

Older men mentoring younger men: July 2012 update The value of human systems

a band of brothers



The story so far: one of the Men Beyond 50 Network's priorities for 2012 is to help older men be of service by creating opportunities for them to mentor younger men. We are doing this by partnering with two newish UK charities who specialise in this work: one of these is [A Band of Brothers](#). This is a report on the July 3 taster evening in Bristol which MB50 helped ABOB to organise.

The evening became a deep conversation about ABOB's approach to mentoring, between a group of very engaged locals and Michael Boyle, the co-founder and Director of ABOB. One of Michael's many gifts is his engagement with the human qualities of the present moment, which gives him a suspicion of systems as alien impositions. I have a different view: I believe that human systems, which respect and adapt to the people involved in them, are invaluable, and I pointed out to Michael that quite a lot of the evening's conversation had been people gently teasing out from him a depiction of the human system which ABOB has evolved for mentoring young men.

One of the really impressive and exciting features of A Band of Brothers is that their work has earned endorsement and active support from what might be called institutional systems, such as the Police, Probation Services, Youth Services and others. These institutions need to know that there is a system in order to have trust in ABOB's work, but it's also clear that they are impressed by the deep, positive human impact which ABOB's work achieves. For the rest of this blog, I'm going to share my understanding of how this human system works.

When ABOB want to offer mentoring to young men in any given area, they start by recruiting and training older men as potential mentors: these men could be age 30s through 60s and beyond. The first step for these potential mentors is an initiatory weekend, *Beyond the Hero*: this is largely the same initiation process which the younger men will go through later. Basic to ABOB's approach is the belief that any mentor must find his own initiation, truth, healing, sense of purpose, before he can help a younger man to find these qualities.

The older men taking part in *Beyond the Hero* should be clear by the end of the weekend whether they are willing and ready to become mentors. If they are, the next step is to attend a Soul Friend Weekend, which is a training in mentoring skills. ABOB offer two kinds of mentors to young men: one is soul friends, who support the inner, personal journey. They have other mentors who can help young men to explore the kind of work they want to do, and the skills they need to do it.

One of the powerful features of *Beyond the Hero* weekends is the 1:1 ratio of participants and supporters. The third step in the process is *The Quest*, where older men who have done the two weekends and are willing to be mentors, support a group of younger men through a similar initiatory process: this provides a rite of passage for young men from boyhood into manhood.. During this weekend, the younger men have the chance to choose an older man to be a soul friend mentor for them.

After this first weekend, ABOB provide several mutually reinforcing ways to support the young men being mentored. Key among these is a series of twelve 1-to-1 mentoring sessions between each young man and his chosen mentor, usually at weekly intervals: these move through a series of themes and topics provided by ABOB. There is also a weekly circle, open to all mentors and mentees: no one is required to go to this, but it can offer an extra source of support and wisdom for all involved.

There is also a monthly 'group day' at weekends, open to the wider local circle (for example, other mentors who are not currently soul friends, other young men who have completed the twelve week mentoring programme): these days may include community service projects, and woodland activities like trust games and wilderness skills. Beyond the twelve weeks, ABOB will seek to help each young man find satisfying work, offering help in getting vocational training, tools, etc. They also aim to create ongoing shared activities, for example the community vegetable garden in Brighton.

The client group who ABOB work with are young men who have left school, and are in trouble in some way. If you look at the case studies on their website, you will find some moving accounts of how the human system above has turned many young lives around. If you share my view that ABOB's work deserves support to enable it to expand, there are

two main kinds of help they need. One is funding, the other is people: if you have the desire and some of the skills to help bring this work to your area, [contact ABOB](#) to see how to take this further.

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