

## The positive impact of mentors and role models

Written by Timothy Houston  
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*"Georgia changed my way of thinking about truth... You gave me the reason, and the root... Taught me, in order to be a man... I needed to see a man... Gave me the spiritual guidance I so needed, and pleaded that I didn't repeat the cycles that I had seen repeated... I want to thank you for the lessons, and blessing that you bestowed upon me... I hope that I can someday be the man you want me to be... I'm on my way... Bottom dollar you can bet... Because God is not done with me yet..." Eric Braylock*

My nephew wrote the poem above to shine light on the impact I had on his life when he came to live with me for 6 months when he was 16. Now at 40 and a mentor and role model himself, Eric is an inspiration to me because of his self-determination to win in this battle we call life. What is a mentor? What is a role model? How do they differ?

What is a mentor? A mentor is a trusted counselor or guide who directs an individual through their development in a career, educational pursuit or other personal challenge. The mentor's goal is to help the mentee build the skills and discipline necessary to succeed without continued assistance. The mentor/mentee relationship is hands-on and personal. The mentor helps the mentee both with concrete, skill-related and psychological guidance, usually focusing on developing the mentee's self-esteem and habits of responsibility and accountability.

What is a role model? A role model is a person whose behavior, examples, or success can be emulated by others, especially by younger people. The ways in which we self-identify are called "roles." These include gender, professional and religious identities. They also include less apparent self-expectations, such as how a person of a certain age, social standing, or skill set should behave. We look to the role model to determine how a person in a similar role should conduct themselves. Individually, we identify role models as people whom we recognize as having a role in common with us, and they are usually more established in that role than we are.

What is the difference between a role model and a mentor? While a role model and a mentor are both people that individual look up to as examples of how to behave or excel, there are some differences. The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is personal, usually face-to-face and one-on-one. The mentor is invested in the mentee and has made a commitment to guide and assist them. On the other hand, a role model may not even know the

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person who seeks to emulate him or her. Even if they do, the relationship is not reciprocal. The individual may admire the role model and attempt to imitate their behavior, but the role model does not actively connect with the individual. The mentor/mentee relationship has the advantage of being a real interaction, rather than a psychological concept in the person's mind. An individual with a mentor has both a role model and a personal guide.

We need both role models and mentors in our lives. I am glad that my nephew continues to see me as a mentor, and I know that he is aspiring to be a role model for others. It is great to know that the mentee becomes the mentors, and role models can be family members and those in our immediate circle.

*Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. To get copies of his books, for questions, comments or more information, go to [www.tlhouston.com](http://www.tlhouston.com).*