



Mentoring is one of the most rewarding experiences - by Joseph Aquino

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I would like to share a joyful experience with you. I have joined as a volunteer with The NYS Mentoring Program. It is a one-on-one mentoring program which was started in 1984 by Matilda Cuomo at the request of her husband, governor Mario Cuomo. Mrs. Cuomo created and implemented The New York State Mentoring Program, the nation's first statewide unique school mentoring program to prevent school dropouts. This program not only demonstrates to students the importance of staying in school, but also sends a message that there are people who care and are counting on them to succeed.

The time spent by volunteers are at the students' school and the commitment is once a week for one hour. During this time, the mentor and student are in an open classroom setting with large community tables and chairs that sit eight to ten students alongside with their mentors. And a lot happens in that hour. Here is what I experienced:

Our mentees median age are about 10 years old, and the hour is filled with lots of giggles, laughs, hard work, praise, and affirmation. This is the result of their hard work, and accomplishments of jobs well done as both individuals and as team players in games that are created to stretch the students' imagination and help foster their intuitive, communicative and cooperation skills.

Sometimes, we do jigsaw puzzles. When a group completes a puzzle, (and they have never missed a deadline), they all put their hands together and place the last piece of the puzzle together at the same time and let out a big shout saying, "WE DID IT!" Then they all give each other high fives, hugs, and pats on each others' backs.

In the room, there are always so many smiling faces. The mentors take photos of the students and give them plenty of affirmation of a job well done. The next week, the mentors bring the photos in and we mount them on colorful paper and hang them on the wall. Then we start all over again! We never take the puzzles apart and during the week, the students, if they like, can bring the other students in and show them of their job well done.

In a world filled with setbacks and disappointments, this hour is filled with plenty of hope, love, enthusiasm, and good life lessons for both students and mentors. Other takeaways for the children are that they work successfully in a team setting. Like most of us, they get the satisfaction of completing a task in a timely manner which is a great life lesson to teach children at an early age. They see that by getting involved and doing the hard work, whether singularly or in a team setting,

they can accomplish great things and have fun—another great life lesson!

Having lost my father at the age of 13 years old, I know having a mentor at this age is very important for a child's development since they need good role models. At 13 years, I missed that fatherly voice and love. However, as I got older and entered my professional career, I found new mentors whom I am still very close to and still communicate and share my life experiences with on a regular basis.

In fact, one never gave me that promotion I longed for when I worked for him and we are still great friends. Finally, one day a few years back, I said, "Steve, come on, why didn't you give me that promotion of supervisor that I longed for back in 1985 before I left the health club industry. Just say the words." He replied, "Is that what you want?" I said, "yes!" He said, "I will do better than that."

Well, a month or two went by, and then I got a FedEx package from Steve. When opened it, there was a plaque that was inscribed,

Joseph A. Aquino

Honorary Supervisor, 1985

Jack La Lanne, Bally Fitness

I can't tell you what this meant to me to receive this from my mentor Steve. He wrote a beautiful letter to go along with it, saying I was the greatest and how proud he was of me that I succeeded in real estate sector and in New York City, one of the largest international cities.

Going back to the mentoring program. I want to share the joy I am getting out of this doesn't have a monetary value. My soul feels great because of these children. I keep a photo of the students on my desk, and it doesn't fail that every time I see them, I smile! How great is that!

If anyone is interested in volunteering one hour a week, just shoot me an e-mail, and I will put you in touch with the right person or go directly to the website by visiting <https://www.ny.gov/new-york-state-mentoring-program/new-york-state-mentoring-program>. We are not looking for donations, only open and warm hearts. I know real estate has many of them!

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