

MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE YOUTH OF TODAY

An Interview With Rick Rigsby, Ph.D.

Teacher, author, communications expert, and chaplain, Rick Rigsby, Ph.D., challenges us to find the leader that lives within all of us in this exclusive interview with *Camping Magazine*. As the opening keynote for the 2008 National Conference, Rigsby's powerful presentation skills will keep you on the edge of your seat as you learn to move beyond making an impression on the children and youth in your care to making an impact. In this brief yet poignant interview, Rigsby shares timeless insights into the value of character and the role mentors can have in shaping the lives of youth.

What should you do to prepare yourself to work with youth in a meaningful way . . . especially in situations where you may have a short-term time frame, like many camp programs?

It is critically important for each of us to realize the leader that is within us. Many of us discount our capacity for leadership, when the reality is that we make decisions every day that will influence someone in our lives. According to John Maxwell, leadership is all about influence—each of us has the ability to influence the people who are within the sphere of our periphery, no matter how short of a time frame this window of influence may be. We should all ask ourselves this question, “How will my influence then exceed the title of leadership?” My answer is this: by being an authentic person, by being who you were created to be, and by being the best you that you can possibly be. The more authentic you are, the more truthful you are. The more loyal and willing you are to help other people, the more people will see your true authenticity. When you do these things, your influence will grow and people will follow you naturally as a leader. You will then be able to take them places where they will not be able to go on their own. As a leader, make sure you are growing your influence so that your sphere of influence is following a leader with character—who is loyal and kind, whom they trust, and whom they believe in. A leader with these characteristics will influence them to do the right things in even the shortest time periods.

How have you successfully instilled the value of character in youth with whom you have worked?

One of the things that I have always tried to do is to realize that everybody is of value. I think that it is very important for others to see in me as a leader, that I am not there to promote myself, but that I have a burden to see them reach another level. I personally subscribe to a philosophy that comes from John Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Maxwell says on one occasion that the bottom line of leadership is not how far we advance ourselves, but how far we advance others. I really internalize that and see that we successfully instill the value of character in young people by looking beyond ourselves, and looking into other's lives and asking ourselves, “What can I do as a leader that will connect with them in a way that forces me to go beyond my circumstances, title, and situation?” The whole goal of leadership is serving others in such a way that they will be advanced by your presence.

What are common mistakes of those focused on making an impression rather than an impact?

This mistake is a societal mistake as well as an individual mistake; we have become convinced that people are going to be moved by what they see as opposed to who we are. We dress ourselves up in a certain way, we pad our resumes, we extend our titles, and we provide multiple colors for our business cards. We want to make sure that we prove to someone else that we are worthy. I do not believe there is anything wrong with that; it is simply how we go about proving who we are. In this culture we go about proving this along external values, the way that you make an impact as opposed to just making an impression is to be your authentic self.

Here are some simple things that I try to do every day: tell the truth, think the best of people, and do what you say you are going to do. If you can do these things, people will not only follow you, but they will be

amazed as you lose yourself in helping to advance them. In the process, you may not be known as the most popular counselor in the world, but you will be known as a man or woman who makes an impact as opposed to just hoping that somebody is going to be impressed by your title, degrees, or something that does not really have the foundation to build a legacy. I want you to remember that you are building a legacy; these precious young people that you have for a short period of time really are wet cement. What do you want them to remember—your title and your name? Or do you want them to remember an example of servanthood that you modeled in front of them during that week-long camp over the summer?

At what point in your own life do you feel you began recognizing the lessons of your father, and the impact they had on your life and the others he influenced?

It was in the middle of a storm and difficult times that I began to realize the impact of my father. I do not think that I am that much different from corporations or other people in the sense that as long as things are going well, we do not see the need to change. As long as things are going well—nobody gets sued, no company changes on its own, and there doesn't seem to be a reason to change. But as soon as things start going badly or poorly, we start to reevaluate—we start to evaluate our decisions. Failure can be a great teacher. When I discovered that my wife was sick from breast cancer, and eventually she died of that disease, I had to make some changes. This is when my father's lessons began to enter my heart, because this was the time of greatest receptivity for me. I could no longer function on the old models of just making a nice impression or just getting by with my personality. This was the point where I began to realize the impact from my father's life. He would tell me that a man or woman STANDS, you have got to STAND no matter what. It is funny—as long as you are succeeding, you do not have a lot of great teachers. But once you start failing, then you start questioning assumptions, character flaws, and errors in judgment. When I started to fall and get consumed by the fire of tragedy—when I started to drift away with the winds of grief—this was when I realized that my father had invested forty years of his life into me—saying that a man stands when he wants to run; a woman stands when she wants to quit and give up; and a real person hangs in there. I discovered that true greatness is not inextricably bound to riches, status, or titles. True greatness is simply and unwittingly getting back up once you have been knocked down—finding the faith and the courage to get back up once you have fallen. I had to be knocked down before my dad's lessons could gain receptivity.

What are the lessons you hope your children share, later in life, that they have learned from you?

I want my children to be authentic. I want them to be solid as a rock when it comes to character. And no matter what, I want them to stand throughout the good times and the bad times.

Reference

Maxwell, J.C. (2007). *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Following a successful career as a television news reporter for a CBS affiliate in Northern California, Rick Rigsby began graduate studies, earning a master's degree at California State University, Chico, followed by his doctorate from the University of Oregon. For the last two decades, Dr. Rigsby has served as a college professor—the last fourteen years at Texas A&M University—where he continues to serve as chaplain for the Aggies football team. For more information about Rick Rigsby, visit www.RickRigsby.com or e-mail info@RickRigsby.com.

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