

**TRAILBLAZERS!**  
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*“Those who have a mentor in life are truly fortunate. The path of mentor and disciple is one that leads to personal development and growth. Those without a mentor may appear free and un beholden to anyone, but without a solid standard or model on which to base themselves their lives will be aimless and wandering.”*  
(Faith into Action, p. 234)

Currently, I work as a teen counselor in Oklahoma City. Many of my clients look to me as their mentor. As a counselor I’ve found that most of the youth that I talk with have very few mentors. Mentors are very important. I remember growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y.; I had no real goals or dreams other than to be a professional athlete. My mother, a single parent with two children, always encouraged me to practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. It took several years before I got the courage to chant, and about a year after that I started to read SGI President Ikeda’s guidance. The more I read his guidance, the more I started to feel as if he was talking directly to me. How wonderful! I began to go through all sorts of obstacles and, without fail, each time I picked up the *World Tribune*, there was President Ikeda telling me to stand up and keep fighting. I had found a mentor who I could follow. I began to dream the impossible dream.

The youth I work with are like I was — poor and without many dreams. As a counselor I learned the most effective way to lead young people to become self-directed. My discovery was partly due to my experiences, but while chanting for the wisdom to be effective in my new profession, I picked up the *World Tribune*. “It is important to have compassion to respond to person’s needs and situations, to give considered thought to how you can best help him or her and then take appropriate action. Wisdom comes from compassion” (2/24/96 *World Tribune*, p. 7).

Recently I have been reading a book by Arthur Levine and Jana Nidiffer entitled *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get into College*. This book describes how 24 college students escaped poverty through the compassion of a caring adult mentor. *Beating the Odds* describes the mentors as being people from various backgrounds but sharing four common attributes: “a common worldview about the value of hard work, a belief in education as a central ingredient in success, a sense of bi-culturalism, and a belief that they can make a difference.”

I am determined that every client who walks into my office will walk out with a smile and a new outlook on life. To be looked upon as a mentor is a great honor. Mentors bring hope to those who need encouragement and direction in life. Let’s all mentor someone!