

Mentor Leaders

Reflections On School Teachers

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

Last weekend I attended my daughter, Hayley's, high school graduation. I've been in a reflective mood since, thinking about how she's grown into an amazing, gifted young woman. But, I've also reflected on something else. In the graduation programs I heard many of her teachers speak. I was genuinely moved, not just by their eloquence and wisdom but also by their presence. There is much to learn about leadership from teachers. In Oprah's final show, she introduced and praised her grade 4 teacher, an early "liberator" who made her feel valued. And even the two American Idol finalists acknowledged the teachers who inspired them. Think about your own teachers. There are those who just meet the curriculum requirements and help you get into the next grade, while others inspire you, build your character, and mentor you to be a better person, not just a better student. And think about the bosses you've had. Some merely help you get your work done, some get in your way, but some change your life. Some help you be a better employee, while others help you be a better *person*. Hayley has had some amazing teachers over the years that have deeply impacted her. I wish all of them could have been there to see her graduate, to know the difference that they made.

How is it that some teachers are merely teachers, but others are leaders, mentors, and life-changers? And how is it that some bosses are merely bosses, while others influence and build your moral fibre, model and teach new attitudes and behaviors, and create a constructive legacy for future generations? It is this distinction that makes a "mentor leader."

While there are many leadership *practices* that amplify one's impact on others, "mentor leaders" possess three qualities of leadership that exemplify their *presence*:

1) Leaders who make a difference are authentic. They are human, and humble, and present. They also aren't perfect or attempt to create an illusion of perfection. To impact others, you can't be phony. People will see right through it. By being who they are, they create a space where others are inspired to also be authentic. Authentic people love what they do and are open to learning about themselves. They are inspired by a purpose and a passion, so their heart's in the game, and by being inspired, they inspire others.

2) Leaders who make a difference are accountable. They can be counted on and don't make promises they aren't prepared to keep. They create a place where blame is viewed as a waste of time. They have high standards, both for themselves and those around

them. It's inspiring to be around people you can count on. You aren't a leader until someone says you are, and you won't earn the credibility to influence and be trusted if people can't count on you.

3) Leaders who make a difference love. They genuinely care. They love their work and they love the people around them. They understand that leading is largely a matter of caring about people, not manipulating or controlling them. Leaders who love measure their success by the trust they build and the value they bring to the lives of people. Mentor leaders know that their work is a means to a higher end and put people above products and processes. It's about changing lives.

Seeing so many examples of such fine mentor leaders last weekend made me optimistic about our future leaders. Great leadership goes well beyond merely "getting the job done," and cannot be reduced to technique or position or power. Great leadership inspires others and comes from the strength of one's identity and integrity – their *presence*. When teachers possess this presence and inspire it in their students, we are truly fortunate to have them in our lives. When it happens at work and in our lives, we reach unimaginable potential.

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. David is the best selling author of five books. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact david@davidirvine.com or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).