

Thoughts about Urban Battles Tutoring/Mentoring Program

by Dr. Geeta S. Vora

“If success or failure of this planet and of the human being depends on how I am and what I do, how would I be and what would I do?” ~R. Buckminster Fuller

“Creativity is just not going to the moon, but living effectively on earth.”

~Anonymous

“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.” ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

“No one can fissile a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.” ~H. E. Luccock

“Teamwork divides the task, and multiplies the success.” ~Unknown

“Never doubt that a group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” ~Margaret Mead

“Little things mean a lot – not true. Little things mean everything.” ~Harvey Mackay

I would like to relate to you a story that was done by CBS anchor Scott Pelley in 1988. I was introduced to Paul Tudor Jones; and hedge fund manager who founded Robin Hood foundation in 1988. It is a charitable foundation, which attempts to alleviate problems caused by poverty in New York City. Paul Tudor Jones was focused on himself in the 1980s. At age 32, he made a documentary about the Wall Street. Paul's mother wanted him to be a preacher and Paul Jones wanted to be a millionaire or a movie director. He ended up being a billionaire.

In 1986, he felt something was missing in his life. One Sunday evening, he was watching CBS 60 minutes. His attention was caught by Harry Reasoner's interview headline: Millionaire with a heart of gold offers hope to ghetto kids. Eugene Lang had guaranteed college tuition for every kid in one Harlem class. He said: “I love them. I look at them now, all of them, as an extension of my family.”

B. T. Jones picked up the phone, the second the program ended and called Jean Lang. B. T. Jones said, “that I probably had a hole in my soul. And all of a sudden, here was this man that showed the joy of giving. I realized there was a whole new journey of my life that was ahead of me, that I had not yet realized was there.” He founded Robin Hood Foundation.

Statistics

1. 50% of chronically unemployed and 60% of inmates are illiterate.
2. 85% of all juveniles in the court system are illiterate.
3. Low literacy levels cost
 - i) Between \$106 to \$238 billion per year in health care spending.
 - ii) \$225 billion in non-productivity in the workforce.
 - iii) \$1.4 billion provide remedial education for students who have recently graduated from high school.
 - iv) \$2.3 billion in lost earning potential.
4. 93 million American adults, or 45% of the adult population, have limited reading, writing and math skills, according to Nation Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003.
5. Workers 18 and over per US Census Bureau 2005
 - a) With bachelors degree earn an average of \$51,206 per year.
 - b) With high school diploma earn an average of \$27,915 per year.
 - c) Without high school diploma earn an average of \$18,734 per year.

Illiteracy and crime are closely related. The Department of Justice states, "The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence and crime is welded to reading failure." Over 70% of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level.

I. The Problem:

To solve any problem, there are 3 questions to ask yourself.

First, What could I do?

Second, What could I read?

Third, "Whom could I ask?"

Usually the problem is 2 or 3 questions deep. Neil Armstrong once said: "you only have to solve 2 problems when going to the moon; first, how to get there and second, how to get back. The KEY is don't leave until you have solved both problems."

Poverty comes in 3 forms:

1. Body: when you are cold and hungry.
2. Mind: when you lack an education.
3. Opportunity: when it seems every door is closed.

II. Our Approach:

We have tried to be on the frontlines of fighting poverty at grassroots level by providing food for the body and education for the mind.

Mission Statement: Our program's main mission is to improve the ability of our children/youth in low income communities to do math, read, write, learn technology and communicate effectively in English, allowing them to graduate high school prepared for college or vocational school.

This we will do by creating learning systems that provide seamless learning opportunities to gain the skills, knowledge and the abilities needed to be successful in the 21st century.

Goal: we have numerous goals, but the main goal is to increase the graduation rate for Minnesota youth/children coming from low income families.

Our mission is to make a positive impact in the community by providing education and real-time mentoring designed to keep inner-city children in school.

How do we make a difference?

1. We offer a safe environment and support framework for learning all year round.
2. We also provide learning opportunities to gain the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to be successful in the 21st century.
3. We provide meals to kids before we start tutoring, help with school supplies throughout the year and provide backpacks filled with school supplies at the beginning of the school year and help with expenses of various schools activities. We also buy workbooks, help to apply to colleges, provide scholarships for college, etc.

III. Our Impact: Our director pays most of the expenses, so hundred percent of the donations go directly on fighting the poverty of mind and body directly.

IV. Donate: Different forms.

1. Take action. Become a Volunteer.
2. Participate in Corporate Giving.

3. Help to Fundraise.

4. Give Monetary Donations.

5. Give Tribute: Honor your friends, family and colleagues with the donation to Urban Battle's Tutoring/Mentoring Program on their special occasion or make a gift in someone's memory.

Significant Giving is not only monetary giving, but self involvement. It means giving attention, interest in the kids lives, giving inspiration and supporting their dreams.

Volunteers

Volunteer activities cover a wide spectrum. It includes teaching English, writing, math, sciences, technology, arts, crafts, critical thinking, comprehension, and more. The program is run by volunteers. Our volunteers come from different walks of life and have a wide range of skills. We have doctors, nurses, attorneys, financial consultants, teachers, accountants, psychologist, office staff and, other white-collar professionals and blue-collar workers and students. Also, our volunteers range from high school and college students to retirees. We accept volunteers throughout the year for periods of 1 to 3 months. However, once a volunteer start tutoring, kids get a hold of their hearts and they stay, for example, we have volunteers who have been involved from one to twelve years. We welcome both individual volunteer and volunteer groups. The only thing we expect from our volunteers is positive attitude, patience and a loving unconditional heart.

Our best-known volunteer is our director, Bob Kohl. He has been with the program for about 13 years. His spirit is best described by the quote of poet Edward Everett Hale:

"I am only one,

But still I am one.

I cannot do everything,

But still I can do something.

And because I cannot do everything,

I will not refuse to do the SOMETHING."

In the last 12 years, Bob Kohl, has only taken two vacations. He is the perfect example of significant giving. He not only gives monetary support (he covers about 98% of the expenses), but also gives of himself. It is a self involvement of giving attention, showing interest in the lives of the kids, giving inspiration and supporting their dreams.

Summary

We will be best prepared to face any uncertainties in the Safari of life, if we fill our duffel bag with “KASH”. It is an acronym for

K= Knowledge.

A=Attitude

S=Skills

H=Habits (Excerpt from Seeds of Greatness Treasury).

This is what we plan to give the children in a program, KASH, so they can be successful in the 21st century. So I like to end this with a question for you. It is a quote by R. Buckminster Fuller, “If success or failure of this planet and of the human being depends on how I am and what I do, how would I be and what would I do?”