Role Model to the Rescue

The term role model generally means any "person who serves as an example, whose behavior is emulated by others." Most everyone has a role model in his or her life. They could be a parent, a friend, a teacher, or a sports hero. Who your role model is depends as much on you as it does on the person you admire. Understanding what a role model is and how they are chosen is important for teens to learn. Not only does it teach them about why they choose their own role models but it helps them understand why younger children, such as campers, may be looking up to them. When it comes to being a role model, teens must be aware that the choices they make do not only impact themselves but also the friends and younger children who regard them as their superheroes.

Youth Will Learn

Workforce Skills: Respect, kindness, problem solving, integrity, self-awareness
Success Indicators: Youth will identify reasons why someone is a role model, define what a role model is, and rate qualities in order of importance.

What You Need:

Time Involved: 60+ minutes
Suggested Group Size: Any
Materials Needed:
- Paper
- Pencils or pens
- "How To Be An Everyday Superhero" Handout

The Activity

1. Begin by asking the teens why so many athletes and other celebrities are used in advertising and promoting products. The result of the discussion should be the recognition that athletes, singers, and actors are used in this capacity because they are seen as role models who influence many people.

2. In order to further study role models, ask the teens why only certain athletes receive this attention when many others do not.
3. Next, ask the teens whether or not an individual chooses to be a role model. The intent is to introduce the idea that role models are chosen by those who admire them; a person cannot choose to be a role model—he or she must be chosen by others. It is important for the teens to recognize also that, once a person is chosen as a role model, that person cannot refuse the role. The simple fact is, once chosen, that individual, like it or not, is now a role model for someone.

4. Break the teens into small groups or 3 to 5 people and ask them to brainstorm the reasons why someone is chosen as a role model. After allowing time for them to discuss, share their reasons with the group.

5. Summarize the groups’ discussions by compiling a list of reasons. This discussion should result in teens’ realization that the chosen role models reflect the values of the group that holds them in such high esteem.

6. Ask the groups to now consider the impacts that role models have on our society. What value do role models serve? Again, summarize the findings of the groups.

7. Read the following to the teens before starting the next part of the activity:

   A role model is often hard to define, because it can be different for everyone, however most everyone has a role model in his or her life. Who your role model is depends as much on you as it does on the person you admire. Often, it is someone you would like to be like when you get older, or someone who does something you find hard to do. They could be a parent, a friend, a teacher, or a sports hero. They could be the police officer who works in your school. They could be someone you read about in a book. They might be somebody who performs outstanding volunteer work. They might be a community leader. They might be your mentor. Maybe they are generous and kind. Maybe they performed an extraordinary feat or accomplishment. They might be someone in your neighborhood, or someone in another country. Typically, a role model is brave, smart, strong, kind, thoughtful and fun. Not every role model is perfect. Unless it is someone out of a storybook, role models are people who might be outstanding in only one or two areas. Or maybe it is someone who is far less than perfect, but is working to improve himself or herself.

8. In their small groups, have the teens brainstorm a list of heroes and role models that they are familiar with, such as celebrities and athletes. Have them also brainstorm a second list of heroes and role models that the teens know personally, such as family, friends, and/or the community leaders where they live. (It is very possible that the students might not know each other’s role models, but that does not matter.)

9. Then have the teens brainstorm a list of “What we admire about these people” for the celebrities and also brainstorm a list of “What we admire about these people” for the list of people the teens know. Discuss any differences between those last two brainstorm lists.
10. After the brainstorming ask the teens to do a focused free writing called: “My Heroes and Role Models.” They may write about one role model or hero in particular or multiple ones.

11. Have teens share their writing in small groups. You can also ask for volunteers to read their writings to the whole group.

12. Develop a list of qualities for each of the honored members. It should be pointed out that the lists of valued qualities that the teens identify reveal much about what they deem important. Review the lists to see what values the group as a whole rate highly.

13. Ask the teens, do you think you are a role model for anyone? If so, for whom? This discussion should result in teens’ realization that they are role models for younger 4-H members, their peers, and for the campers they are in charge of when they are camp counselors.

14. Discuss what it means to be a role model for others such as the campers at camp. Ask the teens to brainstorm ways that they can behave as a role model for others.

15. Share with them the “How To Be An Everyday Superhero” handout. Read through the items and discuss the items on the handout. Talk about how these behaviors of a role model can be exhibited at camp, during meetings, at the fair, or during other events.
Talk It Over

Share
- What is a role model?
- Why do we often choose athletes, singers and actors to be role models?
- Who were your local role models?

Process
- What are some qualities that are important for role models to have?
- What kind of things do role models do?

Generalize
- What traits apply to anyone who wishes to be a good role model?
- What traits are important for employers to look for?

Apply
- What things can you do to be an “Everyday Superhero”?
- What traits do you possess to be a good role model?
- What traits might need to be revisited?
- Why is it important to be a good role model in a job?
- What is the importance of being a good role model as a camp counselor?
How To Be An Everyday Superhero

• **Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle**
  Youth should see you taking care of yourself. Model wise food choices as well as a commitment to exercise. Avoiding negative comments about your body (or anyone else's, for that matter) will project a sense of body confidence that can influence how students feel about their own bodies. And obviously, students should never see you participate in or talk about any experiences with drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.

• **Model a Love of Learning**
  Youths' value systems are impacted by their interactions with adults. A positive attitude about education and learning on your part can foster similar attitudes in your students. Make sure they know that you believe education is important and worthy, and show them examples of how you continue to learn, as well.

• **Keep a Positive Attitude**
  Negativity is contagious. By keeping a can-do attitude even when things get difficult, you model for youth the power of positive thinking.

• **Take Responsibility for Yourself**
  Do not blame your problems on external factors or other people. When you make a mistake, admit it and work on fixing it. Youth see too many "role models" in the media who cannot take responsibility for what they do wrong. Show them a better option.

• **Use Good Problem Solving Skills**
  When dealing with a problem, handle it maturely. Youth watch how you respond to difficult situations, and they take their cues from what they see. They also imitate emotional intensity levels, so keep stress to a minimum by responding to tough times in a calm fashion.

• **Show Kindness and Respect**
  Youth will notice how you treat other people. Do not use derogatory names or terms, even in fun. That kind of behavior gives youth the idea that it is okay to disrespect others. Go out of your way to model helpful and kind behavior, especially to the elderly, disabled, or others who may need it.

• **Behave Ethically**
  We all have expectations for youths' behavior. Make sure you are holding yourself to the same standard. In your everyday actions, are you honest, fair, compassionate, and tolerant? If not, make a conscious decision to show youth something better.

• **Model Good Coping Skills**
  Let students see you engaging in positive examples of stress relief. Show them how you might shoot hoops to let off steam, or take a walk when you need a break. Help them uncover the stress relievers that will work for them.

• **Be Reliable**
  Be someone the youth can count on. Unfortunately, many students have experienced being let down by adults. Do not be one of them. If you say you will do something, do it. No excuses. You will earn respect and admiration.
How To Be An Everyday Superhero

• **Model Positive Choice Making**
  When it comes to being a role model, you must be aware that the choices you make impact not only you, but also the children who regard you as their superhero. When you are a role model it is not enough to tell those who look up to you what the best choices are to make. You must put them into action yourself.

• **Apologize and Admit Mistakes**
  Nobody’s perfect. When you make a bad choice, let those who are watching and learning from you know that you made a mistake and how you plan to correct it. This will help them to understand that (a) everyone makes mistakes; (b) it is not the end of the world; (c) you can make it right; and (d) you should take responsibility for it as soon as possible. By apologizing, admitting your mistake, and repairing the damage, you will be demonstrating an important yet often overlooked part of being a role model.

• **Follow Through**
  To be a good role model, we must demonstrate stick-to-itiveness and self discipline. That means; (a) be on time; (b) finish what you started; (c) do not quit; (d) keep your word; and (e) do not back off when things get challenging.

• **Show Respect**
  You may be driven, successful, and smart but whether you choose to show respect or not speaks volumes about the type of attitude it takes to make it in life. We always tell children to “treat others the way we want to be treated” and yet, may not follow that ourselves.

• **Demonstrate Confidence in Who You Are**
  Be proud of the person you have become and continue to become. It may have been a long road and you may have experienced bumps along the way, but it is the responsibility of a role model to commemorate the lessons learned, the strength they have gained, and the character they have developed. We can always get better, however, in order for children to celebrate who they are, their role models need to show confidence in who they are.

Although it may seem like a great deal of pressure to be a positive role model, nobody is expecting you to be superhuman. We certainly would not expect that behavior from the children who are looking to us for answers and guidance—nor would we want them to expect that kind of flawless behavior from themselves or others. You can only do your best. And, if you mess up today, you can always refer back to the tips- apologize, admit mistakes, and try again tomorrow. Good role models show those who believe in them that they can do anything if they simply put their mind to it.

Students look up to the adults in their lives. You are the adult to children younger than you. They look to you for protection, answers, and guidance. They also look to you for cues on how to act in everyday situations.