

Essay – The Power of Role Models

The Power of Role Models by Sara - Georgetown, Kentucky

My junior year in high school I was asked to join the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program at a local elementary school. My first thought was that it would look good on a college application and resume, so I signed up. I got paired with a young girl who was repeating the second grade again. She was very quiet and wouldn't look at me. I tried to talk to her and help her with her homework, but she rarely responded. After about two months of trying to be friendly and loving toward her, she finally cracked a smile and opened up. I asked her why she never did her homework and why she had so much. She told me that she didn't have anyone to help her. She came from a single-parent family and her mother worked two jobs. So I thought to myself that this was my opportunity to be a role model to her. After two years of spending one hour a week with her I saw so much improvement in just one little girl's life. She finally made eye contact with people, her academics were excelling, not to mention her attitude towards life was positive. Though I don't think that she changed just because of me, I do believe that by having a role model her life started to change.

Joseph Joubert, a French writer, tells us that "Children need models rather than critics." A lot of times people point out to children what they are doing wrong and scolding them, rather than showing them what is right. Studies show that children who are involved in Big Brothers/Big Sisters are 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, and are more likely to get along with their families and peers. Who knew a role model could save a child's life? Many people have heard of the famous NBA basketball player, Raymond Felton, who plays for the Charlotte Bobcats. He is a big brother in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. What a role model he can be for his little brother he was placed with, as well as other children.

It has been said that "True role models are those who possess the qualities that we would like to have and those who affected us in a way that makes us want to be better people." I think this statement is very true. It reminds me of the philosophy of Tiger Woods. The famous golfer started a foundation called the Tiger Woods Foundation. He promotes both golf and non sport activities for disadvantaged children. Though he tries to help them with their golf game, he also wants to try to help them become better people. He has affected so many children from all over and so many children look up to him. Though when I say the word "role model," the first person to pop in your head might be a celebrity, such as your favorite basketball player or favorite actress, there are also everyday role models. One of my biggest role models is my parents. They have set such a great example for me and I respect them so much.

I strongly believe in the power of role models. It is estimated that 90-95% of all human behaviors are learned through modeling. Almost every action that we take is being watched. It isn't only by what we say; modeling is also picked up by non-verbal communication. Actions speak louder than words. I want to leave you with a thought by Robert Fulgham, an American author. "Don't worry that children never listen to you. Worry that they are always watching you."

For Discussion or Writing:

1. Give examples of Sarah's attribute of patience, which she proves in her work with the second grader.
2. Sara's patience paid off in what ways?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the quote in this essay: "Children need models rather than critics." Tell why.
4. What are role models?
5. Do you believe in role models as a powerful influence? Why or why not?