

Mentorship

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As middle school students graduate and prepare to enter high school, I urge them to seek good mentors. These students might be puzzled by the word "mentor", but they already have been mentors. At The Principled Academy, they have been "reading buddies" to younger students, accompanied them on field trips, and tutored some of them. As part of our Character Education focus of the school, students greet each other in the morning assembly by saying, "Good morning, brothers and sisters." We want students to feel like a family where we are all committed to each other and care about each other - the basis of mentoring.

Business and management professionals use the term and practice of mentoring frequently to enhance the effectiveness of employees, who become more valuable for a company. But originally, the term "mentor" had moral implications, to help someone develop the potential of moral strengths. Gregory Nagy, a classics professor at Harvard, explains that in Homer's *Odyssey*, "Menos" means mental strength. The goddess Athena works through Mentor to give moral strength to a weak-willed Telemachus.

The teachers at The Principled Academy seek to provide academic knowledge to students but also try to develop their moral or ethical character. Since many of our students participate in sports, I suggest they read a book like John Wooden's *A Game Plan for Life: The Power of Mentoring*. Wooden was the winningest coach in college basketball history. Numerous people asked Wooden the secret of his success. He responded by saying, "I sought to teach those boys about more than basketball. I wanted to teach them how to live."

He wanted the players to develop their skills through disciplined practice, to respect their opponents, and to maintain dignity on and off the basketball court. He saw this behavior modeled by the most important person in his life: his father. "He showed me love, kindness, gentleness, responsibility, and peace of mind." The most important mentors in our life are usually found in our family as they mentor by example, more powerful than just words.

Wooden was also mentored by good books, where he could read about noble figures in history, and model his behavior on the best of the past. He writes about such figures as Mother Teresa and Abraham Lincoln, and explains about their influence on his life.

Needless to say, we need to find mentors who will bring out the best in our lives. I look back at my past and how I was attracted to charismatic or brilliant people in college. Yet, as I learned more about them I found little true virtue or good character. To return to our graduates: seek and ye shall find. It takes discrimination and a certain amount of self-knowledge, humility, and courage to find good mentors. We develop our knowledge and moral character learning from the past and the present. There is always something or someone who can help us develop the best of who we can be.