

## **Choosing Your Role Models**

by Dennis Hooper, published in the Houston Home Journal on Tuesday, January 20, 2004

I've had the opportunity in recent weeks to talk with some people about who they admire. I never said the specific words: "Who are your role models?" But that's essentially what I was seeking.

Many cited their parents. So let me start with some counsel for parents and soon-to-be parents. Your children learn so very much from you before you or they are even aware of it. You are forming the values and behaviors of these young ones with everything you do, so be aware! Further, the learnings that occur in our early years remain a blessing or a curse our entire lives.

Once children reach the toddler stage, they start learning from other role models, too. The people in our lives--as well as the characters we watch on television and in movies--shape our values!

The best role models are not necessarily the flashiest. Yet popularity and prestige command attention. Glamour grabs our interest. Popular celebrities influence our culture, but sadly, often not in a positive way.

It seems to me that many pop idols have quite selfish values. For example, when they appear on talk shows, I rarely hear them advocating a strong sense of service to others. Could this be a reason that the quality of service in our society seems to have diminished?

Many of us seem to be unaware that we can consciously choose our role models. When I have the opportunity to influence young people, I bring this to their attention and work to raise their standards in terms of how to assess a potential role model.

I see the world through the eyes of "leadership development". So, I think about how we learn "leadership". Have you ever taken a course in "leadership"? Most public schools, colleges, and even most workplaces do not overtly teach "leadership". So how do we learn to be leaders?

I think most of us learn leadership by unconsciously adopting what seems to work for the people around us. But if we don't consciously decide who the good role models are and who the inappropriate or destructive role models are, how can we be certain that we are learning appropriate leadership skills?

What characteristics describe a good leadership role model? After twenty years of research, James Kouzes and Barry Posner think they know. In their book "The Leadership Challenge", they describe the characteristics that most people want in their leaders: honesty, forward-looking, inspiration, and competence in leadership skills.

Is there anyone at your work or in your church or school who seems to exhibit these characteristics? Does that person treat you and others with dignity and respect? Consider talking with this individual and asking if he or she would be willing to mentor you. This is a huge step in moving from an unconscious form of role modeling to a very conscious, intentional form.

If you are a parent or grandparent of children or teens, I encourage you to talk with them about "role models". Help them become aware of the influence that the people they admire have on them. Encourage them to consciously choose who they emulate. Make them aware of the effect values have on the choices they make, and the effect that their choices have on their futures.

Let them know that leadership is needed in all areas of life. Encourage these young people to become more aware of what is involved in leading people. Conscious awareness is the first step in intentional learning and growth.