

Summer Youth Employment Program's Monthly Publication:

The Road Map



The Relationship Issue

I realize at first glance this title suggests an article from a teen magazine. But I assure you - it's not. Relationships are a critical element of the Summer Youth Employment Program, and this issue is dedicated to supporting that idea.

Our program seeks to foster relationships between students, employers, educators, parents, and community members. I hope the features in this month's issue provide insight and inspiration. Building relationships is not always easy. We have to navigate around roadblocks - both real and perceived - in order to form strong connections that benefit both parties.

As an adult, I still struggle with this process. I remember some of the challenges I experienced as a teenager, but those memories fade with time. Involvement with the Summer Youth Employment Program has provided me with a refresher course of sorts - a chance to brush up on my relationship-building skills while helping students develop their own toolkit for the process.

I hope you'll find the topics in this issue to be engaging. Please send your feedback at any time! And thanks for reading!

Features:

The Relationship Issue:

Intro

Show & Tell: Three Great Quotes on Relationships

Student Expectations

Employer Expectations

Opportunities to Get Involved

Show & Tell: The SYEP Blog Page

Three Great Quotes on Relationships

I'll be honest - I really searched for a way to get Halloween into this blog post but I just couldn't make it work. So instead I found three quotes on relationships that can be applied to the goals and focus of this program when it comes to relationships.

1. ***"They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel."*** ~Carl W. Buechner

When I first read this quote, I immediately thought of the impact our adult supporters have on the students. However, this quote goes deeper than that. It's a valuable way to think of all our relationships. Granted, there are times when it is very important to listen and be able to recall things that are said to you. As a person who finds delight in words, I would never think to undermine their value. But this quote makes me think about the muscle memory our feelings have. Just like a certain scent or sound can transport you to a memory, the behaviors of people around you can have the same effect. If we consider how our actions and words might affect another person, we can ensure our impact is positive and meaningful in some way. This is a requirement of anyone hired by the program. It is something we trust our employers to do. And it is a practice we try to teach our student participants. Words are powerful. There's no denying that. But if I can leave a positive emotional impact on those around me, then I'm okay with them not being able to recall exactly what words I used to accomplish that goal.

2. ***"We can improve our relationships with others by leaps and bounds if we become encouragers instead of critics."*** ~Joyce Meyer

I'll admit, sometimes it's hard to quiet the inner critic. Our brains are wired to analyze and judge our surroundings. It's a survival tactic. What's a threat? What isn't? I think sometimes we forget that the critic shouldn't be carried into every encounter anymore. As with the first quote, I want to be clear that I don't mean to assert we should *never* be critics. But I do believe the "tough love" approach is more prevalent than it should be these days. Encouragement can be more effective than we realize. In many ways, encouraging another person is - at the most basic level - a way of letting that person know he or she is seen. The feeling of being overlooked is not limited to teenagers. That anxiety can be felt at any age, and the effects can have a variety of negative results. If we can begin to approach others with encouragement before critique, the outcomes are

likely to exceed our expectations. This quote is particularly apt for our staff members and employers, but it can certainly benefit our students as well. I think sometimes students are quick to critique opportunities presented to them. Is this lame? Is it a waste of time? Is this person trustworthy? If we can all learn to begin with authentic encouragement, I think we can win out over some of these critical concerns.

3. ***“Assumptions are the termites of relationships.” ~Henry Winkler***

This might be my favorite of the three. It helps that this quote comes from the Fonz. But I like the clear imagery it evokes and the easy practical application. Termites eat away at the foundations of strong things - trees, houses...Okay mostly those two things. But they are a serious threat to those things. It's important to note that the word “termite” is used in its plural form. One termite is maybe less threatening than a clan. However, if you find one you can generally bet the others are nearby. Making one false assumption might not topple a relationship on its own, but my experience is that assumptions are a little like potato chips. You can't have just one. It will become a habit if we don't learn self-awareness. This is the quote that speaks best to all of our participants. Sometimes students feel their value isn't always recognized by adults. I think as adults we sometimes make assumptions about the potential of students based on our perceptions. That can be positive, but more often it's a detriment to the students. On the other side, I remember as a teenager making assumptions about what others thought about me and altering my behavior based on those assumptions. Sometimes this was good, but if I assumed someone didn't like me, my response was to withdraw. I tried to become less visible to that person. In critical formative years, the response of withdrawing from social interactions can significantly affect a teenager's development of the social-emotional skills that will later be important for things like interviewing and joining the workforce. I believe this quote, with its imagery of scary foundation-devouring insects, can be very helpful to carry with us into our relationships. Instead of assumptions, lean into questions. Questions and curiosity will always lead away from the assumption termites. That whole “Curiosity killed the cat” quote is a myth. Ignore that one. Or maybe change it to “Ignorant curiosity with no respect for potential danger killed the cat.” But regular curiosity is the key to building and strengthening relationships. And ridding of us hungry relationship termites.

Thanks for reading! As always, shoot me an email with any topic suggestions or questions: smithmi@u4sd.org.



Building Relationships: Student Requirements

When we look at student applicants, there are a variety of things we consider before offering a place in the program.

For starters, we have a list of eligibility requirements that must be met before anything else is considered. The qualifiers are:

- Participant of Free/Reduced Lunch
- Minimum of 90% Attendance from January-December 2016
- Minimum of 2.0 GPA from January-December 2016
- No more than 2 days worth of in/out of school suspension from January-December 2016
- Not already employed anywhere else
- Currently a 9-12 grade student at a Champaign Unit 4 high school

Once we evaluate those criteria and offer a placement to a student, we ask participants to sign a Student Agreement. This document outlines expectations of all SYEP students. For example:

- Students are expected to have a 90% Attendance rate at their worksite. Any cause for tardiness or absence must be communicated to both their worksite coordinator and their worksite supervisor.
- Students must agree to follow rules and policies specific to their job placement.
- They are asked to commit to avoiding any situation that might result in the involvement of any law enforcement personnel.
- They also agree to communicate any concerns or problems with their worksite coordinator as soon as possible. We want them to know they have a support system in place in the event they need anything.
- Students are required to attend certain events and trainings, and they must agree to communicating in advance if they need to be absent.

The overall goal of this program is to help students build bridges to meaningful employment. In order to reach that goal, it's important for us to ensure they receive a holistic learning experience. We focus on the following areas:

- Preparing to find a job (resume work, interviewing practice)
- Building a toolkit of soft skills (communication, teamwork, accountability)
- Developing job skills (leadership, time management, critical thinking)

We expect our students to participate fully in all required events and training sessions. If accepted, they should value these experiences as an investment in their future careers.

Building Relationships: Employer Expectations

Our employers play a vital role in helping our students connect to their ideal career paths. The hope is always that employers will become mentors to their students. To this end, we created an Employer Toolkit to communicate the expectations we have for our employers. For example, we have a list of suggestions on how to build a mentor-mentee connection:

- Appreciate the individuality of each student employee(s).
- Demonstrate that you are open to conversation about how to help them learn and succeed.
- Recognize that we all have our own learning styles and cultural assumptions that affect our expectations of others.
- Get student employee(s) “doing” in addition to listening as quickly as possible.
- Be creative in the ways you repeat concepts or emphasize a point.
- Demonstrate honesty, authenticity, and excitement for working with your student employee(s).
- Presume competence and instill confidence.

It's also important that employers understand the need for worksites to be safe spaces:

- Providing young people with safe opportunities to explore how their personal resiliency can be used to develop enhanced problem-solving and conflict resolutions skills is an opportunity many adults may shy away from, but one that can be a huge gift.
- There is a population of young people who may struggle with one or more of the individual skills that make up professionalism, and providing a safe space in which they can practice and develop these skills can be transformative for them.
- They need an environment where they feel safe enough to make mistakes, learn from their mistakes, and have opportunities (and the encouragement) to try again.

We have a few other requests that we make of our employers:

- Job Form - This is filled out by each employer prior to our matching process. We ask for specific job duties and required skills, and this form is critical to the matching process.
- Evaluations - We provide evaluation forms twice during the work period. One evaluation of the student is done halfway through so that adjustments and improvements can be made. The other is completed at the end of the program to see what progress was made.
- Attendance at major events - We ask employers to be present at several major events: Career Fair, Kick-Off Celebration, and Closing Ceremony. Attendance is a way to show support for the students and further the mentor-mentee potential.

Building Relationships: Community Involvement

This program wouldn't work if it weren't for the involvement and support of our community. There are a number of ways community members can get involved with SYEP.

APPLY TO BE A WORKSITE COORDINATOR

Each summer, the District website will list a job description for our worksite coordinators. If you have heard about the program and wondered how you might help out, this is a great option. We hold interviews in the spring and employment will typically cover all of June and July on a part-time basis. Check the site for listings, or keep an eye out on our Facebook page for when these become available.

HELP LEAD A TRAINING SESSION OR WORKSHOP

We now have a year-long focus on job training and preparation. If you have a background in any of the areas we'll be working on, contact the program to see about leading a session. Some examples of our training topics are:

- Communication Skills
- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Ethics/Accountability
- Public Speaking/Interviewing
- Networking
- Taking Initiative
- Leading/Inspiring Others
- Resume/Cover Letter Tips

BECOME A SPONSOR

We can always put financial or in-kind gifts to good use for the students. If you would like to see a list of our sponsorship levels, please contact program staff at smithmi@u4sd.org. If you received the September issue, you can find the form there as well.

LOOK INTO BECOMING AN EMPLOYER

If you think your business might be a good fit as an employer site, let us know! We're always looking to grow our employer database and can send additional information if desired. You can also check out the article in this issue on Employer Expectations to ensure this is something that would be a good fit for your business.

