

MESSAGING FOR MALE MENTOR RECRUITMENT: COMPONENTS OF A RECRUITMENT MESSAGE



Recruiting male mentors is one of the biggest challenges programs report. The majority of mentors have always been female while the majority of youth in need of a mentor have been male. Programs have learned that traditional recruitment techniques do not seem to motivate the male audience to become mentors. In order for children to have stable mentors in their lives, the methods for recruiting men must change.

While recruitment is a statewide struggle, it is an issue that must be solved locally. Men become mentors when they are personally recruited and specifically invited to join a program. While national and statewide recruitment campaigns can reinforce what is said locally, a personal ask has proven to be the most effective method to recruit male mentors.

This tool is designed to provide program staff and their trained mentor recruiters with language and tips to use when making the ask. This document takes you through the steps to recruit male mentors in a variety of settings, and it addresses the main components of a complete recruitment message:

1. *Awareness: Making the Case*
2. *Understanding: The Role of Stories*
3. *Comfort: You Can Do It*
4. *Commitment: Let's Be Clear About Things*
5. *Success: The Ability to Win*
6. *Closing/Making the Ask*
7. *Overcoming Objections/Concerns*

Additional tools provide you with talking points by speaker type.

Please take this information and adapt it to the needs of your own program. For readability, we have used examples that reflect a mentoring program that requires a one-hour-per-week commitment for one year.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN TALKING WITH MEN ABOUT MENTORING

1. AWARENESS: MAKING THE CASE

First, men need to be made aware of the critical need for male mentors. Rarely do they have even the most fundamental understanding of the societal impact of the shortage male role models. In an effort to raise awareness, it may help to be mindful of the fact that men tend to show an appreciation for statistics. However, pairing statistics with real-life stories has been found to more effectively impact mentor-recruitment efforts.

Group Setting Example

"Statewide, there are more than 3,500 children waiting to be matched with a mentor. In our program, we have 125 waiting for someone like you. That may sound like an enormous problem that you cannot solve, but let me tell you how you can make a difference. 'Kyle' is an 8-year-old boy in our program growing up without a dad or positive male role model. His mother works two jobs and he really needs a mentor in his life. Becoming Kyle's friend puts us another step closer to our goal and it makes a big difference for him."

Individual Setting Example

"We are working to connect 125 kids right here in our community. These are kids who really need someone like you in their lives. We have a boy named Kyle in our program. He has been waiting a year for a mentor. He could use someone like you to just hang out with him for an hour a week, just being his friend. He would grow so much from spending time with someone like you."

“Awareness” Talking Points

- Kahle Research Solutions estimates that 3,500 children are waiting to be matched with a caring adult in Michigan. That may seem like a daunting number – one that may cause potential mentors to believe that they may not be able to make a difference, but let me tell you how much good you can do.
 - For more information, on the number of children waiting to be matched with a mentor, visit www.mentormichigan.org and click on the Mentor Michigan Census.
- Most of these children are boys who need positive male role models.
- Right now we need nearly 1,000 men to be mentors for these boys, many of whom do not have fathers or a male role model to guide them through life.
 - To find more information about the number of children waiting for a mentor in your community, visit www.mentormichigan.org and click on the Mentor Michigan Census or use the number of youth on your program’s waiting list.
- Four out of every 10 families belong to a single-parent household.
- That leaves a lot of children, especially boys, without someone to look up to during those critical years when they are growing up to be men.
- There are young men in our community who live without the guidance of men in their lives.
- Growing up, boys are at an impressionable stage of learning how to become men, and if they do not have a positive male role model to guide them, they will look to whomever else happens to be around. For many boys, those other options are not very positive.



2. UNDERSTANDING: THE ROLE OF STORIES

Stories can lay the groundwork for empathy and understanding. This is why it is important for men to hear the stories of how mentors have made a difference. In reflecting upon their own childhood stories, men begin to recognize how their own role models made (or did not make) a difference in their lives. They start to empathize with those who do not have strong role models in their lives. In sharing stories, emphasize the role models outside of the home or family to show that you do not have to play the role of a father and be there everyday. Describing a mentor as a father or grandfather may overwhelm a potential mentor and cause them undue concern about their expected role and time commitment.

Group Setting Example

“How often do we take a moment to look at the people who shaped our lives? Think for a moment – who were the important men that influenced you? Imagine now if you took all of them away. That is what life is like for many of the children waiting for someone like you to come into their lives.”

***Consider brainstorming the types of people that made a difference in your life. Examples include: teacher, coach, youth group leader, boss, neighbor, etc.**

Individual Setting Examples

“I don’t know about you, but I was surrounded by lots of great role models. I had great coaches and teachers. How about you? Did you have an important role model?”

***Listen carefully. If the candidate did have a positive role model, encourage him to talk more about what made that role model so special. Be sure to highlight the role models that are outside the family.**

“The boys in our program really don’t have anyone in their lives to fill a role like your [candidate’s role model]. You can imagine how hard it must be to grow up without someone like that. It obviously had an important impact on you.”

***If they did not have a good role model, allow them to talk about how that impacted their lives. The key is getting candidates to talk about and acknowledge the importance of a male role model in their lives.**

"That must have been difficult not having [details from candidate]. We have a lot of boys in our program in similar situations."

****If the candidate had a strong female role model, consider a different approach.***

"You were very fortunate to have had such a strong, caring woman in your life. In fact, most volunteers in mentoring programs are women. But you can imagine that, for a boy, there are just some discussions that are more meaningful to have with a man. Boys are learning how to become men and are looking around them for other males to respect and exemplify. Men are the only ones who can model this unique role for boys."

"Understanding" Talking Points

- Think for a moment about your life as you were growing up. What men guided you in life? Was it your coach, pastor, or a caring teacher?
- What would you be like today if you had not had good role models in your life?
- If you hadn't had someone to look up to, what people would have shaped your life? How might your life have been different?
- One hour a week gives a child something he will keep for a lifetime.
 - Use your program's minimum weekly time commitment.
- Think of those who made a lasting impact on your life. Now it's your turn to "Pass It On."

3. COMFORT: YOU CAN DO IT

Getting men comfortable with the idea of mentoring requires addressing head-on any fears about the potential for personal failure or a lack of necessary skills for success. Men need to be assured that they already possess the skills and characteristics they need to make a difference. They have the ability to be a friend to a child. Men must also know that the most important quality they bring to a mentoring relationship is their own unique personality. The very fact that they are willing to attend a presentation – to listen, consider and understand – demonstrates readiness. Utilize information that is available about the candidate to show them that they have what it takes to be a great mentor.

Group Setting Example

"The wonderful thing about mentoring is that you are already equipped to be a great mentor."

You bring to the table something unique that these kids do not have in their lives ... the ability to be their friend. Every child can take away something positive just by being with you. The fact that you are willing to listen to this presentation is an indication of that."

****You may want to use this opportunity to ask the audience to identify reasons that might prevent someone from becoming a mentor. This will allow you to address any questions or concerns raised by the audience. Be prepared to discuss concerns such as one's inability to make the time commitment, not being a perfect role model or not knowing what to say to kids. Many men have liability concerns about being alone with a child, driving another person's child, or being perceived as unusual for wanting to spend time with a child or youth.***

Individual Setting Example

"I can tell, [candidate name], that you have what it takes to be a great mentor. [Discussion of personally observed attributes.] You have characteristics that many of our kids have no exposure to. And all you need to be is a friend. A friend is someone that likes to do what you do, supports your goals, asks you how you are doing, and teaches you about things that interest you."

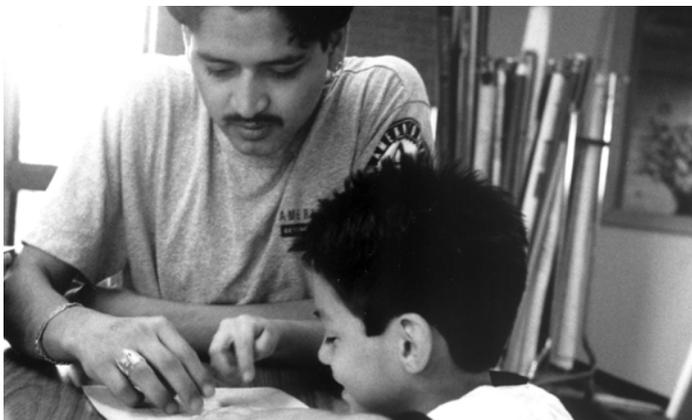
****Be aware that a potential mentor may ask you to define what a friendship means in the context of mentoring. Befriending a child is very different than the types of friendships that adults have with each other.***



"Comfort" Talking Points

- Mentoring only requires that you be yourself.
- Who could imagine that helping out with a little homework, or playing a game of catch could reap such rewards?
- You already demonstrate that you possess all the fundamental skills and abilities to be a successful mentor by your willingness to be there.

- Mentoring is about sharing your personal time. It is not about money, gifts or events.
- Mentoring is often as uncomplicated as engaging in what appears ordinary to most of us ... helping a child with homework, playing games, talking, listening, letting a child run errands with you. But to a child without a role model, these are extraordinary activities.
- The moment you become a mentor to a child, your experience is a success. For these kids, your willingness to spend time with them is the most powerful act of all.



4. COMMITMENT: LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT THINGS

Men need clarity regarding the commitment required. Right up front they will want to know, "What do you expect of me? How much time will this really take? When does it end?" Help potential male mentors make the right choice by providing clear information from the start about what is being asked of them. There is a need for balance. Refrain from scaring away potential candidates, but determine whether a prospect is serious about working with children.

Group Setting Example

"We do not want you to play the role of psychologist, case worker, or parent. We need you to be yourself for just one hour a week for one year. These are kids who need the peace of mind and security of knowing that you will be around for them. We will provide you with the support you need to succeed, including how to create clear guidelines."

Individual Setting Site-based Example

"You will spend just one hour at [specific location] each week with a young man who shares your interests. That might include helping him with his homework, playing games, or just hanging out."

We give you all the training you need, so all we ask is that you be yourself. When a kid sees you showing up for them once a week, it makes a difference. We also need you to commit for one year. These are kids who need stability in their lives, and they need to know that you will be there for them each week."

Individual Setting Community-based Example

"You will spend just one hour each week with a child who shares your interests. In community-based matches, the fun is in sharing activities you both enjoy such as basketball, video games, or grabbing a pizza together. Sometimes you might help the child with his homework, other times you may simply decide to hang out together. We give you all the training you need, so all we ask is that you be yourself. When a kid sees you showing up for them once a week, it makes a difference. We also need you to commit for one year. These are kids who need stability in their lives, and they need to know you will be there for them each week."

"Commitment" Talking Points

- The choice to share just one hour a week of your time with a child who needs a mentor results in a living expression of who you are; a legacy of caring.
- We need you to commit for one year. These are children who need to know that you will not be yet another person who does not keep his word. That demonstration of commitment has a powerful impact on the lives of children.
- Think for a moment about the things you already do that you could share with a child for an hour a week, for just one year.

5. SUCCESS: THE ABILITY TO WIN

Finally, men need to know mentoring is a winning proposition – both for themselves and the young men they will mentor. Perhaps the greatest fear men will confront in this process is the fear of failure. Paint a clear picture of success: "You are the right person. You have the right skills. You will succeed." It is worth noting that most men will not want to openly talk about being successful, but it is surely on the minds of candidates and needs to be gently addressed. Success is not what you accomplish.

While many youth experience increased academic and social behaviors, these results are often not immediate and are rarely observed within the first year. Success is being someone a young person can go to when life throws a curve ball or when there's an occasion to celebrate.

Group Setting Example

"In life we are provided few situations in which you are rewarded just by walking into a room. Mentoring is one of those situations. Our experience has shown time and time again that your presence – just being you – has a powerful, lifelong positive impact on a child. A child's life improves the moment you demonstrate a willingness to care."

Individual Setting Example

"You seem to me to be a person who likes to accomplish goals. Mentoring is one commitment where you can do that just by showing up. Any child who knows you are taking a personal interest in his life will benefit, just by you being who you are."

"Success" Talking Points

- How can you be sure your experience as a mentor will be a win-win? You do it by joining the team. "Showing up on the field" is the most important thing you can do for yourself and the child you mentor.
- Mentoring instantly says something about your character. In the eyes of a child with few role models, you are an example of what it means to be a winner.
- How often are we provided a unique opportunity to "Pass It On?" This is a chance to share those qualities that make you so special with a child who needs someone to care.

CLOSING/MAKING THE ASK

Awareness alone rarely results in new mentors. Candidates must be asked directly if they would like to be a mentor. They will expect to be asked. This should be done in a direct (and if possible, face-to-face) conversation. The more personal the conversation, the more likely you are to recruit a new mentor. The more specific you are about asking for a commitment the better. Remember, you are only asking them to apply at this time.

- You seem ready to be a mentor. Would you be willing to fill out an application this week?
- Are you willing to become a mentor this month?
- When can you come down and fill out an application?
- We really need men like you, [name]. When can you join our program?
- At this time all I need is your willingness to apply. You still have the choice to accept later. So, will you apply this week?
- If you are still unsure, you can check out our program with one of our mentors.

****If you are a site-based program, you may have the potential mentor stop by and observe your programs. Some programs do not allow people who have not been through a background check process to be with the youth in the program. If you are a community-based program, you may want to have one of your current mentors meet a potential volunteer for coffee or give them a call to share their experience. If someone isn't ready to visit a program or meet with a mentor, you may also ask if you can add them to your newsletter distribution or email lists to keep them connected to your program.***



OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS/CONCERNS

In virtually every situation it is possible to get a "yes" from a viable candidate. "No" means you have not yet said the words to overcome their objections. Let us be clear, not every candidate is a viable candidate. For example, someone that is frequently out of town for business trips and cannot maintain a consistent schedule may not be an ideal candidate. Someone caring for an ailing parent may not have the emotional ability to mentor at this time. There certainly is a difference between someone who can't or shouldn't mentor at this point in their life and someone who simply needs his concerns addressed.

What concerns does the candidate have? Try to keep the candidate talking until you can learn what his objections are and how they can be overcome. If you keep hearing “no” then it is time to change your way of presenting to your male candidates.

Overcoming objections can often be easier if you can actually get the candidates to visit the program, meet the boys, and engage them in fun activities. If this is within your confidentiality and liability parameters, open houses or meet-and-greet events can be a good recruitment strategy. For programs that require that all individuals who meet a youth be screened, it is possible to have one of these events with just mentors. Candidates should also be reassured that they will succeed even if it appears that they are not making a positive impact.



- We are all busy people, but mentoring takes only an hour of your week for one year. You don't need to carve out additional time. Take your mentee along on your current activities like going to the gym, watching sports, or just running errands.
- You are someone a child will look up to.
- We do not want you to play the role of a parent, teacher, social worker, or a psychologist.
- You only need to be yourself → a caring adult, willing to spend time with a child who needs a good role model.
- We will support you and are equipped to assist you at a moment's notice.
- Our programs have structure and supervision to make sure everyone experiences a safe and positive relationship.
- Mentoring is about giving of your personal time. It is not about money, gifts, or events.
- You never need to be concerned about feeling financially responsible for a child, or the need to provide anything other than your time.
- Mentoring is about sharing your time with a child. Relationships can be successfully built around commonly shared activities. It is not necessary to spend money to build a friendship with your mentee.