Empowering Youth To Internalize Positive Behavior

As a teacher and training facilitator, I have witnessed a countless number of youths go through high-school, employability programs and career training successfully. After the successful completion of these education and training programs some students returned home, others went on to obtain additional training or college. The question I pose to anyone reading this article is, **"Do these young people believe they have experienced change?"**

Society uses the word, "**change**" loosely. Many of us believe that we have gone through the process of change only to be rudely awakened to the fact that **we have modified our behavior to fit our present environment**. Some people feel as though they have changed as a result of achieving a certain level of social status, obtaining a high paying job, receiving a degree or purchasing a home.

We equate achievement, awards and acquisition to change.
We equate achievement, awards and acquisition to success.

From my perspective, the **addition** of a career, car, house, cash, etc. is not the most accurate measure of change or success because **we can acquire these items without changing (or transforming) internally**.

Addition is accomplishment. ~ Mr. Cage

Sometimes addition is not advancement, sometimes it is accomplishment. At times, we are more focused on what we do (**accomplishment**) rather than focusing on who we are and who we are becoming (**identity**). **Accomplishments can affirm our identity but are not the origin of our identity**. When we teach youth (**through conversation and demonstration**) to rely solely on incentive-based (**extrinsic reward**) accomplishments, we position them to become victims of external circumstances because adolescents have the tendency to modify their behavior to the present environment to receive external recognition and affirmation. The result is an externalizing of positive behavior to get (**extrinsic reward through accomplishment**), not the internalizing of positive behavior to become (**intrinsic reward through identity**).

Why is helping youth internalize positive behavior important?

If positive behaviors are not internalized by our youth, the best we can hope for from them is behavior modification (**BM**). In this article we define (**BM**) as behavior patterns that conform to external stimuli (**people and places**). When our students leave the external stimuli, their behavior returns to its original state. They become actors and actresses that act (**or play**) the role instead of **becoming** the role.

Behavior modification leaves young people subject to and at the mercy of their present environment.

A lack of intentional effort in cultivating a teenager's self-esteem (**from the inside-out**) can lead them down a path of constructing a life focused on performance (**playing the role**) rather than building a life centered on the substance of character (**becoming the role**).

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For example, when a child is placed in an environment where high expectations, rules and discipline are consistently demonstrated and enforced, the child adapts to this environment. Conversely, when a child is taken out of the previous environment and placed in an environment where there is a lack of the three (**high expectations, rules and discipline**), the child conforms to his/her present environment.

As a personal testimony, I've witnessed several of my former students from the city of Chicago become victims of violence, murder and living beneath their full potential because they **left some of the most valuable lessons in the building where the lessons were taught**. When there is no application and reinforcement of the lessons learned, the confidence needed to demonstrate positive behaviors in various environments lies dormant.

To Be Continued…

YOU CANNOT BE MAD AT THE WIND IF YOUR HOUSE IS BUILT ON SAND.

MR. CAGE