doses of adult support and guidance—can strengthen their self-esteem and encourage them to achieve.

Matching a needy young person with a caring adult—the basic recipe of mentoring programs—rewards the mentor as well, for as the authors make clear, mentoring offers that rare chance for volunteers to make a real difference in someone's life, One PLUS One.

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Introduction

Lee A. Iacocca

Chairman of the Board
Chrysler Corporation

When I first started out in business, I was lucky. I had a mentor named Charlie Beacham.

He'll never have a chapter written about him in the history books or be somebody whose name brings instant recognition. But he had more impact on my life than any person other than my father.

He taught me the car business. He taught me about being street smart. And he was the greatest motivator in the world (the kind of guy you'd follow up the hill even though you knew very well you could get killed in the process).

After I'd known him for 20 years, I finally got up the nerve to tell Charlie publicly what I thought of him. He was not only my mentor, he was more than that. He was my *tormentor*, but I loved him.

It's now been more than 40 years since I first ran into Charlie, and would you believe, I still make decisions based on what I learned from him?

We all need mentors at some points in our lives. My mentor came along when I was in my twenties, but for a lot of kids today the real need for a mentor starts when they are still in grade school.
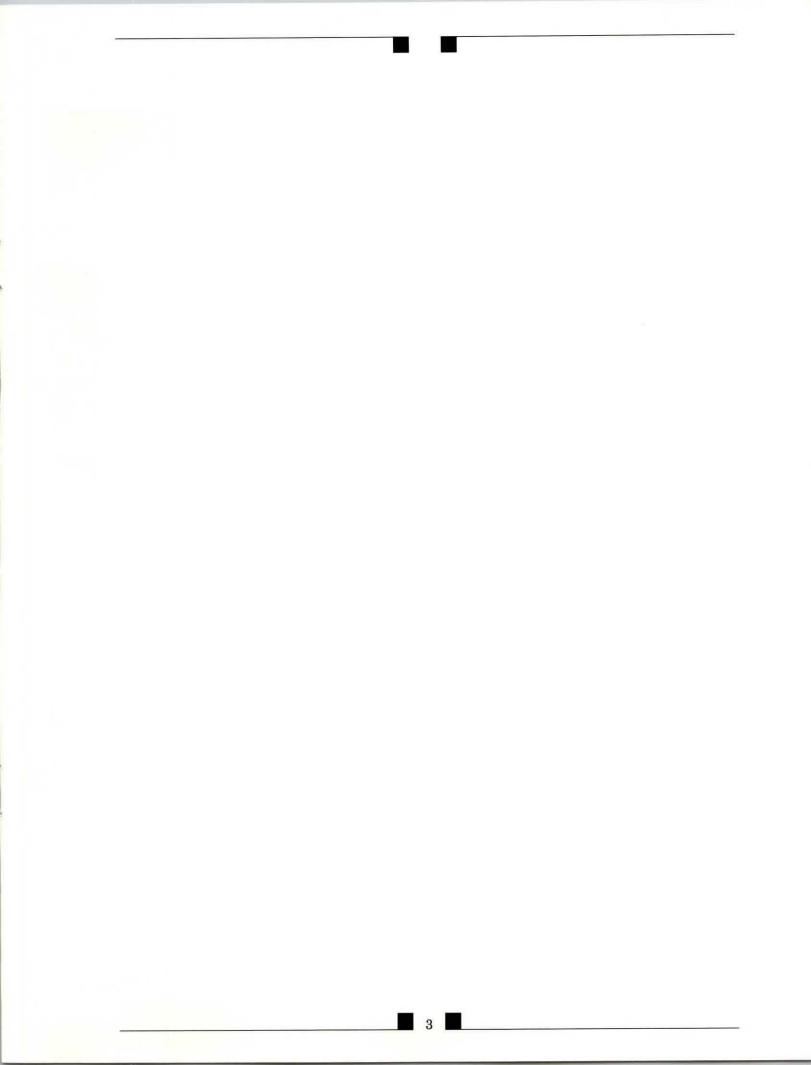
They're looking for role models, and they can't always turn to their parents as I did because their parent is a single mother who works all day just to pay the heat bill.

Sure, there are plenty of role models on the street for them—but too many are the *wrong* kind. They are the ones selling drugs, or stealing to buy drugs.

That's why we encourage our employees at Chrysler to get involved with their community groups and become mentors. None of them is likely to become famous for volunteering. They don't even get much recognition for what they are doing.

But they're getting something more important out of their experience. They're getting *satisfaction*. Satisfaction in knowing that the next generation of Americans will grow up with the same values they have.

Believe me, our kids want those values. They just need a mentor to pass them along.

THE POWER OF SOMEONE WHO CARES

Margaret E. Mahoney

President
The Commonwealth Fund

Across America, there is a new awareness of the value of mentors. Their offer of guidance to others, especially to young people, is to help those trying to come to terms with the complexities of our modern society and to open opportunities for them to lead productive and satisfying lives.

Left to their own resources, many young people will fall far short of their potential. They drop out before the ninth grade at an alarming rate—29-50% in many schools. Children under 16 years of age are more likely to live in poverty than ever before in our history. Not only has the number of children in households headed by a single parent risen, the number in poverty has risen dramatically. For too many, the street is an attractive and normal alternative to school or minimum-wage work with little promise. Many are without hope, and others are on a giddy course of experimentation, often inspired by peers bent on adventure, if not on a deliberately destructive course. Undereducated and unskilled, they are not ready for work—or for life.

Even those inner-city youths who stay in school and graduate tend not to go on for future education—only about 35% make this important life step. And many of those who go on do not complete college. Yet more than half of all new jobs created between now and the year 2000 will require more, not less, education — at least one-third will require a college degree.

In a growing number of communities, individuals, foundations, schools and businesses are responding with special programs to keep youngsters in school and fuel their ambitions to succeed. These programs provide what is lacking for many youngsters — the mentor.

Mentoring is not a mystery. It is sustained help — one-to-one — from an older, more experienced person. Mentoring is more than the communication of professional expertise; it is the giving of time and thought. It is caring, supplemented with practical guidance. Samuel Proctor, the recently retired pastor of New York's Abyssinian Baptist Church, says what is needed by inner-city youth is "the presence of quality persons, with character as well as knowledge, to show poorly directed youngsters that they can do something with their lives." He is describing what mentoring provides.

Although Americans have no patent on the mentoring idea, it is very American. It suits our culture and our traditions. It is an expression of our history of volunteerism; it depends on highly personal acts by individuals — not on the demands of government or any system.

The idea of the mentor goes back to the time before written history. The word itself is Homeric. Homer gave the name Mentor to the friend whom Odysseus entrusted with the guidance and education of his son, Telemachus. In the Bible, Saul was the mentor of David, as was Naomi of Ruth. There are such examples throughout history, but frequently the mentor gets no historical notice. How many recognize the name of Marshall Lefferts, the Western Union executive who watched over the growth and development of Thomas Edison as scientist and inventor?

Today, the traditional sources of mentors—the extended family, the local churches, schools, or neighborhoods—are either absent or overburdened. To fill the gap, an increasing number of adults with a wide variety of experiences are volunteering to devote a small but significant part of their lives to helping a younger person. They recognize that as individuals

they can perform a personal service that no massive social program possibly can—that is to help another person achieve self-reliance, self-esteem and a successful life. Our society has a growing need for such mentors. They will not solve all our societal ills and they are no substitute for strong parents and inspiring teachers. But, as many programs are proving, they will make a difference.

People with the interest, the willingness, the time and the experience to be mentors might be business people intent on community service; or older people who have been squeezed out of their traditional mentoring role; or college students, acting as mentors to younger college or high school students. They are serving as more experienced individuals who can build self-esteem and instill hope.

Mentoring is a relationship that we are just beginning to define and understand. It requires patience, willingness to listen, and subtle guidance to move someone forward from one point in life to another. Mentoring should aim to strengthen familial ties. The relationship should not replace the family but extend a helping hand that, in the absence of a strong family, can show youngsters how to solve problems that handicap their progress. As one mentor said, "It is letting them know what is expected of them—in the job, in any relationship, including with me … it is giving them a taste of real life and what the world is like."

We have learned that to be successful, mentoring must be sustained over time; it must be built around some meaningful activity; and it is best when the mentors themselves have experienced and reflected on the difficulties of life. If it fills a void in the mentor's life as well as in that of the other person, that shared need often gives a mentoring relationship staying power and impact.

To place value on the mentor role is a challenge to communities and their leaders—in business, community and religious organizations, schools, colleges and universities. We have to bring honor and dignity to the efforts and accomplishments of the mentor and find ways to sustain mentors in their role. They are significant bridge builders, enlarging the options of individuals whose vision has been too narrow because, at least in part, they have known too few people who have made successful lives.

Our collective common sense is telling us that whole generations may be saved by as simple an answer as someone who cares. We are learning that we can help young people become productive members of society. But it takes the involvement of individuals who will spare the time to teach pride and how to make it through life.

A teenager, living in poor circumstances, was asked recently what made him happy. He replied, "When someone pays me attention." In that statement, he made the case for mentors.

MARGARET E. MAHONEY is president of The Commonwealth Fund, a philanthropic foundation established in 1918 by Anna M. Harkness with the broad charge to enhance the common good. One of the Fund's goals is to help young people reach their full potential. It supports the national Career Beginnings Program which has matched more than 7,000 students and mentors in three years.

How I Talked Myself Into Mentoring

Robert G. Hechlinski

Mentor
Career Beginnings
Indiana University—Northwest

Every evening my wife, Nancy, and I discuss the day's activities with each other. There is one of these discussions that I will not forget. It was while we were doing dishes. I explained to her that I had been approached to become a "mentor" for a new program. It was called "Career Beginnings" and it involved spending time with disadvantaged or "at risk" young people. It had been brought to my attention by a friend at Indiana University. I gave Nancy all the details that I knew: It would be a one-to-one partnership with some youngster entering his or her senior year of high school. We would be expected to set our own schedule, establish our own goals and find our own way through our relationship. Working together, we would try to ease the young person into a career.

She said that it sounded interesting and that I would probably be good at it. It wasn't exactly the answer I wanted. I quickly explained that I had a lot on my hands at the time. Some major activities and projects at work were very demanding. Other outside activities were taking up a lot of my time. Sixty-hour weeks, 15- and 16-hour days were not uncommon. There just wasn't any available time to devote to this project. My intention was to call my friend the next day and beg off. Certainly, he could get someone else to do it.

Nancy's response was quick, pointed and effective. "What if Dick Cordill had taken that attitude with you?" she said. She knew what she had done—reminded me of a longstanding and unpaid debt.

Some 25 years ago, Dick Cordill was my boss. For some reason, he took an interest in me and my development. It was because of his concern that I started to think about college. I had a lot of respect for Dick. He was a West Point graduate who looked the part. Ramrod straight, self-assured in every move and gesture, his presence demanded respect. When he talked to me about my studies and my future, I couldn't help but feel honored and flattered. Gradually, his confidence began to find a home in me.

Looking back, it is obvious that my career is patterned on his counsel. Whatever success I enjoy is a living debt to his thoughtful interest and understanding. To turn my back on mentoring now would be a slap in the face to my own mentor, Mr. Richard Cordill.

The next morning, my phone call to Indiana University was different than I originally anticipated. I signed on as a mentor in the Career Beginnings Program, and it wasn't long before I gained a new friend by the name of Malcolm A. Maxwell, Jr.

Beyond a doubt, Malcolm was, and is, easy to know. Yet, as our relationship began, I was apprehensive. Would I fail? Could I possibly destroy a young man's future? Nancy and I are not parents. What qualifications did I have to do this properly? This was a year's commitment. I could make a real mess of this man's life.

I was worried, too, about the realities of a high school teenager today. Malcolm's problems were different, more severe than those of my high school days. Saturday night dances, for example, were a problem to him because, normally, he could expect gun fire. When I was in high school, running in the halls was something the rough kids did. Now drugs, teenage pregnancies and crime are common. Was I prepared to help Malcolm?

The fact that Malcolm is black was never a issue until one day early in our relation-

ship when he mentioned that I was his first white friend. Gary, Indiana, where Malcolm lives, is a principally black city. It just never occurred to me that Malcolm had never been close to anyone who was white—his opinion of white people in general could easily hinge upon the outcome of our interaction. This was not an overwhelming concern, but it was major. What about Malcolm's parents? Would I be stepping on their toes? I didn't want to usurp their roles or interfere with their efforts. How would they react to my involvement? What would I use for guidance?

Malcolm's scholastic record was yet another concern. He had managed to accumulate three years of C grades, unlikely to impress college admissions officers. Again, I expressed my doubts. After all, I wasn't superman. My wife straightened me out. She didn't use the term "cop-out," but it was in her eyes. Her advice was solid and succinct. "Take it one step at a time. Malcolm will help you." I hate it when she's always right.

Malcolm did help. In fact, it was because of his efforts that this whole relationship worked. He was totally receptive to everything. I advised some changes in his study habits and classroom participation, and he made them unquestioningly. He accepted the challenges that lay ahead. He knew that nothing could be done about his school performance over the past three years. He knew that his senior year was the last chance to change it. And change it he did.

After analyzing Malcolm's courses, he and I set minimum grade objectives for each of them. The toughest objective was the overall goal. He had to acheive a "B" average and make the Dean's List. We knew that colleges would be interested in seeing him coming to grips with his obligations and preparations for adulthood. We gambled that a marked change in academic performance just might swing the vote to win college entrance.

Each week we would review progress and problems. Malcolm made adjustments willingly. There were times when it looked impossible. We both questioned ourselves. Did we set the goal too high? What if it couldn't be done?

Then, it all came together. Malcolm did it. He made the Dean's List in his senior year. His own self-restraint held back his pride. Social conventions bottled up his emotions. But nothing held back his confidence.

The year we spent together went well. Malcolm is grateful to me for the things I have done, but he isn't aware that it was I who gained the most. There were many successes for Malcolm and I was fortunate enough to be part of them. Meanwhile, I learned several things myself: Remarkably enough, I *did* have time for the Malcolms of the world and my career and life didn't come unbalanced because of the time we were together. I realized that sometimes the most important contribution of a good mentor is simply being there when needed. The satisfaction in this work is immeasurable. We *are* our brother's keeper and our contributions *do* make a difference. Mentoring has my dedication. Since Malcolm, there have been three other kids for me to work with. Each of them with questions. Each of them not sure of the future. Each of them willing to help someone help them. Each of them grateful for everything.

There are others who need help. The young people I mentor know I expect them to give that time back to someone else. I believe that Malcolm will repay his debt. Probably to someone not even born yet. But when the time comes, he will be a better man for it. Just as I was when I repaid my debt to Dick Cordill.

ROBERT G. HECHLINSKI is Vice President of Operations for Nippon Magnetics USA, Inc., a corporation involved in metallics refinement in the steel industry. He is a mentor in the Career Beginnings Program at Indiana University Northwest, in Gary, Indiana.

Thank You, Bob

Malcolm B. Maxwell, Jr.

Student
Indiana University Northwest

During my junior year at Horace Mann High School in Gary, Indiana, a woman came to my American history class looking for students to become involved in a new program called "Career Beginnings." She explained that the goal of the program was to give high school seniors practical work experience in their areas of interest and to aid them in making professional or vocational decisions. Yet, this isn't what prompted me to complete the application for enrollment. It was the promise of a summer job with good hours and pay.

Shortly after school let out for the year, I was chosen to be one of the interns. I didn't know what I was in for. No one ever heard of this program before. No one had any experience with a program like it. Little did I know Career Beginnings would provide me with not only work experience, but friendships long after it ended—and a mentor.

When I first learned that I was going to receive a mentor I was kind of skeptical; in fact, I really didn't want one. I didn't know who this person would be. White or black, male or female. I didn't want another person in my life telling me how I could better myself in school; what roads I should take as far as going to college; where to go to school and why. In my book, that's what my parents were for. And if my parents weren't around, I could always go to one of my family members or a friend. I knew that having this mentor would only mean having another PERSON speaking to me, with everything he said going in one ear and going out of the other.

Not long after the first Career Beginnings meeting, I received my first job assignment at the Northwest Indiana Forum, a private, economic development group with the objective of attracting industry to the three counties of Northwest Indiana. I was to collect news articles relative to economic activity in the area. I think what made this job very special was the fact that I was treated as more than just a high school student. For instance, I was given my own office. My co-workers were all friendly and enthusiastic people who were always encouraging.

It was at the Forum that I met Robert Hechlinski, the man who would become my mentor. From the start, Bob was kind to me and easy to talk with. When I learned he was also to become my mentor, I was anxious to know if his attitude might change because we would be working closely together for the whole year. As it turned out, this would be the start of a friendship that would go far beyond the time I spent at the Forum.

When my parents first learned that I was going to be assigned to a mentor they were curious and afraid. They thought that there was going to be this stranger who was going to be telling their son how, where and when to do things that had to do with this future. They didn't want somebody steering me into a direction that might not be good for me. They also didn't want someone coming in and trying to fill their role. As it turned out, my parents and I found out that our fears were unnecessary.

Robert Hechlinski was more than an employer—he was a wonderful gentleman. As my mentor, Bob was an exceptional influence on my life. Whenever I was confused as to what direction I should take, he was one of the few people that I could look forward to for sound and thoughtful advice. There was never a conversation where Bob would talk "at me." We always had discussions where we could freely exchange thoughts and ideas. If ever there was a

difference of opinion, he would still respect my viewpoint although he didn't agree with it. It is important that interns not look at their mentors as just another adult who doesn't understand, but as someone who can point to another aspect of the situation. I believe that it is because we became friends, that Bob's and my relationship as mentor and intern worked out so well.

Bob and I participated fully in the Career Beginnings program offerings. We attended all the workshops and seminars. We took advantage of the College Career Day. During those three summer months, Bob and I would take every available opportunity to discuss my future. This might be during the quiet of the early morning before work started, or long after everyone went home. Sometimes it would be during the work day when we would both put aside our duties. Or, over a lunch just between the two of us where we had the privacy to concentrate on the problems at hand. We even had a chance to go fishing.

In my opinion, mentors must keep in mind that mentoring is not an opportunity to force their ideas and views on someone less experienced, but, hopefully, to act as a sounding board and become a positive role model. Because my mentor gave me these considerations, I enjoyed the most important thing in the Career Beginnings program—which was not a paycheck as I originally thought, but ties with people who were generous with their time and truly concerned for my life and my future, primarily Bob.

It became very apparent to me that the time Bob spent with me was time that was taken away from his family. I felt a growing indebtedness as the program progressed. Bob sensed this discomfort. He told me that an obligation was growing on my part. He asked me to repay this debt in the future, not to him, but to someone who may need my guidance as much as I needed his. I intend to make that payment...with interest!

MALCOLM B. MAXWELL, JR. is a freshman at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Indiana, majoring in criminal justice. As a high school student, he participated in the Career Beginnings program at the University.

AIM HIGH

George E. Curry

New York Bureau Chief
Chicago Tribune

Tisha Derricotte, a former participant in a workshop I directed in Washington, DC, for minority high school students, decided last year that she wanted me to serve as her mentor. Newly enrolled at Howard University, Tisha had decided to become a correspondent for Youth News Service, an Associated Press-like national wire service operated for and by teenagers. I was pleased to mentor this obviously talented young woman, but there was one nagging problem: Every time Tisha and I were scheduled to meet and go over one of her assignments, she would either fail to appear on time or try to explain why she hadn't completed the work.

I finally said to her, "You are obviously not serious about wanting to become a journalist. All you're doing is wasting my time. If you ever decide you want to be serious, give me a call. If you're not serious, we don't need to kid each other." As I anticipated, Tisha proclaimed a deep and abiding interest in journalism. Summoning my most skeptical voice, I said, "We'll see."

And we did. Tisha went on to develop into one of my most dedicated and dependable students. My experience with Tisha was by no means unique and it underscores perhaps the most important guideline for mentoring: challenge the student to perform at his or her absolute best and don't accept excuses for non-performance. At first, students might rebel, even consider you a little loony. In the end, however, they will be elated, flushed by the success of having met perhaps the most difficult challenge of their young lives. Properly nurtured, their self-esteem and their ambition grow tremendously over a very short period. But that same ambition and confidence can be sidetracked by a mentor who talks down to them, feeling, "He (or she) is only a kid."

Some non-minorities have confided to me that, deep down, they have some reluctance about being "too hard" on African-Americans and other minority group members for fear of being labeled a racist. I think it's racist *not* to challenge minority students. I think it's racist *not* to force them to perform at their best. And I think it is racist to let anything or anyone get in the way of imparting knowledge, which is what the whole process is all about, anyway. I can't count the times students have met me for the first time and left with the clear impression that I was either crazy or close to it.

Ann Scales Cobbs, one of my former students in St. Louis, likes to tell of the time she turned in what *she* knew was an excellent paper. I promptly said it smelled up the place and threw it into the garbage can. At least, that's the way Ann tells the story; I'm asserting my Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination. Ann covers higher education for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and now, years later, somewhat agrees with my assessment. While I may have overstated the case to make my point with Ann, something I am frequently accused of doing with students, I knew she had a lot of pride and I counted on her pride not allowing her to continue turning in work I considered garbage.

It is important to be tough on students, but then it is equally important to help rebuild their confidence. It is not enough to yell at them and leave them with the impression that perhaps they are not equipped to become journalists. After venting my frustration, I'm likely to say, "I wouldn't be so upset if I thought you weren't capable of doing the work. In fact, if I

knew that, I wouldn't even be upset by what you turned in. But I *know* you can do better than this. I only ask that you do one thing: give me your best work. And you know when you've done your best. Be honest with yourself." After making that pitch, I usually give them another chance to write, usually under a less stressful deadline. When they improve, I am quick to praise, perhaps overpraise, their improvement. Once their confidence has been restored, we are ready to push forward.

Beyond the failure of teachers and mentors to nudge—or goad, when necessary—there is also the problem of some mentors and educators failing to include minorities in their teaching materials. Both minorities and whites could and should benefit from writing assignments that include the contributions of minorities and having among visiting speakers, people who are non-white.

In addition to doing the right thing, as filmmaker Spike Lee might say, the presence of minority role models takes away any excuse a student might be tempted to offer for failing to perform. For example, my biological father was an alcoholic and left my family when I was very young (fortunately, I had a very caring stepfather who was more than any person could ever want in a father figure), and my mother and stepfather never had a combined income of more than $5,000 when I was growing up; neither parent completed high school, and I experienced first-hand the humiliation of riding on segregated public buses and the indignity of "white" and "colored" water fountains. So, when I share my background with a young person, especially one looking to lean on the crutches of racism or poverty, all of the excuses immediately go out of the window. And that's the way I like it.

Still, if one is to have a meaningful mentoring relationship with a student, minority or otherwise, then one has to be honest, especially about the prevalence of racism. The minority student who hears from a mentor that racism no longer exists might question that mentor's candor. On the other hand, one can say, "Yes, there is indeed racism in the United States and it is not likely to go away in your lifetime." Having said that, it is important to then add, "You can beat the odds. You can become successful in spite of racism or discrimination."

Students need to be reminded of people who beat the odds every day. Whenever I mentor minority students, I always try to teach by using examples. I have never read anything more moving than Mary Frances Berry recounting her childhood in Barbara Reynolds' book *And Still We Rise*. Berry tells how she was placed in a Nashville orphanage at the age of 4. "During that period we were very hungry," Berry recalled. "We almost starved.... The guy who ran the orphanage would eat pork chops for dinner and then sell the kids the bones." Berry also told how her remarkable mother got them out of the orphanage and how her mother's love and determination pushed Berry to excel in school. She earned a master's degree, a law degree, and a Ph.D. and became the first African-American chancellor of the University of Colorado before serving as assistant secretary of education under President Jimmy Carter. There are many other inspirational stories in Reynolds' book, such as Melba Moore's decision to help close a "crack house" in her old neighborhood. These stories hold special appeal to minority youths and nothing prevents one from mixing in a little inspiration while teaching the basic techniques of journalism.

Any person embarking on a mentoring relationship should be aware that there may be difficulties. My first mentoring relationship with Youth News Service was a flop. A young man who should be grateful that I'm omitting his name said he wanted me to be his mentor. As always, I warned him that I'm a no-nonsense person who demands nothing short of excellence from my students. He said he was aware of my reputation, but that he still wanted us to work together. So, I took him under my wing.

The young man never produced when he said he would; he showed no initiative; and he even failed to appear the day we were supposed to be photographed together for a Youth News Service promotional ad.

I will never forget that incident. I had just left the White House where then-President Ronald Reagan was seeing Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev off at the conclusion of his first trip to the United States. I was standing in the rain in the Rose Garden, worried about whether the ceremony would be over in time for me to keep my appointment with my student. When the event ended, I began running back to the office.

But there was no sign of my student. I checked with the receptionist. No calls from the student. I telephoned Youth News Service. No, he hadn't checked in over there, either. No call, no student, no explanation.

It wasn't until the next day that I learned that the student "forgot" his appointment with me. After another of his non-appearance appearances, I told him I did not think we could work together. I told him he had a lot of potential, but potential without follow-up was worse than having no talent at all. That night I telephoned his father to convey my frustration. I let him know that I thought his son had a lot of unrealized potential and that I hoped he eventually would get his act together. His father relayed his own frustration with his son and said he understood why I did not want to remain involved. At first, I faulted myself, thinking that maybe I hadn't tried hard enough, that perhaps I had missed a trick that would have motivated this young man. I even thought briefly—very briefly—about whether I should re-evaluate some of my teaching tactics. Eventually, though, I realized that no matter how hard I wanted the student to succeed, I couldn't succeed for him. That's something *he* would have to do. As a source told me when I was writing a series of stories on a drug addict: You can't breathe for someone else. They have to breathe for themselves—or die.

When I think of mentoring, I generally think about the successes. I think about the dozens of former students who have become professional journalists: Alvin Reid, business editor of the Lansing State Journal; Sharon Green, a reporter for the St. Louis American; Vivian King, a TV anchor in Alexandria, La.; Celeste Garrett, an assistant city editor at the St. Louis Sun; Robin Boyce, reporter and community relations director of KMJM radio in St. Louis; Leslie Allen, a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; Stephanie Reid, a reporter for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle; Francine Parker of the Waco, Texas, newspaper; and Eric Clark, director of public relations for the YWCA in St. Louis. I am especially proud of three former students who directed their own journalism workshops: Mark Russell, City Hall reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer; Andre Jackson, reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; and Bennie Currie, a manager of public relations for Southwestern Bell in St. Louis, who ran programs in Kansas City and Memphis.

I have no doubt that the young woman I am now mentoring, Tisha Derricotte, will join that distinguished list. She has come a long way since the day I questioned the depth of her commitment to journalism. A student who was once uncertain about whether she wanted to pursue a career in journalism has been transformed before my very eyes. I've never seen Tisha more excited than when she completed her first full-length story for Youth News Service. The story, about the real "Mississippi Burning," was based on an interview with Joyce Ladner, a Howard University professor who participated in the civil rights struggle in her native state. She contrasted the movie, *Mississippi Burning,* with reality. The story, which was rewritten a half-dozen times by Tisha, made page one of Youth News Service's printed copy, was sent out on-line, and was reprinted in Tisha's college newspaper. This time when I received a call from Tisha, there were no excuses. She only wanted to know: "What do we do next?"

GEORGE E. CURRY is New York Bureau Chief of the Chicago Tribune and former national correspondent in the newspaper's Washington Bureau. He is also founding director of high school journalism programs established by National Association of Black Journalists chapters in St. Louis, the District of Columbia and New York City. Curry is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Press Foundation and a national board member of Youth

Communications, which operates a national mentoring program and administers Youth News Service, the only national news service operated by and for teenagers. He teaches in the Academy for Future Journalists, a program established by Northwestern University for students enrolled in predominately black colleges.

Curry has been honored with more than a dozen journalism awards including the National Urban Coalition's Distinguished Urban Journalism Award and the top award of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications.

MENTORS: TEACHERS' ALLIES

Keith Geiger

President
National Education Association

Change is the one constant of our times. Change in the way we live, work and play—change in our economic, social and family structures. Long gone are the days of "Ozzie and Harriet." The post-Star Wars generation is now in our schools. The world of today's students is far more complex and far less secure, far more challenging and far less supportive than the world most of us knew when we were growing up.

Today, 20 percent of America's students are poor. Tens of thousands are homeless. And many—far too many—are victims of child abuse, drug abuse, peer intimidation and random violence. Most of these already disadvantaged young people are burdened with still another disadvantage: they have no guidance in their out-of-school lives.

These are the facts of contemporary America and of America's schools. But these facts tell only part of the story.

Today students are more racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse than at any previous time in our nation's history. By the year 2000, more than a third of our students will be members of minority groups. Some of these students come from homes where English is a second language. Some come from homes where English is not spoken at all. Many children arrive at school hungry and ill-clothed. For many, home is a crowded tenement building. For others, home is an abandoned car.

We who teach in America's public schools know these young people. And we know that for far too many of them, their school days will end long before they are prepared for work or for life. We see them as they first mentally, and then physically, drop out of school. Most of us try hard to stem the tide of desperation that threatens to engulf them. Sometimes we succeed.

Most often we fail. And it is then that teachers come face-to-face with the harsh truth: we are not miracle workers. There are limits to what we can do. We can't go it alone.

If we are to succeed—if we are to rescue students trapped in a cycle of poverty, neglect, despair, anger and anguish—we need to practice the politics of collaboration. We must reach out to our neighbors and to our communities. We must give new life to an ideal as old as America itself—the ideal of neighbors helping neighbors. This work can begin in our schools.

The student at risk needs one-on-one attention, needs someone who is a friend in the truest sense, who will work with that young person and offer guidance, offer support, offer hope. The student at risk needs a mentor.

Skilled mentors address the needs of the whole child. They set high expectations for students and keep them on track. They are caring. And because they are caring, they can bring about important changes in a young person's life.

The role of mentor differs in decisive respects from that of teacher. Teachers are trapped by a school structure that does not allow the kind of individual attention so many students need.

In elementary school, the teacher's attention must be divided among 25 or more students. From middle school on, at the very time when students face not only intense peer pressure but often contradictory social and emotional demands, teacher contact with students is typically limited to 50 minutes each day. The clock rules the school day and handicaps even

the most caring, most devoted, most well-intentioned teacher. Then the calendar takes over: in nine months, the student moves on.

By contrast, mentors are not ruled by curriculum, class size, clock or calendar. As a result, the mentor is able to establish one-on-one contact and, if the relationship is long-term, offer a sense of continuity as the student moves from grade to grade and from teacher to teacher. This relationship may provide the only real stability a student knows. This guidance and support are what mentoring is all about.

The mentor's primary function is not teaching in the formal sense. A mentor may serve as a coach or tutor, but his or her most crucial role is to be an adult who has time for a child, who cares about that child, who believes in that child.

Mentors can introduce students to the world beyond home, school and community — introduce them to new vistas, new options. Working one-on-one, a mentor can reawaken a student's drive to achieve, instill self-esteem and rekindle hope.

A mentor's success is invariably reflected in a student's classroom performance. Teachers see the results: the student who for months has said "I can't" says "I'll try." We see the new interest in learning, the new determination to stay in school—and to succeed. We see new positive attitudes and a reduction in discipline problems arising out of frustration, anxiety and anger.

The successful mentor is the teacher's natural ally. And we are grateful for this alliance. For all teachers—I know of no exceptions—want their students to learn, to become well-adjusted, responsible, caring adults who respect the norms of civility because they have been treated in accord with those norms.

Mentors can be a pivotal force in helping teachers help students achieve this maturity. The essential prerequisite is teacher-mentor cooperation. Mentors' one-on-one work with students provides them with insights that can be invaluable to classroom teachers. The converse is also true; teachers' professional observations about their students' social and learning needs are essential if mentors are to succeed. Teachers are often in the best position to recommend a student for a mentoring program and to outline for the mentor where the child needs help.

Mentoring programs must be well planned and carefully implemented if they are to succeed. The match between mentor and student must "fit," and, if the program is school-based, regular communication between teachers and mentors should be built in. It takes time and effort, but it's well worth it. Good mentoring programs are really an extension of team teaching—the new team members are community members instead of school staff.

Successful mentoring programs can have far-reaching benefits. As mentors become actively involved with students and schools, they will gain a greater understanding of the issues schools face. They will also become a powerful force for involving communities in restructuring schools and enriching the lives of young people.

As a young lawyer said after becoming a mentor, "This isn't like giving at the office. It isn't like putting a donation on MasterCard. It's really giving, in the old-fashioned sense. I have the joy of seeing—in a youngster's eyes and achievement—exactly what I have given."

GOOD MENTORING

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The classical mentor in Western culture is the teacher named "Mentor" in Homer's *Odyssey*, who guided Odysseus's son Telemachus on his legendary journey to become an adult. Other more commonplace mentors have been less powerful and divine but probably no less heroic in their efforts. They have offered support, guidance and concrete assistance to young people with less experience as they go through difficult periods, perform difficult tasks or solve significant problems. Mentoring is an enabling experience: it helps young people do for themselves what their mentors begin by doing for them.

Mentoring, historically, has occurred naturally, but now it is being planned by many schools and communities, particularly for youths lacking relationships with adults who can help them navigate their confusing and sometimes overwhelming personal, educational and social worlds. In natural mentoring the bonds between the mentor and the mentee are strong because they have found each other. Because their relationship has not been artificially organized or programmed, it can become more intense, more fluid, broader in scope and longer lasting. Those of us developing mentoring programs, particularly large-scale efforts, have to worry about how to keep some of the qualities of this "love match" in the "arranged marriage" of our planned mentoring programs.

Mentoring can provide direct assistance and help youths develop.

Mentoring can provide direct help to a young person. Mentors can be patrons, sponsors or advocates who make opportunities available. They can open doors to new worlds (schools and jobs, for example) that might otherwise be closed to the mentee because of inexperience, prejudice or low social status. Such sponsorship or advocacy helps mentees negotiate, and even avoid, the treacherous shoals of unhealthy life paths or overcome personal, social or institutional barriers. Mentors can also be coaches or advisors who can help their mentees to solve problems at school, at work, in the neighborhood and in the family.

Mentoring helps young people to master social circumstances beyond their existing powers to do so. More traditionally, mentoring is thought to help the young person psychologically. The mentor is a role model whom the young person can imitate or with whom he or she can identify, and thus evaluate and alter negative personal attitudes, values, behaviors and beliefs. The mentor accepts and confirms the young person's acts and thoughts, and thus the mentee has a stronger sense of self and a greater willingness to experiment with new ways of thinking and doing things. The better the "chemistry" between the mentor and the young person, the better the quality of the interpersonal relationship, and thus the better the chance that the youth will use the mentor as a role model.

Mentoring may be an especially powerful intervention in the lives of isolated youths.

Adolescents are an increasingly isolated population. Because of changes in the structure of the family, in community and neighborhood relationships, and in workplace arrangements, these youths are being deprived of the adult contacts that historically helped them develop and take on adult roles. For many disadvantaged and at-risk youths who are victims of the harmful influences of street life, this isolation is particularly devastating; and

many of them avoid or drop out of society. This is why so many people feel that mentoring may be a particularly powerful intervention in the lives of low-income youth.

Many youths grow up with a combination of opportunities and resources to help them, such as family, peers, religious and youth organizations, social agencies and schools; and many of these young people have the character and personality that makes for success in our society. We might say that they have extra resources: when one fails they can always turn to another. This is not always the case for some youths; no matter how tenacious they are or how much they want to succeed, they may not have enough social and personal resources available to them—or know how to get them. Planned mentoring programs can help them fill the gap.

In order to provide good mentoring we must understand how to train mentors and match them with youths.

Intuitively, mentors and their charges should be temperamentally and personally compatible, but some observers also feel that they should have had the same background and experiences, and be of the same gender and race. This may not always be possible, given the available supply of mentors, but may also not always be necessary. An older working-class or lower-class woman who was a teenage mother might be a sympathetic mentor to a pregnant adolescent because she understands what the girl is going through at school and at home, but a middle-class woman who knows how to negotiate the bureaucracies of social agencies and schools may be an even better sponsor or role model. We should also not forget that mentors can be intolerant and judgmental of those who resemble them, especially if their mentees have made their mistakes.

We also have to be aware of hidden barriers between mentors and mentees, even in successful programs. Sometimes, the social distance is too great to cover. In one program, a group of Ivy League graduate students with unconventional career and educational histories were matched with a group of ambitious, upwardly mobile young black adolescents. The mentees, however, were somewhat detached from their mentors. One can only wonder how the socially conscious but socially secure mentors, who had the security to have adopted moderately alternative lifestyles, interacted with their "straight" mentees, who often were too busy with various school and extracurricular activities even to keep their appointments. Did the mentees see their mentors as role models, or did they form only fairly superficial personal relationships with them? What did the mentees, and mentors, learn about different social worlds? We should not forget that despite the goals of the programs we create, the participating youths will take from them what they want.

Simply training a mentor cannot ensure the chemistry of a good natural mentoring relationship, but it can make sure that the mentor exhibits certain behavior that will increase the chance that the young person will benefit from the relationship. Training can define and regulate the mentoring activity and can establish goals to be met. It can also help the mentor better understand where the young person is "coming from."

Above all, mentoring must be salient to the needs of youth.

Most young people can profit from a close relationship with an adult, but unless it is clear that what the mentor brings—in attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and skills—is useful to the youth, the mentoring will not work. Mentors and mentees probably do not need to have the same backgrounds, personalities or experiences, but if the social distance between them causes the mentor to misunderstand the young person's problems, needs and thoughts, the mentee will only superficially participate in the relationship or will even be indifferent. A mentor should not assume that his or her way of life is so superior that the mentee would naturally aspire to it. And although mentors may not be able to understand it, many young

people, particularly those from isolated communities, may find their mentors naive and placating, although they might want to emulate them. Mentors have to be the kind of people youths can trust for help and guidance. To be trusted, the mentor needs to be perceived as understanding the young person's situation and able to use his or her personal and social resources to help the youth.

Some features of mentoring programs are critical to their success.

Mentoring programs are usually somewhat formally organized. Their managers need to provide consistent support so that the programs do not fade away and to build in safeguards so that the goals of the programs are met.

Mentoring should be integrated into a larger educational or training or career development effort, which gives the mentoring its structure and purpose. Natural mentoring is more diffuse and global and can stand alone; planned mentoring is an instrument for helping the mentee to do something specific, and thus needs to "lean on" other activities.

Organizers of mentoring programs should think about their criteria for selecting mentors and mentees and their goals for the programs. A vague desire to help is probably not enough of a reason for a program. Clearly articulated program objectives can be used for orienting mentors and mentees, for designing training and for careful monitoring of the program. Equally important, the roles of all actors in the program—organizers, mentors and mentees alike—need to be delineated so that good ideas are not ruined when they are turned into programs.

Mentoring programs should be flexible. There should be room for some changes in direction, for diversity in the activities of the mentors and mentees, and for individual styles in their relationship. Flexibility is one way to make planned mentoring more like natural mentoring.

Mentoring programs should not be just for some youths.

The mentoring programs that are growing nationally are reaching more youths every day. These planned efforts will increasingly provide more and more of the kind of help to isolated youths that was the natural legacy of youths growing up in other communities. But reaching these isolated youths is a serious problem. Some of them show up and sign up for any help they can get; others stay away because their personalities and previous experiences stop them from looking for help. It would be a terrible irony if mentoring were to end up being another way of creaming off motivated youths and discriminating against those who have yet to find their way to asking for help, and who need it most. Mentoring programs need to reach even the unreachable.

TEN STEPS TO A MENTORING NETWORK

Jan Hively

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The Minneapolis YOUTH TRUST

Everyone understands...

It's easy for people to understand the importance of mentoring. All they need to do is to recall how they were guided by others during their youth.

Similarly, it's easy for people to understand the importance of being connected to a community network. All they have to do is to recall how they got their first job, or how somebody connected them to the right service. Everyone understands that who you know tends to be as important as what you know.

This common understanding, which is reinforced by powerful memories and emotions, can be applied to build a community network of mentoring relationships between adults and young people, connecting needy youths with opportunities and support for growth.

What steps are needed to create a community network which will assure mentoring support for all needy youths?

Defining the need for a network...

"But why can't we just let mentoring happen for today's young people the way it happened for us? ... through our teachers, the parents of our friends, the friends of our family, through our church? What's different today from the way it was when we were growing up? Why is it necessary today to *assign* mentors?"

Times have changed, and work and family patterns along with them. Time spent with parents has shrunk as the number of single-parent families has gone up and mothers have entered the work force in unprecedented numbers. Options for apprenticeships and other clear paths to careers have shrunk. Any acquaintance with career workers may be entirely absent from the lives of children growing in families dependent upon public assistance for one or more generations. Adult male role models may be absent from the lives of children born to unwed mothers. Any acquaintance with people who have finished high school, much less gone on to post-secondary education, may be lacking for children growing up in poverty—now 20% of all of our children. Access to adults sharing hope and high expectations for achievement may be missing for children pulled out of the mainstream because of disabilities, juvenile delinquency or dysfunctional families. And meanwhile, the pressures grow for children to experiment with negative behaviors such as too-early sex and the use of chemicals.

Many communities are naive about the full range of problems facing young people. **The first step** toward building a community network is to prepare a fact sheet describing those problems in the local community. Information about family status, welfare dependency, poverty and dropping out is available from the school district. Statistics about health and crime are compiled by the local government's planning staff. The fact sheet should describe the youth growing up in your community. What special problems do they face? What changes have occurred that suggest that community volunteers need to reach out to form a network of support for youth development? It would be useful to supplement the statistics on the fact sheet with some anecdotes (collected from the local media or other data sources) which pull at the heartstrings by describing specific problems faced by some at-risk youth. The purpose of

this information is to show the importance of building a mentoring network.

Recognizing the range of options...

Some of the people who themselves have been guided by mentors bristle at the idea of *assigning* people to develop personal relationships. They may not want to use the term "mentor" to describe anything less than a lifelong relationship. Conflict over terminology can be avoided by referring to the variety of relationships which can result from mentoring.

Relationships include: career coach, academic tutor, tutor in nonacademic skills, friend, recreational leader and advocate in special situations. Ideally, young people should experience adult guidance through a number of relationships. The role of a mentor should be determined by the context of the relationship and the specific needs of both the young person and the adult.

What do the researchers say is important? Leon Chestang, of Wayne State University, surveyed a group of adult black male leaders who had grown up in disadvantaged homes. What was common in their backgrounds? He found that the only thing they had in common was *a relationship with a responsible, caring adult who was achievement oriented and held high expectations.* Other researchers have joined Chestang in citing the importance of the compassionate mentor. But none of the studies can standardize the details of the relationship.

It's important to recognize the range of mentoring relationships for several reasons: a) to respond to individual needs; b) to involve many different mentor programs and youth services in your community network; and c) to establish the framework for your second action step.

The second step is to identify all of the programs in your community that use volunteers to guide children and youth. Be inclusive! Check the schools, the parks, the libraries, the court system and all of the standard youth-serving organizations such as 4-H or the "Y" or scout troops, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and job programs. Prepare a summary describing each program and identify a representative in a position of leadership.

Convening the leaders...

The third step is to persuade a strong community leader (with the authority to pull together all sectors of the community) to lead the development of the mentoring network. The mayor is most logical. Or perhaps it's the city manager, or the school superintendent, or the head of the Chamber of Commerce who has both the clout to bring people to the table and concern about the future of the community, reflected in its youth.

The fourth step is for that community leader to convene a meeting of all of the directors of the youth serving programs, where he/she will begin by talking about the powerful positive impacts of mentoring, perhaps recalling personal experience with its benefits. The convener might then ask for a review of the fact sheet about youth and the summary describing programs which currently exist in the community. Members of the group should be encouraged to contradict any data which is not factual.

The next item on the meeting agenda would be to go around the room and ask the youth program directors what they need to provide effective mentoring relationships for needy youth. As these needs are listed on a large pad for all to see, it will be important for the convener to note repetition. Assume that more funding will be at the top of the list, but you will want to note what the money is needed for.

One may be sure that most of the program directors will report the need for more adult volunteers. Others may report the need for publicizing the problems facing today's youth, or the need for help in screening and training volunteers. The convener will need to be prepared to discuss and summarize what's been heard and to promise follow-up at the end of the

meeting. The meeting should end on a high, with all of those present enthusiastic about the potential for developing a mentor network which will benefit youth.

Those who attend this meeting should be asked to propose the names of other groups involved in mentoring. The process of building a network consists primarily of continuous oral and written communication with a continuously expanding group of people who feel bound together by a common vision.

Developing the vision…

The fifth step is to analyze the information which has been collected to gain a vision of what's needed for the future:

Along the continuum of youth development from early childhood to adulthood, what mentoring services are presently available for needy youths? Tutors for those falling behind in schoolwork? Stable friends for children in crisis? Group leaders for peer support groups? Recreation leaders? Career guides? Buddies at the work place? Assistance to select and apply for post secondary institutions? Sponsors for junior entrepreneurs? Sponsors for community service? Friends to track disadvantaged kids who appear to be potential dropouts?

Next, analyze what services are missing along the developmental continuum. Which of the existing programs could be bent and shaped and supplemented to fill the gaps? What are the common needs of the existing programs?

What resources would it take to satisfy those common needs? How many youths are being served by the existing programs? How many are on waiting lists? Have any of the waiting lists closed for lack of adult volunteers? How many of the community's needy youths remain untouched by any existing programs?

The vision for every community should be a full range of high quality mentoring services available for all needy youths along the developmental continuum from early childhood to adulthood.

Identifying the resources to make it happen…

The sixth step is to convene another meeting, expanded with more key players, to agree on the vision and begin identifying the resources needed to make it happen. The community leader selected to convene the network should communicate the vision as powerfully as possible … and ask for shared commitment. Some of the key players present at the meeting should be asked by the convener to express their excitement about the potential for community and youth development.

Then it's time to get down to brass tacks. What resources will be needed to achieve the vision?

■ A media campaign to recruit volunteers?
■ A campaign coordinator?
■ A central referral resource which guides both adults and youth to available programs?
■ Information about what's being done elsewhere which could be applied locally?
■ Interaction with youth serving agencies to plan expansion of existing programs?

As the needs are listed on one sheet, ideas about how to provide the resources should be listed on another. Avoid talking about the need for money until other ideas have been used up. Who knows someone in an advertising or public relations agency who might develop the recruitment campaign *pro bono*? Who is on the convening leader's staff who might act as campaign coordinator? Whose existing staff could be trained to provide referrals?

It may be that none of the needed resources can be provided without cost, but note that people value what they pay for. An organization buys into the vision when it invests its resources.

Developing and Implementing a Strategy...

For the seventh step, begin developing a strategy or action plan showing how the community's vision of a mentoring network might be fulfilled. Who needs to do what? When to move ahead? Which of the key players is willing to volunteer resources? What kind of budget is going to be needed?

This strategy should be reviewed and refined in the third and following meetings with the full group of key players, including potential donors if possible. Ideas about sources for funding should be discussed. The strategy should be written down in the form of grant proposals distributed by the convening leader to potential donors. Donors may include local government, corporations or foundations. To the greatest degree possible, the strategy should tap resources available on a long-term basis rather than counting on short-term start-up only.

It will be important to build performance objectives and a time line for performance, including the acquisition of resources, into the strategy. Resources should include expertise in evaluation.

Organizing the network...

For the eighth step, once the strategy has begun to take shape, it's time to begin developing an ongoing organization. What committees are needed to work on implementation of the strategy?
- Finance?
- Organization?
- Media?
- Implementation planning?
- Recruitment?
- Evaluation?

At some point, when the future of the network appears assured, it will be necessary to develop a long-term umbrella organization. For this step, the group should consider:
- Bylaws and/or articles of incorporation
- A name for the organization
- Appointment of a chairperson and officers
- Regular meeting schedule
- Decision-making format and all of the other aspects of a start-up organization.

Developing standards for performance...

A ninth step is to set standards. One important aspect of organizing is to consider how membership will be defined. What mentoring programs will be served by the organization? The network needs to consider standards for member programs. Every network should develop its own standards, but some guidelines are essential for all. For example, every member program must screen prospective volunteers, train mentors, monitor relationships, and provide information about performance for evaluation.

Standards will sharply reduce liability problems and build the kind of reputation for the organization that will attract donors and volunteers.

Keeping in touch with reality...

Finally, the tenth step is to keep in touch with the reality of the kids being served by the network. Start collecting anecdotes about the impact of mentor relationships. Avoid getting bogged down in organizational matters. The donors, the community leaders and the volunteers don't care about goals or strategies or organizational details. They are turned on by young people who have a new lease on life because of a mentor.

Good luck! It's worth it!

JAN HIVELY directs The Minneapolis Youth Trust, a community collaborative dedicated to preparing all of the young people growing up in Minneapolis to be productive workers and successful adults. A network of three dozen mentoring programs, the BUDDY SYSTEM, is an operating division of the YOUTH TRUST.