



## **The Importance of Mentoring**

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*January 2014*

In Present World we are witnessing an abandonment of our young people -routinely dismissed as a hormone-charged, irrational, and narcissistic cohort. Most adolescents are delivered to impersonal and developmentally inappropriate middle schools, while society anxiously awaits their emergence from this untamed 'adolescence' phase. Meanwhile, our grey-haired and experienced generation, those members of society long regarded as the best equipped to guide and mentor youth through our species' long history, are stowed away in retirement centers. These long-lived elders, with stories and lessons untold, are shelved without obvious purpose, dumped in prison-like nursing homes where they sit by the dusty window awaiting a dignified death.

In Present World, among industrialized peoples, we have largely lost the long-practiced artform of 'mentoring.' In the absence of guiding elders who can mentor youth across the threshold to adulthood, peers seek mentoring from peers. This model of peer-mentoring has never worked, because the ordeals youth orchestrate for one another, the trials they devise to initiate themselves into adulthood, lack the wisdom and structure informed by adult experience and insight. Peer initiations are impractical, unsafe, and yet inevitable in the absence of mentors. Rick behavior is a global epidemic among youth, with such behaviors impacting all demographics.

The role of teacher, neighbor, uncle, and community member, must be reconceptualized to invite the 'mentor' back into the lives of all adults, to re-awaken this natural artform in their daily interactions with youth. Young people need adults who listen, who see them, and who welcome their unique gifts. In the act of mentoring, adults not only awaken the genius in the young person, they re-awaken their own genius. The artform of mentoring calls forth an intuitive capacity in 'olders,' birthing the 'elder' they are meant to be. We refer to it as 'genius to genius mentoring.'

In schools, we have to begin to teach towards something that is coming out of the child, rather than something we feel we must feed into the child. We have to reorient our thinking towards the flow out of the child, as something we will not only see and recognize, welcome and embrace, but also nurture, build and develop in the child. This is a very different paradigm, because it is not longer out agenda, but a belief that the child has an agenda already though it hasn't been found, discovered, embraced, accepted, welcomed, and articulated by the mentors. And part of our job as a mentor is to see the child as that gift to the world, which we are called upon to carefully unpack. We must structure our curriculum to bring it forth. And we must be willing to develop the unique capacities for each child with which they will be best able to express their individual gifts.



Mentoring is not a luxury, it is a mandate and a right. Youth are born more fully into themselves when they are carried, guided, questioned, and supported by the mentors who believe in their gifts.

Any healthy environment for middle and high-school aged youth must carry a strong commitment to mentoring into all of the systems developed therein.