

Attributes of a mentor

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BIG SANDY, Texas—When people use the word *mentor* as a noun, they often refer to a wise and trusted person who is viewed as a positive influence to help somebody's life. To *mentor* someone is to be a positive influence to help him.

The parent-child relationship is a natural mentor relationship. When children are younger, their parents seek to mentor them. As children grow older, other people enter their lives as mentors.

What about you? Do you have a mentor? Do you have someone who is guiding you through life?

What about this? Are you mentoring other people? Are there people whom you are guiding through life?

Bible examples

We see in the Bible that the apostle Paul had the opportunity to mentor other individuals.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian congregation about a man named Titus (2 Corinthians 8:16-23).

Paul wrote to the Philippian congregation about a man named Timothy (Philippians 2:19-23).

And we see that Paul wrote mentoring letters to those two men (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

Not only do we have the Bible to help us understand the mentoring process, we can find other books to add some excellent ideas as well.

Helpful book

Let me mention a book titled *Mentoring: The Strategy of the Master* (copyright 1991), written by Ron Lee Davis.

In his book Mr. Davis listed the following seven traits of a mentor.

- Tender toughness—Building with steel and velvet.
- The mentor and failure—Failure is as important as success.

- Integrity—You've got to walk your talk.
- Devotion—The prayer life of a mentor.
- Wisdom—A mentor at the crossroads.
- Motivation—Energizing others for service.
- Perseverance—The blessing of criticism.

Tender and tough

For the rest of this article, I spend a little time focusing on the tender-toughness concept.

On pages 71-80, Mr. Davis listed "The Seven Cardinal Rules of Tender-Tough Mentoring."

Rule No. 1: When you confront, be honest and direct.

Rule No. 2: When you confront, demonstrate unconditional love and acceptance.

Rule No. 3: When you confront, be specific. Never generalize.

Rule No. 4: When you confront, demonstrate empathy.

Rule No. 5: Build on the learner's strengths, gifts and character through positive encouragement.

Rule No. 6: Affirm in public, correct in private.

Rule No. 7: Build an allegiance to relationships, not to issues.

Steel and velvet

On page 84, Mr. Davis wrote the following words under the subhead "The Quintessential Man of Steel and Velvet."

"A man of steel, Jesus confronted the religious evil of His day. He called the corrupt religious leaders vipers, hypocrites, white-washed tombs full of dead bones. Like steel, He cleared the moneychangers out of the Temple. Like steel, he confronted Peter, told him he could be a rock, that he should be consistent, that he should stop wavering.

"Yet it was a man of velvet who wept over the death of His friend Lazarus. It was the velvet in the man that gave Him compassion for a woman caught in adultery. It was the velvet in Him that led Him to reach out to the little children who crowded around Him. It was the velvet in Him that compelled Him, just hours before the Cross, to kneel before His disciples and wash their feet.

"Our task as mentors is to imitate the Master Mentor, Jesus Himself. Our lives must be marked both with Christ's toughness and His tenderness, both His steel and His velvet. This means that those of us who are tender Christians will have to become a bit more tough, and those of us who are tough will have to learn a little more tenderness.

"The tender Christian who avoids building toughness into his or her life soon becomes little more than a weak sentimentalist. The tough Christian who has no use for tenderness inevitably hardens into a harshly critical Pharisee. To be Christlike mentors, we must have these complementary qualities in dynamic balance in our lives.

"If we are to be conformed into the image of Christ, we must allow Christ to mold and reshape our character. We must invite Him to put a reinforcing rod of steel into our backbone so that we can live out His strength. We must allow Him to reupholster our hard surfaces and rough edges with velvet so that we can live out His love and compassion.

"Even as we seek to mentor others, we must never cease to be learners at the feet of the Master Mentor Himself."

In conclusion

On page 203, Mr. Davis wrote: "A mentor is one who pours his life *into* others, and is willing even to pour his life out *for* others. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that a righteous person is one who lives for the next generation . . .

"Brought down to its essentials, mentoring is the process of investing our lives in those who come after us, beginning with our own children, and spreading out to all those men, women and young people God brings into our lives . . .

"Do you want to live on even after your death? Then, beginning today, live the life-style of a mentor."