

## **Mentoring Handout #1**

# **Role Modeling vs. Volunteering vs. Mentoring**

The major differences between a role model, a volunteer and a mentor are time spent and level of commitment. Unlike either a volunteer or a mentor, role models have no attachments to any individual or any program for any amount of time. Role modeling refers to who a person is and what they are doing for their profession, than the daily activity that role model embarks upon. Role models simply serve as individuals to which others aspire to become. For this reason, any one can serve as a role model both positively and negatively. In turn, these role models continue to become better at whatever it is that they are doing. Whether it is perfecting an architectural rendering or carving out a section of a city for illicit drug activity, role models are relative to whoever views them as such. In some cases, role models serve as mentors to others. Generally, though, role models are pointed to as examples for others to exemplify.

Volunteers are generally short-term in nature and have a specific beginning and ending period. Volunteers provide assistance in the area of human service (described as people skills) or program delivery (operational skills). Volunteers have a specific task in front of them and, once completed, could be assigned to another project/program or simply cease serving in a volunteer capacity. Volunteers are geared toward program delivery. In the case of human services, though, volunteers are temporarily assigned, i.e. an aide in a homeless shelter, a tutor in an alternative school, a counselor at an adoption agency.

Mentors, on the other hand, are generally long-term commitments and lean toward the human services. Mentorship is a bonding and trusting relationship that is not to be taken lightly. Mentors, be it personal, professional, academic or otherwise, serve as a stable base in their own lives and in the lives of those whom they mentor. Mentor and mentees do not immediately “choose” one another; the relationship evolves naturally over a given period of time. One could pretty much point out the beginning of a mentoring relationship, but the ending is a virtual unknown. The ending could result of either an individual moving on with their lives by relocating, changing jobs, graduating, and completely shifting priorities to name a few. Accordingly, many people can think of past and present mentors in our lives and, for the most part, highly favor their advice and wise counsel. Mentors do not come and go as volunteers. Mentors are “in it” for the long haul.