

# Mentors Make the Difference

*The benefits of having a leader come alongside to achieve greater results*

*By Dwight Bain, NCC, Founder of the LifeWorks Group of Counselors & Coaches*

Last week I was honored to spend some time with Dr. Elmer Towns, co-founder of Liberty University, and a man who mentored me during graduate school. It was a great experience to catch up with an old friend, made even better because I could introduce him to Sheila and our teenage children. It was a blessing to hear this mentor to so many, sit and spend time talking to our kids about the value of having godly leaders who come alongside to invest in your life. While you may never have heard of Elmer Towns, so many things I do to help people today, I learned by watching him interact and mentor others back then.

When I met this man over 25 years ago I had no idea how much he would impact my future. There is an old saying I heard once that said, *“When the student is ready, the teacher will come.”* Often times you may not realize the tremendous value brought by the leaders around you, or the great opportunities to learn from them. Yet, if you are motivated and seeking direction, I believe that God will send someone with answers your way. If you have a student mindset to learn more- a mentor will come- you just have to be prayerfully watching. Here are some tips to help you in that process.

## **Who could be a mentor?**

Mentors can come from many places- coaches, teachers, pastors, employers, grandparents or coworkers. I've benefited from the personal mentoring of men like Jerry Falwell, Steve Brown, Pat Williams, Dave Hurd, John Maxwell, Joe Christiano and Elmer Towns. However, you can also be mentored through a process I call, *'mentoring one step removed,'* where you regularly study the teaching of a leader through books, audio, video or podcast messages. Media can give you a lot of value from a mentor, and is a good start, yet it misses the importance of face to face contacts and accountability to stay focused. Mentors are committed to helping you grow into the person you were designed to be, so it's a combination of teaching, guiding, challenging, role modeling and coaching to draw out your best, all within the framework of a relationship with honest accountability.

Mentors can make a huge difference, yet how do you go about finding one? Here are some key factors to get you started on your journey to grow faster and maximize your potential from reaching out to find a mentor.

**Look for leaders with a lot of experience.** Mentors are people who have *'been there- and-done that'*. They have a proven track record of knowing what to do because they have learned from their failures and leveraged their successes to achieve greater results. Nothing replaces experience in a master teacher or mentor, so anticipate that they will be older than you and often quite older.

**Look for leaders who know what they believe.** A mentor is a person who has strong convictions and has gone well beyond talking about their values to earnestly living them. If someone is wishy-washy about their core values and purpose in life they won't have much to add to your journey, and may even become a roadblock by creating more doubt than personal discipline and strength. If they don't believe in something they can talk it, but won't be consistent in living it, and a good mentor is rock solid about matching their beliefs to their

behavior.

**Look for leaders who are inspired to help others.** A mentor is motivated to make a difference, so be alert for people around you who want to do more with their life. You may not find a mentor who is a best-selling author or national television personality, yet is making a huge contribution in your local community. Don't be distracted by the lack of formal education either. Some of the greatest role models didn't have the advantages of advanced degrees, but they had earned their PhD from the school of hard knocks and know how to prevent you from taking wrong roads. So watch to see who really cares about people and you will find that they often will take time out to invest into the lives of those around them. Just ask.

### **Basic mentoring requires structure to grow strong**

In a formal mentoring relationship there is a clearly defined structure of times to meet, clear goals, well defined expectations and accountability to keep you on a path of positive growth and change. In a less structured mentoring relationship there are times of teaching, encouraging and equipping, yet you have to be watching more closely because these training times come fast and often leave just as fast. Mentoring can be maximized by follow up calls, emails, text messages or hand written notes to challenge and inspire you to press on to reach your potential.

Remember that a successful mentoring process is closely tied to your hopes, dreams, goals, values and personality. If you are a quiet person of prayer, it is likely that you will connect best to a mentor with those personality traits. If you are a people person who is highly verbal, your mentor will likely have similar traits. I believe that God will send the right person to mentor you at different stages based on your progress and development. Sometimes well meaning parents will try to force an unmotivated son or daughter into the presence of a master teacher, yet it usually ends up being a complete waste of time. Bottom line- stay ready to grow and you will meet the most amazing people along the way, yet usually when you least expect to find them. And if you aren't growing you won't meet mentors because they will walk on by to invest in someone who wants to make the world a better place- instead of just taking up space.

Elmer Towns was a tremendous mentor who made a huge impact on my life. Here are a few of the key success principles I learned from this master teacher that made a positive difference, which I hope will add greater value to your life as well.

#### **1) Have a vision and keep moving forward, no matter what**

Elmer Towns partnered with Jerry Falwell in 1971 to build one of the fastest growing universities in the country. These men faced impossible odds together and often stood up to incredible challenges, yet always with courage and faith. I never saw either of these men discouraged, at work, at the university or at home. You and I can benefit by knowing the vision for our life and then press on, no matter what comes against us. To know where you are going and press on with perseverance is a key to lasting success.

#### **2) Continually be training the next generation of young leaders**

Dr. Towns has always been passionate about training young people. This positive empowering of younger leaders modeled the style of Socrates, Plato and of course, the teaching style Jesus Christ used with the twelve disciples. Clearly, no one lives on this planet forever, so it is essential to be equipping others to carry on the work if you want to make a

positive and lasting difference in the world. This is a timeless principle of discipleship seen in the Bible, as well as in the greatest thinkers throughout history and it's a principle that you and I can put into practice with the younger people in our lives today. Everyone can learn something and everyone can share something they have learned with another.

### **3) Teach and reinforce the message**

A master teacher will keep sharing the same life application principles to reinforce the message until you 'get it'. They don't get mad at you when you don't understand, they just look for a better way to communicate the message of truth to you in a way you can hear. I'm grateful to God for having the opportunity to have listened to countless messages from a world-class leader who was completely dedicated to the success of his students and honor him by teaching and mentoring others.

This brings up the final lesson I learned from my mentor so many decades ago.

### **Do things now that will live on after you are gone**

This is the power of building a positive legacy, and it lives on in the lives of the over 200,000 students who have attended Liberty University. I was blessed to have a mentor early in life that believed in me. I do things today that my mentor taught me to do over a quarter century ago. I'm a better person and more effective leader because of the few years of working around and sitting under the teaching of Dr. Elmer Towns and I honor him and his legacy today because of his investment into my life to equip me to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

### **Who do you look to for leadership?**

The question I leave with you today is an important one. Who is your mentor? If you don't know the answer because you don't have one, start looking today for men and women who are boldly working for positive change in their part of the world and find a way to get to them. You need a mentor you can believe in, and when you find them, plug in to the value that they can add to your life. Once you find them, the process is simple. Listen all you can, learn all you can and then eventually lead others in what your mentor trained you to do... make a positive difference. That legacy that never dies, because it is carried on throughout the generations in the hearts and actions of people who were blessed to know why mentoring matters.

What names of master mentors are on your list and what positive changes are you working toward because of the influence of your mentors? If you need a safe place to get started, send me an email because I'm here to teach and coach you with what I learned at the feet of some godly men. I'll hold the door open for you because someone taught me how to invest in others. Mentoring matters because it changes you today, so that you can work for a better world tomorrow.

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**About the author**- Dwight Bain is dedicated to helping people achieve greater results. He is a Nationally Certified Counselor, Certified Life Coach and Certified Family Law Mediator in practice since 1984 with a primary focus on solving crisis events and managing major change. He is a member of the National Speakers Association and partners with media, major corporations and non-profit organizations to make a positive difference in our culture. Access more counseling and coaching resources designed to save you time by solving stressful situations by visiting his counseling blog with over 150 complimentary articles and special reports at [www.LifeWorksGroup.org](http://www.LifeWorksGroup.org)