

Mentoring: A Little of Your Time Makes a Big Impact

Ernest Kent Coulter walked away from a promising career as a newspaperman to serve as clerk in the New York Children's Court. He was disturbed by the procession of juveniles streaming through the state's penal system. Time and again, he witnessed the same pattern: a youth got into trouble, was branded as a "bad" kid, got into more scrapes with the law, and eventually grew into an adult criminal.

In an effort to deal with ever-increasing numbers of repeat juvenile offenders, the Children Court's presiding judge persuaded 90 community leaders each to befriend one delinquent boy. Coulter noted the remarkable change that occurred as these friendships formed. Having access to a positive influence radically altered the behavior of the boys. Former juvenile delinquents transformed into model citizens.

Inspired by the success of the informal mentoring program, Coulter set out on a campaign to recruit more volunteers. Appearing before a gathering at New York's Central Presbyterian Church, he relayed the story of a young boy on the brink of being sent away to a detention center.

"There is only one possible way to save that youngster, and that is to have some earnest, true man volunteer to be his big brother. To look after him, to help him do right, to make the little chap feel that there is at least one human being in this great city who takes a personal interest in him, who cares whether he lives or dies."

His impassioned plea attracted 39 volunteers from the crowd. In short order, even more men signed up, prompting Coulter to found the Big Brothers mentoring movement in 1904. More than 100 years later, Big Brothers Big Sisters continues to mobilize volunteers to initiate one-on-one mentoring relationships with at-risk kids. Research has confirmed the positive value of mentoring. Youth with a Big Brother or Big Sister are 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, and 52% less likely to skip school.

Take Action:

The story behind the birth of the Big Brother movement illustrates the value of intentional mentoring relationships. When we actively engage in the life of another person our influence can have profound effects.

Option #1: Build an intentional, informal relationship with a person in need.

Brainstorm a list of people who could benefit from your friendship and guidance. Choose one person from the list you've made and be intentional about scheduling time with them over the next four months. Each month, devote at least one hour (above and beyond your usual interactions) to cultivating the relationship. Take them out for lunch or coffee, visit their cubicle regularly, etc. Strike up meaningful

conversation in which you can gain an understanding of their needs, and look for ways to offer support and encouragement.

Option #2: Volunteer as a mentor in your community.

Take advantage of mentoring opportunities at area schools, places of worship, or nonprofit organizations. Big Brother Big Sisters operates in all 50 states and has volunteer information on its website: www.bbbs.org.



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