Know About Rites of Passage (ROP), But Didn’t Know To Ask: How To Implement A ROP/Mentoring Project

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“It takes a village to raise a child” African proverb

This is predicated on the premise that healthy villages and communities exist. They do, yet my experience was (and is) that in America they are the exception rather than the rule.

Youth do not develop in a vacuum, they develop in unhealthy villages and communities that we as adults are responsible for allowing to exist (Some, 1993).
THE BEGINNING

• A personal desire to emulate the order, ritual and ceremony of traditional African Rites of Passage and in the process empower a generation

• A passion to develop a program to confront the feelings of hopelessness, self-hatred, cultural confusion and moral uncertainty that plagued African-American youth in Philadelphia

• Initial focus on African-American males
WHAT IS A RITE OF PASSAGE?

• A rite of passage is a social ritual which marks a change-transition-transformation in consciousness, character and community. During the process, a door of new awareness opens and expanded possibilities and horizons are envisioned.

• It is (traditionally) an organized system designed to indicate mastery of a particular level of life.

• In our culture, rites of passage fills the gap between formal education and home training.
B.U.I.L.D. EXPLAINED

- Birth of Unique Individuals Lessens Delinquency (B.U.I.L.D.) is a contemporary rites of passage/mentoring project. It consists of a comprehensive three-phase prevention/intervention program that utilizes a wellness foundation, designed to develop consciousness, confidence, competence, commitment and character as well as to instill a sense of self, history and community.

- The addition of mentors, who agree to a one-year commitment, increases the potential for youth to maintain project gains.
B.U.I.L.D.’S GOAL

- B.U.I.L.D. uses a teaching-trying-training model to promote its three-fold goal:
  - Immediate goal (teaching)—an increase in information that results in positive attitude and behavior changes
  - Intermediate goal (trying)—an application of that information which results in a mindset change
  - Ultimate goal (training)—a knowledge base + habit-forming implementation that results in permanent conduct change
WHY IMPLEMENT A ROP?

• The rites of passage organizes life into stages and ensures that we attend to significant events fully.
• The rites-of-passage ceremony is a source of affirmation for the young and provide the community with the opportunity to express love, pride and respect for its youth.
• Through rites of passage the young learn that there is always a correct path and in the event that they make a wrong turn, they have a community that values them as members and will help them find the way back.
ADOLESCENCE EXPLAINED

- Havighurst’s (1972) 8 developmental tasks:
  - accepting one’s physique and using the body effectively
  - achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults
  - achieving a masculine or feminine social role
  - achieving new and more mature relations with peers (both sexes)
  - desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior
  - acquiring a set of values and an ethical system to guide behavior
  - preparing for an economic career
  - preparing for marriage and family life
IMPEDIMENTS TO DEVELOPMENT

• Lack of commitment to the youth’s education, personal growth and career preparation.

• Lack of social policy focused on empowering healthy and capable young people with critical thinking skills, a sense of purpose, economic opportunities, high expectations and significant social support.

• Lack of cooperation between home, school and community.
WHAT WE (AGENCIES) MISS

“Why, I feel so tall within-I feel as if the power of a nation is within me!” Sojourner Truth, 1878

• What youth need versus what we need
• Strength-based approach
• Tailor-made interventions
NEGATIVE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ADOLESCENTS

- They need fixing
- Targeting deficits/preventing serious behaviors = preparation
- They are poor investments
- They do not desire to become contributing members of society
POSITIVE APPROACHES TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

• Recognize their many developing selves
• View them as resources versus problems
• Provide them with opportunities and reasons to build attachments to positive social institutions
• Look at program context AND content
• Recognize the importance of engagement
• Seek to meet needs AND build competencies
HOW EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS EMPOWER YOUTH

• In a word: CARING

• In the research literature, caring is a protective factor separate and distinct from high expectations and opportunities for participation. It is the essential quality that underlies the development of social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future.

• Pittman and Cahill (1992) state that it is not the activities that capture the essence of successful youth programs as much as it is the environment offered. They break caring down into four components:

• Caring as NURTURING is to provide consistent support, comfort and attention to basic needs
EFFECTIVE ORGS (CONT)

• Caring as HEALING and TREATMENT is to provide adequate identification and treatment of problems and amelioration of unhealthy circumstances

• Caring as EMPOWERMENT is to provide development of young people’s sense of independence, control and mastery; and assistance in understanding, analyzing, and engaging in the immediate and larger environments in which they live

• Caring as DEVELOPMENT is to provide clear expectations and resources to help young people develop competencies in academic, vocational, social, civic, and health areas
Caring is established in four ways:

• Creating environments in which young people feel welcome, respected and comfortable, and where they are offered legitimate choices for participation

• Structuring opportunities for the development of sustained, personal and collaborative relationships with adults and peers

• Providing information, counseling, and expectations that enable young people to define what it means to care for themselves, by focusing on health issues, risk avoidance, coping skills, assertiveness skills, and life planning, as well as what it means to care for a definable group, by focusing on respect for others, conflict resolution, teamwork and leadership skills
EFFECTIVE ORGS (CONT)

• Providing opportunities, training, and expectations that encourage young people to contribute to the greater good through service, advocacy, philanthropy, and active problem-solving on important issues
HOW TO IMPLEMENT AN EFFECTIVE ROP

- Recognizing the need
  The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential declares the current lack of rites of passage an urgent global problem: “the absence of rites of passage leads to a serious breakdown in the process of maturing as a person. Young people are unable to participate in society in a creative manner because societal structures no longer consider it their responsibility to intentionally establish the necessary marks of passing from one age-related social role to another. The result is that society has no clear expectation of how people should participate in these roles and therefore individuals do not know what is required by society” (Grimes, 2000)

- Recognizing the experiences of the participants
- Scrutinizing selection of and providing adequate training for facilitators
THE THREE PHASES

• Phase I - The Ten Rites
• Phase II - The Community Project
• Phase III - The Passage Ceremony
RITE I: SPIRITUAL

“During my 87 years I have witnessed a whole succession of technological revolutions; but none of them has done away with the need for character in the individual, or the ability to think.” Financier Bernard Baruch

• Why We Do It: to teach the importance of understanding one’s essence; to explore issues of meaning, value and purpose

• How we do it: by posing life-defining questions, such as “Who am I?” “Where does my motivation lie?” “What fuels/drains me?” “What really matters to me? “What is the spirit of my speech?”

• Speaker

• Experiential Activity
RITE II: PERSONAL/INDIVIDUAL

“The real challenge is not simply to survive. ... anyone can do that. It’s to survive as yourself, undiminished.”

Director Elia Kazan

- **Why We Do It:** to stress the importance and power of self-esteem, positive thinking and mindfulness, to develop skills, as well as to impart the step-by-step process of becoming a uniquely empowered person.

- **How We Do It:** develop and record a life mission statement; write your autobiography; explore strengths

- **Speaker**

- **Experiential Activity**
RITE III: PHYSICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL

Everyone is the age of their heart.

Guatemalan Proverb

• Why We Do It: to teach the importance of maintaining a healthy, pure body, as well as clean, safe home and community surroundings

• How We Do It: defining “beauty”; protection of physical “gates”; teaching sound nutritional practices, including not-quite eating disorders; promoting socially responsible activities that protect the environment

• Speaker

• Experiential Activity
RITE IV: EMOTIONAL

“In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer. Writer Albert Camus

- Why We Do It: to teach youth the role of their emotions, how to be aware of and regulate them
- How We Do It: explore positive emotions to encourage and negative ones to guard against; understand and process the “whys” of emotions; understand how to handle stress and loss
- Speaker
- Experiential Activity
RITE V: SOCIAL/RELATIONAL

“All is pattern, all life, but we can’t always see the pattern when we are part of it.” Writer Belva Plain

- **Why We Do It:** to teach about appropriate social interactions; practicing empathy and active listening, caring for others and being open to others’ caring; demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the common good of the community, the state and the nation.

- **How We Do It:** define different types of relationships; pursuing friendships/relationships; sex/sexuality

- **Speaker**

- **Experiential Activity**
RITE VI: HISTORICAL

“If I have seen further… it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants” Sir Isaac Newton

• Why We Do It: to teach youth about World History and their place in it
• How We Do It: explore historical facts, dispel historical myths
• Speaker
• Experiential Activity: prepare genealogy with accompanying family tree; shadowing, apprenticeships
RITE VII: CULTURAL

- “Normal is a cycle on a washing machine” Singer Emmylou Harris
- Why We Do It: to teach what “culture” is; increase sense of belonging and tolerance; increase understanding of diversity
- How We Do It: exploring different cultures, with roles and traditions
- Speaker
- Experiential Activity: Form a “Culture Club” (pen pals)
RITE VIII: PHILOSOPHICAL/POLITICAL

“Moderation. Small helpings. Sample a little bit of everything. These are the secrets of happiness and good health.” Chef Julia Child

Why We Do It: to familiarize the youth with the local, state, national and international political processes

• How We Do It: teach the structure and functions of government, contemporary forms, levels and divisions of government; development and changes in political systems; electoral processes

• Speaker

• Experiential Activity
RITE IX: EDUCATIONAL

“Our only purpose in life is growth. There are no accidents.” Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

- Why We Do It: to stress the importance of mental stimulation, creativity, preparation and education, as well as to decrease truancy and dropouts due to school difficulty, poor grades, and low expectations regarding achievement

- How We Do It: “What is potential?” explore different learning styles and potential obstacles to formal education; explore how life principles affect life practice

- Speaker

- Experiential Activity
RITE X:
VOCATIONAL/FINANCIAL

“...If you have to make a mistake, it’s better to make a mistake of action than one of inaction. If I had the opportunity again, I would take chances.” Director Federico Fellini

- Why We Do It: to teach about all possible career choices as well as the management of finances
- How We Do It: explore principles of saving, managing and investing money; career vs. job; vocational views; the role of giving in your finances
- Speaker:
- Experiential Activity: outing to local bank
PHASE II: COMMUNITY PROJECT

• This project is developed and designed by the youth with guidance/input of facilitators.
• Minimally, 2 months in duration
• Examples of previous projects
PHASE III
PASSAGE CEREMONY

• This is a celebration of the accomplishments of moving from TEACHING through TRYING to TRAINING and assignment of mentors.