

Become A Training Leader

By Dan Webster

As a leader do you ever wonder what exactly you should be teaching and modeling to those under your care? A retired United States nuclear submarine captain recently told me about his priorities in training young leaders. He shared with me how the findings of a study by Douglas Freeman had influenced his thinking and training. Freeman investigated the common traits of the best military leaders from both the north and south during the Civil War. From this study the former submarine captain told me he'd focus his freshmen leaders on three principles.

First, he'd teach a young leader to **be a man** -- manage your life so others will respect you. Second, he'd tell them to **know your stuff** -- have both well-developed skills and also understand your wounds and the down side of your personality and how it can hurt you, the team and the mission. Third, he'd stress, **take care of your men** -- love the people under your command.

This is great counsel for a youth worker too. The goal of our training should be to see three transformations take place in us first and then pass them on to those we train and disciple.

The first place of growth is for each of us to **become men and women**. Grow up and mature is the admonition. Every day face all of life as an opportunity to develop as a person and Christ follower. Make decisions that are right, not easy. *'Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.'* (I Timothy 4:7) Don't tolerate the attitude of our day that simply floats through life and ends up with marginal character. Don't settle for anything less than a fully developed personality and character. As Socrates said, *"Let him that would move the world, first move himself."*

Are you setting an example for your students by being obsessed with your own growth and spiritual maturity?

Do they take you seriously as a mentor because of your example?

The second focus is that we should each **know our stuff**. This challenge fascinates me. We both know that we must develop our skills...i.e. know our youth culture 'stuff' to be effective. That's not what I want you to think about here. What I do want you to consider is how important knowing our "stuff" is if we want to be a part of the healing that's so desperately needed in students today. Why is knowing 'my stuff' so important?

The increasing presence of emotional and spiritual wounds in the lives of students is a daily reality for you as a youth worker. You know it -- you see it. The seeds of warped worldviews planted over the last thirty years are bearing a frightening crop of deviance, deception, cruelty and pessimism. We daily watch families disintegrate before our eyes. Just yesterday a man I mentor told me of a

14 year old girl he'd rescued from a step dad who was 'grooming her' for sexual abuse. She'd already been emotionally abused for months. You daily attempt to love students who are victims and participants of unspeakable actions and activities. Barely a day goes by without your heart being broken by one more sad story.

You notice self-destructive behavior in your students. You see kids establish weird attachments to other kids that result in hurt. You have girls in your ministry who struggle with eating disorders. How about guys and pornography and their twisted view of sex and intimacy? Are any of your students unconsciously sabotaging their futures by their negative and self-destructive attitudes and they don't even know why? Are they attracted to activities and ideologies that reinforce their self-hate? Our students need healing in their minds, souls, spirits and bodies.

I believe that a youth worker becomes a powerful force for healing when they deal with their own 'stuff.' Walking into your heart and allowing Jesus to confront and touch those parts of you that need grace and healing will give you the authority you need as a healing youth worker.

Where is that place in you that needs the healing touch of God?

What steps should you take to get it healed?

The last admonition is to **love your men (and women)**. We know that we are to...*pursue love (I Cor. 14:1)...let all that you do be done in love (I Cor. 16:14)...now abide faith hope and love, but the greatest of these is love (I Cor. 13:13)*. When our programs and strategy aren't working, love always has and always will work. Giving ourselves up to meet the real needs of students manifests the love of God. Students learn to love by being recipients of our love. Those we remember are those who have loved us.

If I were to ask your students would they say they have felt love from you this last week?

When you put your head on the pillow tonight who will have felt loved by you today?

This is good advice from an old captain. Be wise enough to apply it in your thinking and training in the area of leadership. Stay focused on investing and growing the young leaders around you. Don't ever forget they are God's hope for the next generation.