



Harness Your Power as a Mentor

By Patricia Omoqui

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Many of us find ourselves both formally and informally playing roles as mentors to people in our lives--to kids in the community, to co-workers and to people who report to us at work. Some of us even join formal mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters so that we can mentor young men and women. But how many of us have ever attended training on How To Be an Outstanding Mentor? Not many, in fact, probably only a handful of us have ever received any training at all in the art of mentorship. As mentors we jump into our roles and do our best to provide support to our mentees and show that we care. If we are going to invest time in mentoring people in our lives, why not take the time to learn ideas and techniques that will allow us to harness our power as mentors?

I had the privilege of having an outstanding mentor in high school. Through observing my mentor, I got a first hand look at the powerful impact a mentor can have on someone's life. I want to share two key elements that will enable you to become an outstanding mentor: Hold the vision of possibility for your mentee and accept your mentee completely, just as they are.

At 16 years of age, with parents recently separated, emotional upheaval in my life and a move across states from Indiana to Pennsylvania, I entered Souderton High School. It was already a few months into the school year as I started my sophomore year at Souderton. The experience was overwhelming for me in many ways - I had only ever been in private schools and I found myself lost in the crowd in this enormous public high school. I had missed girls' volleyball season that year which was a tremendous disappointment to me. I had no friends and I felt lost in the chaos of my home life.

Little did I know how significant this school and life change would be for me. A short, older man approached me one day in the hallway and asked me the following question: "Have you ever played basketball?" The thought had never crossed my mind to even pick up a basketball. I had been involved in other sports but volleyball was my love and my sole focus. But Coach Price offered me a unique opportunity, "You are welcome to join the girls' basketball team. I see you have potential and I invite you to try out this season." I had never shot a basketball at that point in my life. But I told him I'd consider it.

I rationalized to myself that it couldn't hurt to give basketball a try because it would at

least be something different to do and it would be a way to keep in physical condition. So, I showed up to the tryouts knowing nothing about the game.

Coach Price held a vision in his mind of a girl who had capacity to learn the game of basketball. He saw athletic ability, height and he was willing to hold the vision for me that I could become a basketball player. A spark ignited inside me those first few months of practice and games. Basketball was in my blood - I hadn't known this. I huffed and puffed down the floor the first few games - my mom still says to this day that my face was so red she thought I was going to have a stroke because I was breathing so hard. But Coach Price could see through the fatigue, the lack of conditioning, the absence of basic skills - he could see the potential I had for greatness in the game. He saw the vision. He held the vision for me. He saw a space of possibility for me that I never could have envisioned for myself.

As I progressed in my skill levels, he would keep challenging me to take my skills a step further. He knew it was up to me and to my passion for the game to put the work in, but if I was willing to give it some effort, he was willing to work with me and mentor me as a person both on and off the court. As I grew, his vision of possibility for me expanded. In my first year of playing, he saw that it was feasible that in my three year career I could end-up being the first girls' 1000 point scorer in Souderton high school history. He saw this vision before anyone else. He opened up the space for me to see it too. Coach Price saw that I could have a ticket to my education if I could maintain the passion and tenacity for the game that he saw inside me. So, he mentioned to me an idea of going to a basketball recruiting camp to see if college scouts might have interest in me.

Coach Price was my mentor - my biggest supporter, my biggest fan, and the visionary for my basketball career. That day in the hallways of Souderton High school that he took the time to approach me changed the course of my entire life. A mentor sees a person where they are right now, but envisions the greatness inside that person before he or she can see it for himself. Each of us as mentors has the opportunity to hold the vision of greatness for our mentee. We can see beyond where our mentee is in the path of their life and imagine for them the possibilities that are available to them. You are powerful in your role as a mentor. You are the visionary. You plant the seed of possibility inside your mentee's heart.

Next, you water that seed with Acceptance of who your mentee is as a person. Coach Price and I had seemingly little in common - he was 40 years older than I was, he was a man, he was much shorter than I was, he was from a different "era" than I was. He didn't know all about me or claim to know. But, as my mentor, he met me where I was in my life. He accepted me for where I was. He listened and heard me as a person. He was not so wrapped up in his vision for me that he could not see that at that point, I needed a mentor who could listen as my friend both on and off the court. He took the time to understand the intricacies and difficulties of my family situation. He was empathetic and

caring when I'd break down in practice because of the volatility I experienced in my relationship with my dad. He accepted me. When I was with Coach, I knew that he cared, he would not judge me-- he would only meet me where I was at that point in my life. He opened his heart and made me feel at ease. He was genuine in his expressions of care. He was patient with me when I cycled through the emotions of my parent's divorce and my high-school insecurities.

Coach didn't know exactly how it would pan out the day he asked me if I wanted to join the girl's basketball team. But, because of his vision and acceptance and of course, some of my hard work, it turned out extremely well: I did become the first 1,000 point scorer in Souderton Girl's basketball. I played on the women's team at Princeton University where I was captain my junior and senior years as well as MVP. I then went on to play professionally in Brazil, England and Sweden.

I have experienced first hand the importance and the Power of an Outstanding Mentor and Coach. Each of us as mentors in formal or informal capacities in our lives and careers can raise our mentoring game and become exceptional if we focus in on these two simple, but profound aspects of POWER as mentors: Hold the vision of possibility for what our mentee can achieve and Accept completely the person we are mentoring. Those we mentor are people full of hidden gifts and talents who can choose paths of greatness in their lives.

I close with a piece I wrote entitled, The Power of a Mentor. Post this poem by your desk at work or on your fridge. Let it remind you of how important your role is as a mentor. Mentoring is a tremendous contribution you can give to the World. Know your power today as a mentor. Step into that power-in doing so, your impact on another person's life may be greater than you could ever imagine.

The Power of a Mentor

The power of One who
Sees beyond where I am right now
Knowing how remarkable my journey on Earth can be

The power of One
Who accepts and embraces me as I am
Taking time to know who I am
Beyond outward appearances

The power of One
Who shows me I am strong
That I can go on and grow beyond
My current circumstances

Reaching heights I had never even thought of

The power of One
Who plants a seed, a dream in my heart
A seed of possibility

The power of One
Who through listening and conversing with me as a friend
Waters this seed of possibility
With hope, love, care and calm

The power of One
Whose shoulders I stand on to begin the next chapter of my journey
Learning from the gems of wisdom shared with me
So I avoid pitfalls, mistakes, and stay on my path

The power of One
Who is defined as...

A mentor.

I am a mentor.
I am power
I am the One
I am the leader of new generations
I am the inspiration
Of remarkable achievements, grand ideas,
I am the One who
With my spark
Lights the world on fire with change, with greatness
With contributions that will leave a mark on this planet

I am the One
Who invests myself in others
It is I
Who accept this calling
To create change in my world
By simply being love, being acceptance
Being peace, being joy
And creating a vision in this next generation

I am power. I am One who is a Mentor.

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