Mentoring youth to careers: A Success Steps Strategy

Our Vision: Youth who have been part of volunteer-based tutor/mentor program while in 7th-12th grades are beginning jobs and careers by age 25

Our Vision: Because of their long-term participation with a well-organized and consistently funded tutor/mentor program, the continued involvement of its volunteers, and their use of the Internet to share information and network with each other, youth who have graduated from high school, moved through college or vocational training and are starting their first jobs, or perhaps careers. Networks of youth and volunteers are expanded and are a support system they can draw from as they move through the rest of their lives.

This essay is an ideation of the Tutor/Mentor Institute, LLC. See more like this at http://www.tutormentorexchange.net  Contact us at tutormentor2@earthlink.net
A Tutor/Mentor Program Success Steps Strategy

If we repeat these steps for many years...
This graphic shows the K-12 twelve years it takes for most youth to finish high school. Youth in poverty areas have more challenges because of poverty and lack of learning models and resources.

Thus, connecting a volunteer with a youth is just the beginning of the tutor/mentor process. A program needs to keep volunteers and youth connected from week-to-week throughout the school year, and from year-to-year as youth go from 7th grade, then 8th grade and then high school graduation, and then through continued education to the point where they are looking for jobs and starting careers. Each week programs need to provide coaching to youth and volunteers and provide many learning activities that they can build their relationships around.

At every stage of the way the role of volunteers is to coach this process, serve as mentors and tutors, or be friends and advocates. We outline this Theory of Change in the Success Steps that are shown in this essay. However, we also outline this thinking in a series of illustrated essays that can be found in the Tutor/Mentor Institute web site.

As youth move through volunteer-based tutor/mentor programs, we want to influence the growth of habits that make them more likely to be successful in work and in life. We also want to motivate students to become future leaders in community service and philanthropy. We hope to reinforce these habits in our volunteers as well.

Furthermore, we hope that our student and volunteer alumni will stay connected to our program throughout their lives and that many will support us as volunteers, leaders and donors in future years.

We encourage volunteer-based tutor/mentor programs in Chicago and other cities use these seven steps to success to improve their existing programs. In addition, we encourage leaders of other programs to share their own success steps on their own Web sites. Furthermore, we encourage programs, donors and youth development advocates to connect with each other and share their own tips for success via the Tutor/Mentor Connection portal.
Step 1. Build regular participation in weekly tutor/mentor activities

The first challenge of a non-school tutor/mentor program is to encourage students to commit to regular weekly participation in a long-term tutor/mentoring program. At the Cabrini Connections program in Chicago where this concept was developed between 1993 and 2011, students participates in the program voluntarily. They were not selected by teachers or mandated to participate. They came because they and their parents value what Cabrini Connections has to offer.

Students “vote” with their feet”. If they don’t like a program they will not attend regularly.

Since students are volunteers, measures of participation are a good way to gauge the overall effectiveness of the program.

• Student attendance at tutor/mentoring sessions once a week from 6:00 to 8:00pm averages 80%
• More than 80% of students who start in September are still with the program in May; 85% of the students participating in May return the next year
• Since 1993 more than 580 teens have been part of the program for at least one year. 33% have participated for 3 to 7 consecutive years
Step 2. Maintain regular contact with dedicated Tutor/Mentor role model

Volunteers recruited from business and neighborhoods beyond poverty can demonstrate jobs and opportunities that are not often modeled in high poverty inner city neighborhoods.

Providing “customer services” that support and retain volunteers is an essential component of an effective tutor/mentor program. Measuring participation rates is a way to gauge how well a program operates.

Volunteers also “vote” with their feet”.

If they don’t like a program they will not attend regularly.

- Recruit a diverse group of volunteers from a variety of corporations and networks of friends. Volunteers are encouraged to build long-term relationships with their student and to take a growing leadership role within the organization.
- Volunteer attendance at tutor/mentoring sessions once a week from 6:00 to 7:45pm averages 75%
- More than 80% of volunteers who start in September are still with the program in May; 65% of the volunteers participating in May return the next year
- Since 1993 more than 850 volunteers have been part of the program for at least one year. 24% have participated for 3 or more consecutive years.
Step 3. Provide enrichment and experience activities

One goal of a mentor-rich tutor/mentor program is to expose students to the many careers and life choices that are available to them. These types of models may not otherwise be available in the high poverty neighborhood where the students live.

Youth can participate in a variety of enrichment activities including:

- Art, technology, writing and video clubs
- Computer and internet access provided by the HSBC Technology Center
- Sporting events, movies, theater and other cultural experiences
- Travel experiences, such as an annual trip to Ireland
- Most of these activities are organized by volunteers who wish to share their own workplace and enrichment experience with students

- The mix of activities from program to program can vary and they can change within a program over many years.

Youth and volunteers attend because it’s “fun”, provides new experiences, and offers ways to meet and socialize with new people.
Step 4. Encourage skill development

A career focused tutor/mentor program knows that youths need certain skills to succeed in today’s world. Activities in this stage focus on the communications, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and interpersonal skills required in most of today’s workplaces. While these skills are not consistently taught in inner city schools they can be taught in non-school programs if the volunteers, staff and donors have the vision and resources to do this.

- Art, technology, writing and video clubs
- Jobs and internships
- Job-shadowing
- One-on-one and group activities and games with volunteers

This is what makes a “tutor/mentor” program different from pure mentoring or pure tutoring.
Step 5. Build job and internship opportunities

The Tutor/Mentor Connection’s focus is on students who come from a low-income neighborhoods where there are few people to provide leads to jobs or model a wide range of career choices. By the time they are in 10th grade, many students are looking for jobs to help support their families. The Tutor/Mentor Program can be the channel through which students find their first job and develop their long-term career goals.

A tutor/mentor program’s goal is to create a network of business people, volunteers and others who organize age-appropriate activities, such as job shadowing, part time jobs, internships and summer employment activities. Working in collaboration with many organizations the Tutor/Mentor Institute and Tutor/Mentor Connection hope to build and maintain long-term job and career networks that provide job interviews and career mentoring to youth as they grow older.

Read more of how business can lead this process in essays at http://www.tutormentorexchange.net/leadership-strategies
Step 6. **Provide career counseling and scholarship opportunities**

By high school graduation students should be motivated and prepared to pursue further education or vocational development. Comprehensive, volunteer-based tutor/mentor programs can provide opportunities that challenge students to take responsibility for their futures and inspire them to think big, including:

- Guest speakers from Chicago Public Schools, vocational schools, and colleges
- Edgewood College Summer Program
- ACT/SAT information and materials
- Career talks given by volunteers
- Resume counseling
- Volunteers organize many of these opportunities and provide many of these services according to their own experience and expertise.

Read how universities can use their resources to help K-12 youth move to college to careers at companies led by alumni. [http://www.tutormentorexchange.net/images/PDF/UniversityTMC.pdf](http://www.tutormentorexchange.net/images/PDF/UniversityTMC.pdf)
Step 7. Maintain connections between youths and volunteers after graduation

“Who You Know” is as Important as “What You Know.

The connections forged in a long-term tutor/mentor program between students and volunteers are a form of “bridging” social capital. They connect youth in poor neighborhoods with people who can open doors to jobs and careers when the youth are adults.

These connections provide a support system for inner-city youth even after they have graduated from high school and the tutor/mentor program. Students can use the network of volunteers to ask for advice and support, find jobs and open the door to other opportunities.
What does it take to make such programs available throughout a city like Chicago?

In the book by Jim Collins, titled Good to Great and the Social Sectors, a process of constant improvement is described that helps some organizations become great organizations. Then, once they are great, they work even harder to stay that way.

This graphic illustrates the infrastructure needed in a tutor/mentor program in order for it to recruit students and volunteers and keep them participating and growing over a six to 10 year period from elementary or middle school through high school graduation.

Tutor/Mentor Institute borrows ideas from retail corporations where corporate office teams support the operations of thousands of branch locations. These teams help each location have the staff, supplies, training, facilities, equipment, merchandise and services they need to operate at high levels. They also provide advertising needed to draw customers to stores on a daily basis.

A “master plan” needs to be developed in Chicago and other cities to help build this infrastructure support system so that every tutor/mentor program in the city has the resources it needs to grow from ‘good to great’ and then stay that way for many years. Visit http://www.tutormanmentorexchange.net to see maps, graphics and more ideas that can be used to create this “master plan” in any city.
Without a “master plan” providing consistent support to programs in all poverty neighborhoods, few organizations can implement this Success Steps strategy.

Learn More About the Tutor/Mentor Institute and Tutor/Mentor Connection:

- www.tutormentorexchange.net
- www.tutormentorconnection.org
- www.tutormentorprogramlocator.net
- www.tutormentorconference.org
- http://tutormentor.blogspot.com
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