

Layered Mentorship as Meaningful Leadership

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Nearly a decade ago, I found a formula for meaningful leadership. As a ninth grader living in Jamaica, I learned that even with limited resources, a concerned, close-knit group could provide the functional and fluid mentorship I needed to thrive.

Thanks to my family, I experienced this form of leadership long before I understood it. My mother worked late nights to ensure that I had the books I needed for school while reminding me of the power a bright future can yield. My father frequently challenged me to study harder and washed my school uniforms for me so I would have time to do so. My siblings travelled with me to school and double-checked my assignments, even if they didn't always understand them. Although I did not realize it at the time, my family provided a series of sound, overlapping relationships that positioned me for high achievement. With their layered mentorship, my success was never a casual consequence; it was the primary goal.

After we immigrated to the United States at the close of my ninth-grade year, I started to crave more support than my family alone could provide. Attending high school in the Bronx, I found navigating the multiple cultures, relationships, and languages particularly challenging. I knew that if I wanted to excel at the college level without my family nearby, I could benefit from a posse of sorts.

I found just the program I needed. The collective encouragement of my high school principal and teachers helped me win a full-tuition scholarship to Wheaton College sponsored by the Posse Foundation--one of the nation's most renowned college-access schemes. Posse selects students from urban areas based on academic and leadership excellence and sends teams of ten to first-rate colleges across the United States. The Posse model provided an ideal substitute for the family support I would no longer have close by.

Although the transition from my new urban home to suburban Massachusetts proved difficult, Posse and Wheaton used their institutional resources to weave a thick web of support through which it was hard to fall. They provided engagement and accountability. The nine Posse peers who accompanied me from New York City supported my social and intercultural development. My assigned Posse mentor, a professor of English, met with me on a biweekly basis to assess my personal and intellectual growth. I took classes with other Posse faculty mentors, and they

consistently held me to high standards. Finally, I benefited from numerous visits and phone calls from Posse staff, who were interested in my personal and professional development. Together, Posse and Wheaton provided careful and consistent mentorship that afforded me an empowering educational experience.

These rich, interconnected relationships remained valuable during my years of international service after graduation. As I expanded my involvement in projects around the world, I realized that it was important to build a new "posse network" for the professional sphere of my life. To this end, I not only sought out colleagues who were interested in my development, but worked passionately to mentor others as well. Mentorship was a much-needed resource when I taught schoolchildren in rural Thailand and when I worked with youth in South London to improve community safety. My previous mentorship experiences aided me in providing meaningful leadership in foreign territories.

At every phase of my academic and professional development, nurturing networks, or "posses," have been integral to my advancement. This model of layered mentorship--with its multiple, linked relationships--is powerful infrastructure for successful educational and professional trajectories. I am often reminded that leaders and students who succeed are frequently hoisted by a team of supporters. I pay my debt of gratitude to my posses (personal, academic, and professional) by extending the circle of support to another generation of students. The potential for meaningful leadership would be immense if educators throughout higher education could do the same.