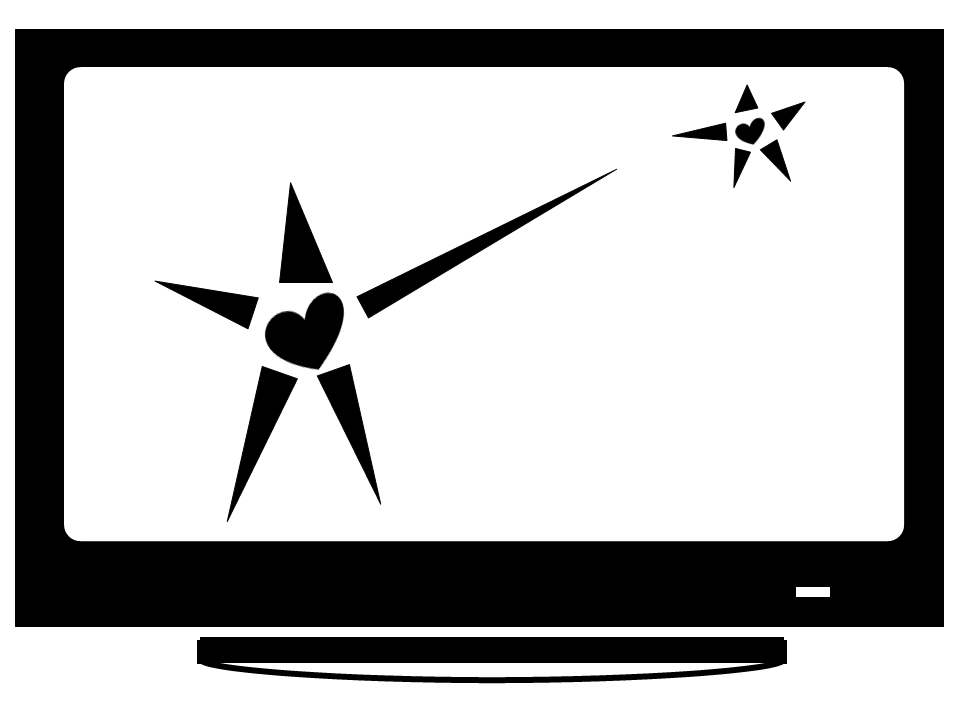
**GRASSROOT HOLLYWOOD:**

**BRAND YOURSELF AS A**

**ROLE MODEL**

**IN NEW MEDIA**

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By Lisa Schaefer, Ph.D.

http://RoleModelEnterprises.com

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### WHAT TO DO WHEN MEDIA IS FILLED WITH POOR ROLE MODELS

Movies, TV, music, newspapers, books - media as we know it, as we consume it, as our children consume it, is changing faster than we can get our arms around the concept. The costs of producing and distributing media have plummeted with the maturation of digital cameras and the Internet.

Now you can make short videos, or a series of videos, about role models and distribute them to the world via the internet. Or you may want to blog about role models. You may wish to use this book to get ideas for service projects that you and your friends or colleagues would like to work on. Or maybe you just want to read this book and think about how role models affect your life.

I introduce twelve concepts in this book. Each represents a chapter, which explains the concept and presents several anecdotes or examples. At the end of each chapter, I present challenges in the form of small short term exercises to try today, and larger exercises to shoot for the longer term. Depending upon your personal goals, you can pick and choose which exercises to try and which to leave for others to tackle.

I have also broken down Learning & Communication steps to help you reach a goal of creating your own stories to post on the internet. This assumes you have access to the internet. If you have never posted anything on the web, don’t worry, it’s simple – an eight year old can do it! Web sites make computer usage so much easier than when I was an undergraduate staring at a green computer screen with yellow text.

If you are planning on making a practice video, go through all the Advanced Learner steps. In case you haven’t already posted some of your own videos on the internet, I broke down the task of making a video story into manageable steps. This book won’t teach you all the details of making a video, but will refer you to a few resources if you want to look into it further.

So why did I writing this? Partly because there are too many poor role models in the media, but mostly because there are so many good stories about regular people and not-so-regular people that people would really like to know about. I lived a sheltered life on a farm until I was a teenager. All of a sudden when I moved to a city, I found out people did things with their lives besides milk cows and clean the house. Then when I went to college, I was amazed about all the people who came from foreign countries and had so many different experiences than I had ever dreamed of. I wanted to experience their stories.

# **Chapter 1 WHY I’M SHARING THIS WITH YOU**

I’m tired of who is getting attention in the media. And if you’re reading this, you probably are too. I know thousands of people out there are doing better work, better deeds that people would much rather know about.

## ***Glorification of bad behavior.***

Every day when I open my Internet email, I am bombarded with “news” about this celebrity’s misdeeds or that celebrity’s scandal. Honestly, I don’t care. I don’t need to know about it. There are so many other stories, so many more interesting stories about things people are doing that are more important. If nobody ever found out about the undergarment preferences of famous twenty-somethings, the world wouldn’t miss it.

Children and teens are particularly susceptible to what they see in the media. They consume much more media than adults. There are increasingly more media products and stories out there than in the past. When people see others behaving a certain way over and over, they start to think that behavior is normal.

## ***Effect on relationships***

You can’t take your kids to the grocery store anymore because the checkout line is filled with pictures of women in low-cut blouses with the word SEX (made you look) printed all around them, advertising that women need to learn tricks in order to please a man. The problem with relationships today is not that men aren’t satisfied with sex. The problem is that people are growing up with poor media portrayals of how relationships work (and in many cases, they see too many real-life displays of bad relationships), or poor role models of what happy relationships are and how people should treat each other.

Children of divorced parents are more likely to get divorced than children from two-parent households. Family therapists Beverly and Tom Rodgers, authors of *Adult Children of Divorced Parents: Making Your Marriage Work*, say that the lack of a mentor for a good marriage and the lack of a healthy social structure cause long-term difficulties in building healthy relationships.

My husband and I both have parents who got divorced after over fifteen years of marriage. We’ve been married for over thirteen years, and expect to be married much longer.

In the case of both sets of parents, the failing factor was lack of communication between spouses. They stopped being involved in each others’ lives, instead devolving into mere roommates living under the same roof.

My husband and I went into the marriage with the mindset that divorce is not one of the options in the set of solutions available for tough times. We have continued to be best friends. Our lives revolve around each other. Even though we each have our own activities, we’re always included in each others’ social plans.

In fact, when I look back at our thirteen-plus years of marriage, I don’t consider anything we’ve gone through as marriage-threatening. And I moved across the country for one year for a fellowship. Yes, it was a strain on my life. No, it wasn’t easy. It was extremely painful. But we weren’t adversaries in the situation. We were on the same side, supportive of what the other was going through. We were still the highest priorities in each others’ lives. Sometimes we have to use the norms that we see as a model of what not to do.

## ***Societal norms***

The behaviors and societal roles that people are exposed to repeatedly becomes their definition of normal or acceptable. Then they start to mimic that behavior. If you grew up in China, your behavior would be much different than if you grew up in Pittsburgh. The cultural norms are different. In some parts of China, it's typical not to flush the toilet every time. People pee on the floor in McDonalds (I personally witnessed this) when all the stalls are full. And McDonalds has the classy restrooms. But growing up in the United States, you would be appalled to see people peeing on the floor. Likewise, if you grow up seeing teens drinking frequently, you are more likely to think it's OK to drink when you are a teen.

Women are still portrayed as weak or as sex objects. This perpetuates the societal norm of women’s roles because both young women and men grow up believing that is how women are supposed to act. Women are shown as caretakers, never men. Of course, this stereotype started in society, not with the media, but we don’t get to see very many of the women who have made the choice to participate in other roles, the women who do other interesting things with their lives.

Men are portrayed as violent in many television shows and movies, even in sports. This reinforces that the roles of men in society are supposed to be physically rough, that men have to act big and tough to be “manly.”

## ***Priorities out of whack***

Too many people are getting the idea that to be important in the world, they must show off material wealth. Young people are forming ideas of what success means based on shallow qualities.

Some television shows make it seem important to be a singer. It's nice to have several singers to enjoy. But does a singer accomplish anything more important than engineers, scientists, or doctors? Surely there are some engineers out there doing something interesting enough that someone would pay attention. It's a matter of getting those stories out there.

Corporate priorities have changed as image becomes the grail.

Fifty years ago, employers treated their employees well and in return, employees were loyal to their employers. Today, employers are looking for short term gains. The CEOs of today aren’t going to be around next year, or sometimes even next month, so they do what works now with no regard to how it will affect the company in the future. They get their bonuses today and their golden parachutes when they leave next year to go on to ru(i)n a different company. It doesn’t affect them whether the company is still around for another five years.

Enron’s executives wanted to make their stock look great now. They weren’t concerned about how inflated stock prices or hidden debts would affect the company, their service, or their employees.

When someone did try to warn about accounting discrepancies, she was punished. Shoot the messenger.

Not enough people appreciate the non-material rewards in life. Whatever happened to the pride in a job well done? In building a strong company that provides a great service that people get excited about? In creating a community of workers that love to help each other achieve a goal?

The money-for-me as the only performance measure mentality has trickled down to the family.

When “Mona” was in high school, she was rewarded with material goods when she got good grades or for good behavior. TV shows and movies use material goods to show the success or wealth of a character.

Now as an adult, she surrounds herself with material goods.

I know I’m not the only citizen of this world who would like to see more attention paid to the women and men who are leading positive change in the world.

## ***Be a Role Model***

I believe we can do good. I also believe we can wreak havoc. We need to show society that there are people doing good things, living productive lives.

You can strive to develop qualities you want to have in yourself. It’s great to be an example. We can be an example for an even broader audience when we spread our stories over the internet. We define who we are in society through a feedback loop. You act, others react and you perceive and internalize those reactions, then you react to them. Others reinforce who we are.

It’s time to put stories out there that show positive behavior. When people are exposed to repeated stories of people doing good, they will associate good deeds as the way to act in society, influencing them to do more good deeds.

Hollywood tells some great stories, and puts together high-quality visuals, but it gives us garbage as role models. However, with new technology, it’s becoming easier than ever for everyone to put their own stories out in the world. It takes years to learn how to craft a cohesive story, but change has to start somewhere. If you don’t like what Hollywood puts out there, put something you do like out there. You can start by practicing with a small endeavor or by joining an existing effort of larger scale.

Some people spend too much time on solitary activities and not enough on their neighbors. We get back what we give.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters program is a successful mentoring program for at-risk youths that has been in existence for over a hundred years. In 1995, Joseph P. Tierney, Jean Baldwin Grossman, and Nancy L. Resch studied the effectiveness of the program. After eighteen months of spending time with mentors, the youths were less likely to begin using illegal drugs, to begin using alcohol, to skip school, or to skip a class. They were more confident of their performance in schoolwork, less likely to hit someone, and they got along better with their families

It didn’t matter what the kids did with their mentors. What mattered was that they had someone to confide in and to look up to. They had a role model.

We can place our attention where it belongs, on people who deserve it. We can put our stories out there, one role model at a time.

## ***Exercise: Why you want to share***

Get on board with our purpose: Putting positive role models in the media.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Now that I’ve explained why I’m writing this, ask yourself: Why are you reading this? What do you want to get out of this book? Do you want to be a part of a community invested in the role models seen in media? Do you want to create stories about role models in your life and share them with the world? Do you want to become a role model to others?

#### *Medium term (This week)*

If you don’t have time to read the whole book this week, skim through it or share it with your friends. Enlist your friends to help you create stories about role models.

## ***Learning & Communication: Share your vision***

#### *Learning exercise*

Articulate to yourself, on paper, why you wanted to read about putting role models in the media. Come up with one sentence to describe your favorite aspect of this book, whether it is the intent of the book as a whole, the exercises, or a certain piece of information you found to be interesting. Tell others why you are reading this book.

#### *For advanced learners*

Open a web browser and watch one of the two-minute RoleModel Enterprises videos at http://youtube.com/user/RoleModelEnterprises or go to http://RoleModelEnterprises.com and click on the link to our videos. Reflect upon the story structure of each episode or how the story flows overall from one episode to the next. You can comment on the videos at the bottom of the page. We appreciate your feedback on our work and our efforts.

# **HOW ROLEMODEL ENTERPRISES WAS BORN**

When I tell people I started a business to put role models in the media, I usually get a question to the effect of: How is that a business? I pondered the same question for three years before I forged ahead and started an actual business. This chapter describes how it’s a business, starting with a very brief synopsis of how I figured out how I would make it a business.

## ***The evolution of ideas***

Ideas are affected by your experiences through childhood to the present. Some pieces of your experiences get thrown away, other pieces are carried through everything you do.

It probably started when I was a kid and thought that after you learned how to read a book, the next thing you do is learn to write a book. But for some reason, I was doing all the writing on my own and we never got to the part about writing a book in my entire twenty-four years of formal education.

I read the Laura Ingalls-Wilder books when I was a kid, so I thought I too should write a book about my life on a farm. Of course, then I moved off the snowy farm and into a desert city. I’ve always had it in the back of my head that I was going to write a book about something in my life. I kept diaries off and on for future use and tried different ideas for different books.

In high school, my teachers told me I should be an engineer. I did not know what an engineer was. Neither did my teachers. So I went to the campus at Arizona State and asked a professor what engineers did. He said, "There will be a sewer project nearby that will need engineers around the time you graduate."

Horrified that my high school teachers wanted me to work in a sewer, I decided I would change my major as soon as I figured out how. Instead, when I got to college, I thoroughly enjoyed my classes. They were about math and computers and had nothing to do with sewers.

The general public has better knowledge today about engineers, but they are still sorely underrepresented in popular media, compared to their effect on society and our quality of life.

During grad school, I thought about writing a book for high school students about what engineers did. I didn’t know what engineers did my first year of college because nobody talked about it in a context that meant anything to me. I had never seen any jobs anything like engineering. I had seen teachers and people who worked in the grocery store. Engineers worked in offices where most people don’t see them.

I put that book project off until after grad school, thinking I’d be better off finishing school first. For the first few years out of grad school, I concentrated on my job. Until one day I asked myself where that job was going. It wasn’t going where I was trying to push it to be. At that point, I decided what my book was going to be and just started.

That book was not this one. That book is a work of fiction that I’m still working on. Fiction is much more difficult to write. Because it’s not true, or at least it didn’t happen that way, it has to be much closer to being perfect.

But as I wrote that piece of fiction, the theme of what I was doing, not just what I wrote, was becoming clearer. I knew what it was when I started writing it, but the meaning became more obvious the more I worked on it. It was the autobiography I started when I was seven and it was the book about engineers I started when I was in grad school. The purpose was to use my experiences to tell others what engineers did. Let them experience the job through my eyes, by following a story.

My novel was a big mess the first three years I worked on it. I hadn’t written any fiction since high school and even though I had written a masters thesis and a doctoral dissertation, I had never written anything as long as a novel. And in case you hadn’t noticed, novels are structured much differently than research papers. I had to learn how to organize a long story so that readers wouldn’t get lost, wondering what was going on.

My novel had become a series of all the stupid things that happened at work. I had over two hundred pages describing all those Dilbert moments and situations. Dilbert may be the best non-fiction comic ever created, but a series of Dilbert stories is not a novel. I decided to take a leave from my regular engineering job to teach at a local university, to get some perspective of the world beyond my ivory tower with iron bars in the suburbs.

While teaching, I took several screenwriting and video production courses. I had read that Al Gore was holding a contest for two-minute videos. I had also read about several series of YouTube videos. I thought it would be a great idea to make a series of two minute videos. I didn’t have any specific ideas. I figured I’d work on coming up with ideas when I got closer to finishing my novel.

Because my project had a bigger purpose than to just write a story and make it long enough to call it a book, I realized I needed to build a business around it. I didn’t know if it would be a non-profit or a for profit business. I looked into several possibilities, but I wasn’t quite sure how my goal, my purpose, was supposed to become a business.

I’m on the board of a women’s educational organization. The organization has been around for over a hundred years and the executive staff members are analyzing their mission for their future. Which got me thinking about what their purpose should or could be. I thought about the relevance of the mostly older members and their relevance is toward the younger generation. The most obvious answer was that they are role models to potential members. They can mentor younger women to become leaders – political leaders, business leaders, and a few of them could be science and technology leaders.

Of course, I don’t control their mission statement. But I can control my personal mission. I realized that I could make it my own mission to bring these leaders into the public eye so they can be role models to others. Still, not a business.

I thought starting my own nonprofit might be a good idea. The first recommendation for new nonprofits is to start as part of someone else’s nonprofit. If they’re willing to share resources. I figured I could put on fundraising events to gather my own resources. But then I thought if I had to sell a product or event to raise money, I might as well be for profit.

I still had a chicken and egg problem. What needed to come first? Should I build a business to promote my novel about the woman engineer, or would it work better to finish the novel, then I’d have something to talk about while building the business. I didn’t have the answer.

When a job came along, I decided to take it. I had to give them an updated resume. For my job title while working on freelance projects and my novel, I called myself a Role Model. My intention for the next two years was to do regular engineering work, being a role model to the next generation of engineers, while I figured out how my idea would become a business.

The job was a great big egg that hatched an even bigger chicken. In more ways than one. It was a terrible work atmosphere. Most of the women older than I were quitting that office. One guy kept feeling me up and locking me in the conference room. Nobody knew what work they were supposed to be doing. They fired me because I was the contractor, and because they could. Well, that was a story I couldn’t refuse. They handed the basis for my series of two-minute stories to me on a tarnished platter.

I had the story – my egg – and built the business ideas around different scenarios of how it could work. I started right away on a business plan. I pulled together all the interesting ideas for unique businesses I had seen pop up because the internet made those businesses possible. Then the ideas and possibilities rolled in. My thoughts about fundraising events referred back to my previous experience teaching class.

## ***The Plan: What RoleModel Enterprises is***

RoleModel Enterprises is a unique business, so it won’t be obvious to everyone how I’m going about my plan. Most of the media as we know it is turning to the internet. So that’s where I’m concentrating my efforts.

The goal is to get more positive role models featured in entertainment and news stories. Most of those stories will appear in new media, such as blogs, podcasts, and online video. Some of these stories will generate enough interest to gain attention in the more mainstream media, such as newspapers, television, and movies.

### **A community of people with a common interest**

While RoleModel Enterprises creates its own new media stories (blogs and internet videos), there’s only so much RoleModel Enterprises can create on its own at this point. We all need to get together to create a community of people interested in having positive role models featured more prominently and more frequently in the public eye.

Some of these people will have a passive interest, participating by watching the videos, reading the blogs, and maybe contributing comments. They can also join email groups and teleconferences. Some people will want to attend events for the sake of fellowship, community, and entertainment.

### **A community of activists**

Other people will take an active interest in putting positive role models in the public eye. They will create their own blogs, podcasts, and videos about positive role models and will attend RoleModel events. RoleModel Enterprises will also include mainstream media professionals interested in creating popular media about role models in the community of role models.

By bringing role models, mainstream media professionals, and new media amateurs together, mainstream and new media producers can become interested in stories about role models.

## ***What RoleModel Enterprises does***

RoleModel Enterprises provides a variety of services and events. We hold teleconferences, social networking events, media production seminars, and speak at other organizations’ events. We also create and distribute fiction and nonfiction stories about engineers as role models and distribute a newsletter.

### **RoleModel events**

The best jobs I’ve had were my teaching jobs. My first priority at the beginning of the semester was to learn all the students’ names. Since I have a keen memory, I usually got this down by the third class session. It helped that I had all the students write their names on the back of a business card, along with something unique about themselves. During the first two weeks, I’d have the students arrange themselves into groups of three or four to work on in-class exercises and to work on their class projects. This way, they quickly met other students in the class – an instant support group. For the most part, each group stayed together for the whole semester, although they were allowed to drift to different groups for the first month if it helped them. Some of my students were still hanging around together on campus three years later.

RoleModel events are similar. We get people into groups and have them talk about a given topic or do some type of exercise. Instant support group! Although it’s more like a game than a class. So anyone can come by themselves, or bring a friend. A support group may last for only an evening, or for a lifetime. You’ll probably even learn something from attending an event, but the main purpose is to meet new people, socialize with friends, and tell stories, or just listen. And I’ll probably learn something from you.

The exercises are mostly about brainstorming stories, or talking about ways to use new media. Some of the games are competitions, others, everyone’s a winner. If you don’t know much about new media, that’s a great excuse to join us. Somebody there will be able to help you. The best part about RoleModel events is that I won’t grade you on whatever you come up with. I’m a tough grader.

As of now, the venues are restaurants in the DC metro area. But you can watch our events on YouTube as they get posted. Go to http://RoleModelEnterprises.com and click on the link to the video site.

### **Teleconferences**

Once a month, the members have an hour to ask each other questions about creating new media about role models or other related goals they may be pursuing. It’s an opportunity to chat and meet remotely, over the phone or internet. To join RoleModel Enterprises as a teleconference member, go to http://RoleModelEnterprises.com and click on the link to Join Us.

### **Media production seminars**

Our seminars are day-long events where participants have the opportunity to network and create stories about role models. Every seminar will be slightly different, and some will have themes, such as father-son events and woman engineer events.

The day starts by arranging people into groups. Each group brainstorms story ideas, whether for a fictional role model or a non-fiction story. Then we go over how to create storyboards and let everyone create their own storyboard. We describe principles of good story structure and help participants figure out how their storyboard fits into a good structure.

After the lunch speaker, we go over the standard screenwriting format and give you time to write either a brief video script or a blog story about a role model. After participants have completed a rough draft, there is time for networking, to tell each other about their stories. Toward the end of the day, we talk about putting our stories in new media, such as YouTube, Facebook, and blogging.

We have in the works a plan for a seminar for people who bring their own camcorders. The participants create videos about their role model stories and share them with each other.

### **RoleModel videos – the woman engineer**

RoleModel Enterprises created a series of two-minute videos and posted them on the internet. You can see them if you click on the videos link at http://RoleModelEnterprises.com.

In the spirit of anyone-can-do-this, we kept the production very low-budget. The actors were volunteers, the video camera was a simple camcorder, and we filmed the scenes in RoleModel Enterprises’ offices. The only thing we “splurged” on was a low-end professional boom microphone.

The series is a true story about sexual harassment, passive-aggressive behavior, conflicting managerial assignments on projects deemed high-priority by Congress, and other power struggles in the workplace that result in a woman engineer being fired. The video series touches on the way women engineers are treated in the workplace, how government employees and contractors are treated in the workplace, how taxpayer dollars are spent, the shortage of engineers and air traffic controllers, and air traffic delays in New York.

Of course, getting sexually harassed doesn’t make a woman engineer a role model. She is a role model because she has strong technical knowledge and she gets along well with her coworkers. Even more commendable is that she focused on a goal to fix the problem Congress wanted the government office to solve – in spite of no direction from management and overall confusion among the staff about what they’re supposed to be working on.

### **Newsletter**

About once a month, RoleModel Enterprises sends out a newsletter. It reviews the most recent teleseminar, networking events, media production seminars, and any other company news.

If you would like to advertise in our newsletter, on our web site, or on our videos, we would welcome your contribution.

### **Speaking engagements**

In addition to holding teleseminars and RoleModel events, I speak at other organization’s conferences and meetings. The goals of some of the speeches are to motivate the audience to:

* Brand themselves as role models
* Create their own media about role models in their organizations and in their lives
* Live like the role models they would like to be to others
* Increase visibility of their organization as an organization of role models for their cause
* Recruit members to their organization
* Become mentors to potential members of their organization
* Become role models for the cause of their organization
* Recruit young women to the field of science and engineering
* Make lemonade when life hands them lemons
* Empower themselves

### **The Future**

Since internet technologies and innovative new uses are evolving rapidly, the RoleModels movement is evolving. Eventually there will be a RoleModels internet television show and teleseminars will involve some video over the internet.

As demand picks up, events, seminars, and teleseminars will be offered more frequently and with more focused themes. I’d like to have a Mother's day mother-daughter story-making event – a gift from dad – and an analogous event for Father’s Day. As technology gets cheaper, we’ll be able to provide more technology doodads that participants can use at each event. I won’t reveal all the ideas here.

And once events and seminars get a foothold in the Washington DC area, we’ll expand to other metro areas. Feel free to suggest ideas by commenting on the RoleModels blog or Facebook page. Go to http://RoleModelEnterprises.com for the link.

## ***Analogous businesses***

Although RoleModel Enterprises has a unique business model, there are several other businesses that have aspects similar to RoleModel Enterprises. To give you some paradigms to build your perception of RoleModel Enterprises around, I mention the similarities and differences of other businesses below.

### **Singles and young professionals services**

Several businesses in large urban areas put on unique social events for singles and young urban professionals. One business, called ThingsToDo, puts on an assortment of interesting classes, cultural events, and sport activities such as dessert preparation classes in the kitchens of chic restaurants, dinners at embassies, and paintball. The activities of ThingsToDo are different than RoleModel events, however people interested in their events may be interested in RoleModel events – smart urban professionals who like to attend social learning events.

### **Professional organizations**

These groups provide several of the types of products that RoleModel Enterprises creates, such as events, and newsletters. Events for professional organizations are typically industry tours or dinners with a speaker, while RoleModel Enterprises events have structured networking activities with a buffet. Professional organizations are typically geared toward narrow professional niches. RoleModel Enterprises gets people from a wide range of professions together.

One organization I found that I thought had an interesting business model is the Downtown Women’s Club, a networking organization for businesswomen. They send out a monthly e-newsletter, they offer memberships, it’s an online and in-person community. As with more and more professional and social organizations, members exchange messages through Facebook and blogs, plus several cities have local face-to-face meetings and events.

### **Nonprofit organizations**

RoleModel Enterprises is similar to nonprofit organizations in that it aims to advance a philanthropic cause. Instead of meetings, we put on events.

### **Professional speakers**

Many professional speakers put on their own events, however their typical focus is speaking at corporate events and conferences. Each professional speaker has their own niche. Some specialize in entertainment, some do motivational speaking, some do leadership training, and most have a certain topic. I speak at other organizations’ conferences and universities in addition to putting on networking events.

### **Night clubs**

One might even think of RoleModel Enterprises as something social to do instead of going to a night club or happy hour at a restaurant. But even better than night clubs, RoleModel Enterprises offers organized activities at their events to make it easier to have a topic to discuss with each new person that you meet.

### **Community classes**

RoleModel Enterprises events do have class-like qualities, in that there are some educational topics addressed during events, such as story structure or internet technology. But community classes are different than RoleModel events in that they typically don’t have an organized socializing component, although socializing happens on an informal basis in any class. When you sign up for a community class, you must commit to a several-week period, where RoleModel events are one evening at a time.

### **Publishers**

RoleModel Enterprises owns the rights to this book. What do I need a publisher for? I found my own printer. I do all the publicity. The internet takes orders. My computer prints mailing labels. UPS delivers. Publishers don’t help with publicity anymore. All they do is send books to bookstores. And bookstores don’t let the books sit on the shelves for very long before they send them back.

In early 2008, a short blurb in the Washington Post mentioned that Dennis Kucinich’s publisher was upset with him because he didn’t do enough publicity for his book. Who are they to be upset? He doesn’t need them, they need him. And what did they do for him in return?

### **Internet videos**

Other people have posted talk shows in series, fiction series, and educational series on the internet. Companies have posted videos as promotional material for their organization. The RoleModel Enterprises videos are also serial and promotional. They are a show about a true situation that happened in the fall of 2007.

### **Television**

The RoleModel Enterprises video series is like a season of TV shows, except that they are only two minutes apiece and they play over the internet. Of course, television is migrating to the internet, so that difference is shrinking. And eventually, RoleModel Enterprises will have its events on internet TV.

### **Independent films**

Like an independent film producer, RoleModel Enterprises is a small entity producing its own videos. However at this time, we have no intentions of submitting our series to any film festivals.

### **Mega place-of-worship**

Except on a smaller scale, inclusive of all religions, and the location changes at each event. We’re a good cause with some entertainment as a bonus. Everything’s a religion these days – political parties, sports teams, global warming, our employers. RoleModel Enterprises is the religion of role models. Let’s all get together, preach about role models, and do good work for our future generations.

### **Oprah**

As long as I’m comparing RoleModel Enterprises to places of worship, why not reach for the stars (like the RoleModel Enterprises logo) and think Oprah. She’s positive, she produces different forms of media, and she does good work.

## ***Target audience***

I’d like to think everyone would want to be a part of RoleModel Enterprises, but that’s not likely to be the case. Some people will be more interested in our events, others will be interested in joining to listen to teleconferences, and other people will be interested in supporting our cause by creating media at seminars or giving our books and T-shirts as gifts.

I’d like to get mainstream media professionals involved, since much of their work is migrating to new media. Also because they have the skills and connections to create and distribute mainstream media, which many people still pay attention to.

People in their twenties or thirties who like to shoot videos of their friends and go out to meet new people will enjoy RoleModel events. Volunteer members and paid staff of service organizations or nonprofits, and employees of small creative businesses or small departments of larger companies will also be interested in attending events and seminars. Many organizations would like to see their employees as role models for their cause.

Soccer moms who want to do something for their children and community will want to attend seminars and wear the T-shirts. Likewise, technically savvy retirees who want to do something for their grandchildren and community will be interested in trying out something new by attending a seminar.

People who are generally interested in seeing role models in the media will watch our videos, participate in events and teleconferences, and give RoleModel gifts to friends.

Which of these categories do you or your friends most closely fall under? As RoleModel Enterprises grows, we will come up with more ideas for services for our target audience, and other services to get more people interested in having positive role models in the media.

## ***Exercise: Get on board***

I hope you will get on board with the effort to put positive role models in the media, especially new media.

#### *Short term (Today)*

Since the internet is a dynamic source of information, web sites can reflect the current status and activities of an organization. The summer of 2008 is the time frame for initial launching of our events and videos. As we create new information, the RoleModel Enterprises web site is updated. To understand where we are today, check our web site (http://RoleModelEnterprises.com) for additions to the calendar of events or new video postings. If our videos aren’t posted yet, they will be soon. We intend to post new videos every week.

#### *Medium term (This month)*

Make a point to check back on our web site in a few weeks for new videos or events. Ask your friends, relatives, and colleagues about their interest in getting positive role models in any form of media. Form an informal group that would like to get together with you to talk about role model stories, maybe even join you in creating stories about role models.

## ***Learning & Communication: Email lists***

##### Email Lists

Email lists are a great way to keep in touch with friends, relatives, and colleagues. About once a month, I compose a short news story about something I’ve been working on or an event I attended and post it in my blog.

Over the past two years, I’ve been building an organized email address book—very handy for maintaining large email lists. You may be interested in organizing your email address book so you can send your own newsletter about events related to your favorite role model topic.

Since my email provider is trying to prevent people from sending annoying spam, it only allows people to send email to fifty people at a time. So I arrange all my email addresses into groups of less than fifty according to how I know each person.

For example, if the group gets to be more than fifty people, I split it into at least two groups. For example, what started as my AAUW (American Association of University Women) group, became three groups: AAUW Lobby Corps, AAUW Vienna, and AAUW Other.

However, because I sometimes send out up to four hundred messages a day (email provider’s daily limit), I think many of my messages don’t make it through everyone’s spam filters. If you need a more convenient method for sending mass email, you can pay for a service called Constant Contact, which will allow you to send your message to thousands of people without getting caught in spam filters.

#### *Learning exercise*

Sign up to be on the email list for the free RoleModel Enterprises newsletter at http://RoleModelEnterprises.com.

#### *For advanced learners*

Organize your email address book and make a point of finding email addresses for a few people you may have lost touch with. Write a few paragraphs about what you are doing towards putting role models in the media, or about something you read about what RoleModel Enterprises is doing. Post your message in a blog if you have one, and send an email to your friends notifying them of your blog update. Or just send your message out by email as an informal newsletter.

# **CHANGING TECHNOLOGY**

Some people have launched their careers by appearing on popular internet videos. Soon, being on internet videos will be the career. In *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, Clay Shirky an interactive telecommunications professor, considers grassroots activism one of the winners of the digital networking age. I predict that in less than ten years, all television shows will be on the internet and TV as we know it will become obsolete.

## ***Technology’s relevance to role models***

It's so much easier today not only to document our stories in video and written form, but to distribute our stories to small and large communities, and to the entire world.

### **Digital media: story creation**

The general public is free to join public access cable and radio stations in communities where they are located. Inexpensive graphics and word processing software make it easy for small local professional and service organizations to publish articles in their newsletters that can be easily distributed by email. But with the newest technologies, the whole world can view anyone’s media. There are blog sites, video sites, social networking sites, and personal web pages.

### **The internet: story distribution**

Not everybody is web savvy yet. I used to live in a small farming community. I went back to visit my grandparents and ran into several former classmates that do not have email or access to computers. Many older people have not experimented with computers. Likewise, in the 1950’s, not everyone had a television. But it eventually made its way into everyone’s living room.

In the near future, as more and more people gain access to the web, television will become obsolete. It is already being phased out by the younger generation in favor of internet video clips. Soon the internet will be the most common source of video, audio, and written entertainment.

After we create these stories about role models, we can share them with everyone by distributing them over the internet through email, blog postings, video postings, and audio postings. They’re out there for the world to search for stories about role models. You can send messages to an email list of family and friends to let them know they can view your story. They can forward the stories on to their friends. Your stories become a networking tool, something you can talk about and share with others. Blog sites facilitate online written discussions about your stories with spaces for readers to leave comments.

As mentioned in the Exercises section of Chapter 2, I write brief articles about engineering events that I participate in and send them around to friends and family once a month. It’s a great tool for keeping in touch and for fostering communication. They send feedback or comments on my stories. It’s a conversation piece. People I don’t see often get an update on what I’m up to. I like it much better than sending holiday cards once a year.

The internet will also become the most common repository of educational materials. Ebooks are becoming popular. The internet will not replace human interaction or learning from each other, rather, it will facilitate our learning from each other. The current state of virtual classrooms is not high quality yet, but soon webcams will help us simulate classrooms.

### **Virtual events: story communication**

The internet can also help us network in different ways with other people who have role model stories to tell or have better ways of creating or distributing stories, such as professionals in the media business. Web sites of professional and social organizations, online social networks, and virtual meetings are a few of the modern technological tools for networking.

I've been to meetings and classes where some of the participants were in another state. Their room showed on our end on a large projector screen and they saw us on their projector screen. They also saw any electronic slides we described to them. We could hear each other over speakers. It worked very well for what we were trying to accomplish – verbally communicating about technical topics. The video helped us to know who was talking and what was on the electronic slides we were talking about.

Many companies have video conferencing capabilities that allow and encourage people from multiple sites to call in at the same time and be connected to each other. Software automatically switches the view to another location when a person at that site starts to speak. It’s common for ten or more sites to be connected all at once, watching electronic slides, and asking questions like in a real face-to-face meeting.

I’ve been on webinars in my own home where hundreds of people called in from various locations. We could hear the meeting facilitator, although weren’t able to see each other. We could, however, see the same electronic slides that were being shown over the internet.

You could try having a virtual party with people in remote locations. Of course, you wouldn't be able to interact the same way. You wouldn't be able to share party food or drink (here, try one of the crepes, as I shove it into the phone). You wouldn't be able to read body language or dance together. (This is why online dating isn’t really dating until you meet in person.)

Soon there will be software that lets us see people in multiple locations on our computer screen all at the same time. You could have each person talk to the entire group for a few moments, then everyone break into small groups of three or four, where each person occasionally splits off to join another group.

So modern evolving technologies enable us to communicate in ways we haven’t been able to in the recent past. This affects our ability to put role models in the public eye by helping us create and distribute visual and verbal stories. We no longer have to passively accept only what others provide to us. We can create our own stories about role models, share them with each other, and communicate with each other about our stories in many different ways. We can use these stories along with internet capabilities to learn about each other.

## ***Blogging***

Some people post their blogs on their own web site, but blog sites such as blogger.com are free to anyone. I write articles for my blog, but most people post random interesting, or not, thoughts throughout the day. My blog, the Composite Post, can be found at compositepost.blogger.com. It’s easy to sign up for your own blog and post articles or other ramblings. Readers can even post comments to blog articles.

## ***Internet videos***

Ten years ago, if you wanted to get people from all parts of the globe to watch a video you made, you had to use bulky video cameras, transfer the video onto a tape, and mail it to specific locations. Sending the video to more than a handful of people was costly and inconvenient. Now just record, transfer the video to your computer, and upload it to the web for hundreds to thousands of people to watch.

Some YouTube videos have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times. That’s not quite the five or six million viewers some of the top television shows or movies get, but with YouTube’s increasing popularity, some of its videos will get that many hits in the near future. I have posted some of my videos on YouTube. Follow the Videos link from http://RoleModelEnterprises.com to view my videos.

In February 2009, we will no longer have analog television. My television antenna was hit by lightening a few years ago. My husband and I decided to skip buying a new television. Instead we watch DVDs that we buy on the internet or watch clips over the internet. The younger generation is already getting much of its entertainment from video clips on the web. NBC has posted several of their mainstream episodes on the web. The whole writers strike of ’07-’08 was about writers getting paid for their work that ends up on the internet because they see the trend leaning toward internet television.

A few shows that first gained popularity on the internet have been picked up by mainstream television networks, which reproduced them with the high quality standards that the television networks have the resources to handle. However, the internet versions of the shows were produced by people already in the television industry, not by amateurs. *Quarterlife* was a show that writers brought to the regular networks, but the networks rejected it, so they posted the episodes online. They gained enough popularity after the public had access to them that the networks decided to produce them after all.

On MySpace and Hulu, you can view television shows and movies with a small advertisement in the middle of each show. An hour and a half movie has a total of about two minutes of advertisement, a few ads about half a minute each, inserted at intervals throughout the movie.

## ***Social networking web sites***

Internet social networks are web sites where people can post a page about themselves. It usually includes a person’s name, their picture, the city or state they live in, and their age. The social networking site usually has a list of questions you can answer on your profile, such as favorite books or hobbies. MySpace, Friendster, Facebook, and LinkedIn are popular social networking sites. Just type .com at the end of the site name (e.g. myspace.com) in your web browser to see what the sites offer.

I’m jealous of college and high school students because they have Facebook while they’re still in school. Way back when I was their age, in the olden days, we didn’t even have email. A few people had it when I was an undergraduate, but email wasn’t common until I started working on my PhD. So I lost touch with all my classmates from high school and college.

I looked up my former students on Facebook. So many of them have over four hundred friends in their profile that they can keep in touch with for as long as Facebook lasts (I hope that’s a long time). I think about the hundreds of people I’ve known who have slipped into the ether, the connections lost. Where they are now? What are they doing?

In 2003, I would have defined “social networking” as the activity of meeting others at social and professional events. The purpose may have been to find out more about how other big city dwellers live. But today, that is the term used for web sites where friends can link to their friends’ profiles and exchange text and graphical messages. Yes, you can leave a picture of a lump of coal or a screaming monkey as a comment on your friends’ message page.

In 2003, my coworkers and I left graphical messages on each other’s electronic in/out boards at work. Because we could. My favorite was mutating a colleague’s picture so it was ten inches high and one inch wide, causing his in/out entry to take up an entire screen. I even figured out how to delete someone’s entire profile from the in/out board. When he got back from vacation, I told him he might have been fired since he was no longer in the system. Then I couldn’t figure out how to put him back on the in/out board. This practice was finally “banned.” (They could say it was banned, but what were they going to do about it?) If I would have foreseen this craze and created my own web site for coworker and friend comments, I could have made a lot of money.

There are different types of social networking sites. Many are for teens to post hourly updates so their friends can see what they’re doing, such as Facebook.com. Others are for professional networking, such as LinkedIn.com, for finding out professional associates of your professional associates. I recently found out that one of my professional associates is an associate of two of my social friends!

Why use social networking sites? I’ve found grade school friends I haven’t seen for twenty-five years, kids I used to babysit, and nieces who live out of state. It’s a great way to keep in touch with people as you move on to a different phase of your life. Social networking sites aren’t just for individuals. If you belong to an organization, such as your local branch of the American Association of University Women, you can start a Facebook group for your branch. It’s an excellent way to recruit and retain younger members.

About two years ago I started building and maintaining an email address book of new acquaintances I met and any of the old friends I could find. At that time, hardly anybody I knew was on Facebook, not even myself. I had a Friendster account with about three friends.

There must be a critical mass of people on any given social networking site in order for it to be of any use to you. Social networking sites are not very interesting when you have no “friends” on those sites, nobody to keep in touch with. Even though I have found some friends from my past, most of the people I have tried to find from grade school or high school do not have a profile on any social networking site. Whenever an old friend comes to mind, I’ll search for his or her name on a networking site. I haven’t taken accurate statistics, but I’ve found probably less than ten percent of the people I’ve looked for who are around my age (late thirties). But as social networking sites gain more exposure in the mainstream media, more people my age and older are signing on.

Social networking is more common among people ten or more years younger than myself. When I searched Facebook for all my former students at American University, all in their early twenties, I found profiles for about seventy percent of them. I have also noticed that social networking is more common in Washington DC, where computer skills and networking on and off the computer are job requirements. I noticed that I am more likely to find someone my age on Facebook if they live in the DC area than if I knew them from my life in Phoenix or the farmlands of Wisconsin.

What does this mean if you are forty or older? You may be able to find several younger relatives, neighborhood kids, or children of friends to keep in touch with. Some high school kids might think it’s not cool to have older people in their friend lists, but many students add their teachers and aunts or uncles. I signed up for Facebook when I saw a newspaper article about social networking sites (hmm, paper news reporting on new media) that quoted a girl I had featured in a video I created about a high school science fair. She accepted my friend request without complaint. Twenty-something coworkers like to recruit their older coworkers to social networking sites. That’s how I signed up for Friendster.

If sites like Facebook or MySpace has just too much busy stuff going on for you, LinkedIn might be more your style. That site is not graphic-intensive. It is meant more for professional networking than as a high school yearbook. Most members are in their thirties and forties. I was recruited to join by my forty-something cousin. I have found several CEOs of businesses and presidents of professional associations on LinkedIn.

I have posted my profile on four social networking sites: Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, and LinkedIn. To see my Facebook profile, go to http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=507176720, or just go to Facebook.com and search for “Lisa Ann Schaefer.” Facebook seems to be the site of choice lately, based on how easy it is to find people I know on their site, compared to how many people I know have profiles on other sites. Perhaps the sites are having a contest similar to VHS versus beta for market share. I don’t post hourly updates, so you won’t be able to find out what I’m doing at this moment. But you can post comments or browse the groups I belong to.

## ***Personal web sites***

For ten dollars a year, you can get your own domain name. However that doesn’t give you an actual web site. Most home or business internet services come with web space, but they don’t run any applications (needed if you want to collect information from people entering data on your web page). You can get a service to host your web pages and run applications for around six dollars per month.

I’ve had a personal web page since 1995. My first site was hosted on Arizona State University’s server for student web pages. After I graduated, it migrated to my PhD professor’s server, then to Marymount University, American University, and finally to Verizon. I purchased the domain name RoleModelEnterprises.com, but it referred to my Verizon web site. I never needed to run applications since the site wasn’t interactive. After RoleModel Enterprises got going, however, I needed to run applications to build my email list.

## ***More flat business organizations***

Soon, the judgment and opinions of Hollywood executives may no longer be used to decide on what stories to allocate their financial resources. The public will create low-budget stories, and whichever stories become popular will get picked up by the high-dollar production studios. This has already happened with the show *Quarterlife*. (Although it was rejected by Hollywood execs before the creators decided to do it on their own, gaining popularity in spite of no prior blessing by Hollywood execs.)

We will no longer need nor be able to justify keeping Loot ‘n Leave corporate executives in Hollywood nor elsewhere. The internet will enable people with talents and skills to pick and choose where, when, why, and whom they work for, for how long, and what work they do. The commitment between employer and employee is already diminishing. People will be paid to do work based on their expertise, rather than to occupy cubicles for eight hours per day. People will freelance, do work for many different projects for many different organizations. If those individual talented people want to pay others to help them do their work, fine. Some people already do this through a website called elance.com.

This will have a big effect on the stock market, global economy, and on health insurance. At some point, it is possible that Americans may no longer be able to rely on Asians slaving away in squalor to support their elaborate lifestyles. Asians may some day be able to demand salaries on the global, rather than local, market and economy. However, for this to happen, it may require free access to the internet by all Asian citizens. It is unlikely that human rights in all Asian countries will advance to the point where all their citizens will be allowed to access the internet any time soon.

## ***Exercise: YouTube***

If you haven’t already spent much time working on social networking sites or browsing web videos, take a moment to learn about these resources.

#### *Short term (Today)*

YouTube is a collection of videos that users have posted. Or is it a collection of users who have posted videos? YouTube users have profiles, which include the collection of videos they post. You can see the profile for RoleModel Enterprises at http://youtube.com/user/RoleModelEnterprises. Leave a comment for us in the Connect with RoleModelEnterprises box on the site.

You can find the most viewed video by clicking Videos next to the YouTube logo at the top of the screen. At the time of this writing, it was something about Barack Obama with over a million hits. Hot For Words, a word lesson by a somewhat smart, but scantily-clad young woman seems to always be near the top of the list. Is she trying to be a role model for words, but getting attention by devaluing her body?

#### *Medium term (This week)*

If you haven’t done so already, create a YouTube profile by filling out the simple Sign In form at YouTube.com. You do not need to post a video. If the RoleModel Enterprises videos are already posted, you can view and rate the videos at http://www.youtube.com/RoleModelEnterprises.

## ***Learning & Communication: Networking on the internet***

##### Social networking web sites

I find that I don’t use social networking sites very often. Maybe I’m too old. Many high school and college students use them to update their friends on what’s going on in their days and in their lives. That age group has more peers that are also using social networking sites on a regular basis. I joined assuming that I’d find a use for them in the near future when I want to send announcements about the videos I post.

Facebook seems to have enough of a critical mass of members to be useful for keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances. MySpace seems to concentrate more on hosting videos.

I also tried out other social networking sites. If you are curious about what’s on those sites, go to http://www.myspace.com/LisaAnnSchaefer http://profiles.friendster.com/lisaschaefer or http://www.linkedin.com/in/LisaAnnSchaefer to browse my profiles or to link to other capabilities on those sites.

You can join some of the interest groups on Facebook. Search groups by clicking, enter “role model” or other interest you have to get a list of groups to join. You can join the RoleModel Enterprises group by entering and clicking. Browse through the list of members.

Depending upon the site, you may be able to post messages on your friends sites, invite them to take an IQ test, or post songs and videos that your friends can view.

#### *Learning exercise*

If you don’t already have a Facebook account, open a web browser right now and go to Facebook.com. Enter your name, email, password, and birthday. Click on the button to sign up, and follow the very simple, brief instructions. Click on “view and edit your profile.” You can upload a picture or leave the question mark in that box. That’s it! You’re on Facebook!

Type RoleModel Enterprises in the Search box on the left. In the box with our logo, click on “view group” then under the logo click on “Join Group.” You just joined the RoleModel Enterprises Facebook group! Your picture, or your Face, will be in our Book of members. Of course, this doesn’t obligate you to anything. It just includes you in our Facebook group.

#### *For advanced learners*

Try creating your own simple web page. Even if you aren’t going to create your own web pages, it’s good to at least know how to create a link to other pages. You may wish to include links in a blog that you will create when you get to Chapter 5.

There are whole books, courses devoted to teaching hyper-text markup language (html). There is so much reference material on html available on the web that I won’t go into much detail here. A good site that lists html examples is http://www.w3schools.com/html/html\_examples.asp.

The way I learned html is to simply copy and paste pieces from the source code of other web pages. View the source code of a simple page on the internet (go to http://mysite.verizon.net/rolemodels/join.htm and select View from the menu bar, then click on Source. A text file will pop up. Save it on your computer as RoleModels.htm.

Changing some of the text and type <a href="http://RoleModelEnterprises.com ">RoleModel Enterprises</a> somewhere on the page. You created a link! Open the file in a web browser. The words RoleModel Enterprises will appear on your new web page in colored font. When you click on those words, the RoleModel Enterprises home page will open.

If you don’t have someplace to host your web page, you can still view it from your own computer. Most universities offer web space to their students and some offer it to alumni. You can get free space to host a web site at http://www.orgfree.com/ if you’re willing to have a few ads appear on your site. If you have DSL service, you likely have web space allocated to you, whether you are aware of it or not. Some hosting services have automated templates to help you create a web page without html. I create my own html pages with a text editor, such as Notepad, and ftp the files to my own web space.

Keep what you created. You may end up getting a place to host it later.

# **WHAT’S YOUR ROLE MODEL STYLE**

Tap your inner role model. What do you want to brand yourself as?

There may be something subtle in something you are already doing in your life. You may belong to a church or other social service organization that does good work. Maybe your job is important and improves the quality of life in America or in third world countries. Or you may have a friend or relative who is doing something you are proud of and you want to be the one to share their story with the world.

It’s OK if some people don’t agree with the merit in your story or topic. You can’t please everyone. Not all role models resonate with all people. There are the obvious ones, like Mother Teresa or anyone else who dedicates their lives to helping the poor and the sick without regard for what they receive in return. And the obvious non-role models, such as those who get thrown in jail for murder or robbery.

But what about the more controversial topics? Some people considered the teen in the movie *Juno* to be a role model for young girls who become pregnant. On one hand, it took courage to go through with the pregnancy. Her family could be considered role models for giving her adequate support to be able to have the baby. Some may laud her for not getting an abortion. Others may think that she doesn’t deserve glory because of her lifestyle or choices that led to becoming pregnant. Or that she should have given the child up for adoption to give an infertile couple the joy of raising children. Or that she shouldn’t be bringing yet another child into this world to consume its resources.

If you worry too much about what everybody else thinks about your story, you’d never get anything accomplished.

When I decided to create my series of internet videos, I knew lots of people would absolutely hate my videos. Sexual harassment is a sensitive topic. A video of someone feeling me up is certainly not the kind of video anyone would expect from me. I didn’t even expect it from me. It’s not the story I wanted. But it was the story I had.

When I set out to make the videos, I knew I had to brace myself. It would be very uncomfortable, more information than I wanted to share. More information than I’d want to hear from others. I knew there could be all kinds of terrible consequences for putting the videos out there.

Some people might make parodies of the videos. Go ahead. I might find them to be funny.

There was the risk that people could spread lies about me to the media. I figured people can say whatever they want about me. It’s not going to change the opinion I have of myself.

I could get phone calls at weird hours, people waiting outside my house. I was concerned that I might attract stalkers who think they should be allowed to grope anyone they want. I told myself to be vigilant, suck it up, and deal with it when it happens.

Some people were going to think I was a naughty little girl for saying bad things about the government and my former employer. But I wasn’t doing this to please them. They didn’t fire me to please me.

My former employer may have expected me to crawl away and hide, pretend it never happened, never grace their doorways with my presence again. That’s what anyone else would have done. But I’m not anyone else.

Like those who say women ask for getting raped, some men will say that I wanted to get sexually harassed. Others will say I deserved to get fired, making up odd reasons to justify it. Some might say I’m a bad woman because I didn’t keep quiet like women are supposed to be.

One thing I knew is that they couldn’t fire me again.

But I also knew that some people would be grateful that I put the video out there. And the video showed me as me. So the public could get an idea of who I was, regardless of what the media might say about me.

I knew it was a powerful story. Pain is the heart of a good story. It draws people in. My story had elements that would hit home for a lot of people. Sexual harassment. Poor treatment in the office. Waste of taxpayer money. Throwing away Congress’s mandates to fix air traffic congestion. Throwing away the flying public’s valuable time.

Sexual harassment is a real problem that very few people want to talk about. The subtleties aren’t easy to communicate, especially without video. And poor treatment by employers is a real problem. It may be the downfall of our country if we continue to take U.S. dominance for granted.

I can tolerate a lot of flak. So I figured one of the worst things that could happen is that nobody would watch the video.

Even I consider some topics not applicable to role models. People who are admired for their ability to do a sport well are off my list. What did they accomplish… throwing a ball in a hoop? Not very important to society. But one may argue that it took persistence and discipline to get where they are, they are a model of keeping healthy, they don’t cave under pressure, etc.

So if some people criticize your role model, go ahead anyway. You don’t have to please everyone.

## ***What do you stand for?***

Are you passionate about kids? Do you care about the environment? Maybe you’re the person who believes in caring about the environment by teaching kids why it’s important to preserve the planet for future generations.

Recognizing what you stand for is about branding yourself, developing your self-image and the image others have of you.

When I was in grade school and high school, I was “The Smart Kid.” But when I got to college, there were a lot of “smart kids,” a few of whom were even smarter than I. I had to erase “The” from my unofficial title. I was another one of the smart kids. I realized I had to figure out what else made me who I was.

I was one of a few young women in the engineering program. I was really nice to everyone. I was more outgoing and friendly than most of my classmates, which was not the case in high school – partly because I became more friendly, partly because in a gigantic university compared with a tiny Catholic school, people felt like small fish. And that’s where I found my niche. I was the friendly girl who could help other students with their homework, the one everyone wanted in their study group or project team.

I formed impromptu study groups whenever I saw a classmate at the library. I got invited to join study groups with all the other smart kids. I got to know many of the student leaders and joined student organizations.

I was so active in campus clubs that I became the poster child for student involvement. My new title became “Queen of Clubs.”

Some people will receive your message more readily than others. Start by preaching to your choir, or at least focus on them when you create your stories. Imagine your audience as being very supportive of what you are telling them as you write or storyboard your first draft. Then bring in a few people on the fence, who may not be as receptive to your message. What do you have to do or say to convince them your story is important?

What you stand for will evolve as you grow and become more experienced. Your role will evolve, incorporate the pieces of yourself that you accumulate throughout your life. Sometimes you will make small additions or changes to your platform, other times you may make a huge leap to something else. But you always bring yourself to the table. You are made up of all the experiences you’ve gathered along the way. Take advantage of what makes you unique to figure out what you have to offer to others.

## ***Female Role Models***

In the 1970’s, when people saw the words “Made in Japan,” what impressions came to mind? Cheap junk. By the 1990’s, what did people think of products, such as Toyota, made in Japan? Best car. People saw that Toyota was no longer junk. Now people no longer associate Toyota with junk.

In the 1950’s, when people thought of women’s roles in society, what did they think of? Mother, secretary, nurse, teacher. That’s it. Women were not encouraged, often not allowed, to do anything else. But today we’ve seen women engineers, CEOs, and senators. But apparently we haven’t seen enough. Women are breaking out of the old stereotypes, but haven’t broken out far enough yet. Women are still discouraged from entering and remaining in traditionally male-oriented fields.

Even in the television show, *Commander in Chief*, Geena Davis could only get to be president by having the elected president die first. I can’t understand why the show’s writers didn’t think the viewers would accept that a woman could get elected to the office.

### **Technical leaders**

Many people stay in the pigeonholes others put them in. Others know they don’t belong in the roles society or family dictates for them.

I grew up with the mindset that women were supposed to be teachers, nurses, secretaries, or housewives. But I was a math whiz. I entered college as an engineering major, but I applied for on-campus clerical jobs. I thought that’s what I was supposed to do. All the girls in high school were expected to learn to type.

I had never heard of an engineer, or any other careers for that matter. I signed up as an engineering major in college because that’s what my high school teachers said good math students do. I didn’t even know what a major was. I think that when one of the college professors told me engineers work in sewers, he was trying to discourage women from continuing as engineering majors.

I never had strong technical women role models until I was almost finished with my bachelors degree. Until then, I hadn’t met women in professional technical positions, not even in any of my internships. There was only one female professor in my undergraduate department, and the only class I took from her was during my last semester (she was excellent and went on to become the department chair).

I didn’t have any fictional characters to relate to either. Most television shows, movies, and books do not feature people in technology careers or with mathematical backgrounds.

Captain Kathryn Janeway on *Star Trek: Voyager* was portrayed as a motherly leader. I find it interesting how the writers chose to portray the other two main female characters. One was completely incapable of expressing emotions and had huge boobs. The other was a pretty half-alien who had fierce temper tantrums.

At least the show did a good job of showing positive, likable traits of both characters, in spite of their emotional problems. They were both very intelligent with a strong sense of confidence.

It is also interesting to compare how women of the future were portrayed on the original 1960’s *Star Trek* series and Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (wives, assistants) and how women of the future are portrayed today (intelligent, independent).

### **Business leaders**

Some of the first women business leaders started companies aimed toward women. Mary Kay Ash sold face cream to her friends. She worked hard and came up with the idea of having women sell cosmetics as a means to empower themselves by becoming cosmetics business consultants. Mary Kay Cosmetics grew into a large international company.

Debbi Fields started selling cookies in a store in California and became successful enough to franchise out Mrs. Fields cookies. There are many fashion-oriented businesses, restaurants, and cleaning businesses run by women. Martha Stewart is the ultimate women-oriented businesswoman. Oprah Winfrey is another positive example of a successful businesswoman who uses her business to help others achieve self-actualization.

More recently, women have become leaders of technology-oriented and other male-dominated companies. Carly Fiorina was the CEO of Hewlett-Packard. Meg Whitman was the CEO of Ebay while it was one of the fastest growing companies in history.

But the sad truth is that there are many “women” owned businesses that are actually run by their husbands. A few years ago I went to an event where one of the women “owned” a construction business. After listening to her speak, I was not convinced she knew the business. I asked her how she got into the business. Her answer: her husband owned a similar business.

In third world countries, microfinance has been used to help empower women to feed their families. At first, men were concerned that this would take power away from them. But they found that when the women were able to get educated and run their own small business, the entire family benefited. So the men became supportive of the women’s businesses.

Women business leaders are often not as readily accepted as male business leaders. “Experts” have suggested that women need to be more aggressive and competitive. But studies have shown that when women are more aggressive and competitive, they are more likely to be thought of as difficult to work with and are penalized in the workplace for exhibiting the very behavior that they are told to cultivate. As a culture, we need to see more of what does work for women in business leadership positions. The stories of women who have made it as business leaders can serve to help younger women understand what works in business and envision themselves in those positions, handling those situations.

In the 1970’s, and earlier, most of the women on television were supporting characters: mothers, secretaries, nurses. *The Bob Newhart Show* was unique. It was the first to feature a couple where the woman had a career and no children (although she was still the wife, and not the main character).

The Mary Tyler Moore show featured Mary as the main character, a career woman, in a refreshing change from her previous role as a crying wife.

### **Political leaders**

Women in politics are also told to behave “like a man,” then are penalized for doing so. I really feel for Hillary Clinton. She is strong, able to take charge, and doesn’t hesitate or act wishy-washy. Yet even women criticize her for being strong and taking charge. It makes me wonder, what other woman does anyone think could handle running for president?

Or does this nation think it can’t handle a woman president? We seem to need to see more women in leadership positions before we can envision our nation under such leadership. We need more female politician role models.

The difference between technical or business leaders and political leaders as role models is that political leaders tend to be in the public eye already, particularly because of their positions. Political leaders are in the news much more often than engineers or CEOs because the nature of their work is public. Engineers and CEOs tend to work on more proprietary business. An exception might be Steve Jobs, a technical (male) leader and CEO, whose company develops cutting edge technological products such as the iPod or iPhone. Political leaders, real or fictional, are also featured more in movies or television shows because the perceived impact of one politician’s work is big. Big stories with big impact make better stories.

But politicians may not actually do anything that has any big impact. Their job is to say lovely words. To get attention. If an engineer makes the news, they probably really messed up.

The first person that comes to mind when anyone mentions a woman politician is Hillary Clinton. She’s already been in the White House, possibly having a bigger effect on decisions than we knew about. She was in the public eye so often, people already knew who she was, and they looked to her as a female political role model. The voters in New York had so much confidence in her role she made for herself as First Lady that they elected her as a senator.

Note that I said she made the role for herself. She had the leadership abilities to be able to put herself in that role. Having the title of First Lady was not enough to enable her to run for the Senate.

Nancy Pelosi is also an excellent role model for women politicians. But there are many women politicians in local communities that could also serve as role models for women who would like to get involved in local politics.

## ***Male Role Models***

Men are also put into stereotypes. They are supposed to be tough, not show emotion, and be in charge. Some are called tech geeks, others dumb jocks. But many are role models for non-stereotypical lifestyles and behavior.

### **Well-read leaders**

In the summer of 2007, news articles brought to our attention that boys reading skills are declining. More in-depth studies have revealed that this is true mostly among low-income boys, but not so much among the middle class or wealthy. So it is more of the age-old problem that poor children do not receive education as good as wealthier children. This indicates that low-income boys need role models that encourage them to read.

Two types of reading are done in school: reading for information and reading for pleasure. For the most part, when reading for information, the text is nonfiction, often in the form of instructions or a set of facts. When reading for pleasure or entertainment, the passage is often fiction, but it can be a nonfiction story.

Nonfiction news stories are important to communicate what is going on in the world around us. Nonfiction instructions are important for learning how to do a process, such as installing software. A necessary skill is the ability to break tasks into processes. Large projects, especially those that take years, such as growing a business, require lots and lots of baby steps to accomplish the end goal. Not many people are able to envision themselves making long-term goals and working toward an end that may seem far off.

Fiction is often used to help with vocabulary enhancement. It is also used as a means to enhance imagination and creativity. Both fiction and nonfiction stories can be used to teach about life in other lands or other cultures. It can be used to show children and adults what other people’s lives are like. In other words, fiction and nonfiction can be used to teach about role models. Role models reading about role models.

Children need to have their parents read to them so they can learn about how symbols translate to sounds and words that can be assembled to communicate through sentences and paragraphs. But as children learn to read on their own, reading becomes a solitary process. Role models have to do something besides quietly sitting reading in a corner. Boys need to see men involved in literary activities. I rarely see men working at my local library. Occasionally a man volunteers there, but most of the employees are women. Except for the library manager.

Small children frequently attend the library, which means a parent brings them. It’s usually their mother. If you know of a project that features men helping young boys at a library, by all means, put that story out for the public to see. We need to see more examples of men at libraries.

The Fairfax County, Virginia, library system holds a mystery night every few months. A young man who is a library employee writes the characters and the plot.

The characters, about twelve other library employees, half men, half women, and one dog, come dressed as their character and stay in character the entire evening.

About fifty library patrons are split into groups and have the opportunity to ask the characters questions throughout the evening. The group that guesses the correct character as the murderer wins nothing. But the snacks are excellent.

Door prizes are books by local authors.

Although these events are meant for adults, similar library events may be candidates for a story. Other library events are probably being held in your community, perhaps some aimed toward teens and younger children. Male role models could encourage low-income boys to become involved in other literacy events also.

### **Father figures**

In the household I grew up in, the man had little involvement in the raising of children. That job was already being managed by someone else. He was neither encouraged nor expected to step in.

My hypothesis is that in some cases, more in the past than in today’s families, the women think they need to have children because everyone else does, it’s expected of them, or they don’t know what else they are supposed to do with their lives. The men don’t care one way or another. Their attitude is, sure, have some babies if you want. They let the wives worry about it. Then they keep their hands out of the child-rearing because their wives take over, so they don’t have to do anything.

But more women today aren’t interested in raising children if they have to do the whole thing themselves. They don’t have time to take over. And through communication with their husbands, they are able to get more buy-in from their husbands.

Fathers can be quiet, strong figures in the background when it comes to family, even if they are outspoken at their workplace. But there are many good stories about fathers waiting to be told. Many fathers are inspirations to their children.

Sometimes fathers are single parents. I know a father of four young children who was left to raise the kids after their mother disappeared. I asked him if he felt outnumbered by all those kids. He said, “Outnumbered, yes. But still up to the task.” This man’s brother also had to raise small children on his own when his wife died shortly after childbirth.

A father figure is someone who looks out for the younger generation and teaches them how to move out on their own. Sometimes men assume fatherly roles outside of family when the relationship leans that way. Sometimes a neighbor, an uncle, or a coworker can act as a father.

I moved to Northern Virginia for a year to work on a research fellowship at the Federal Highway Administration while I was still in grad school. I didn’t know a soul on the east coast. And the office I worked in wasn’t very welcoming to the grad students.

Members of the research staff occasionally gave talks about their work. I met an older gentleman at one of these talks who was interested in helping grad students work on some of his pet projects.

After visiting his office frequently during the first several months of my fellowship, I ended up working on a project with him by default. He was a good sounding board for thoughts about technical work and office politics. I knew that even if my office wasn’t supportive of my assistance at the Federal Highway Administration, he and his boss were more than happy to have me looking into interesting projects. His gentle leadership was about the only thing that kept me going while I was on my own in the Washington, D.C. suburbs.

When I moved back to Phoenix to finish grad school, his office supported me with a research grant for two years to continue the work I had started in Washington. With his guidance, I was able to dig into what had already been done in the area and to branch out on my own. It was time to go off and do my research independently, based on what I had learned during the time I spent in his office.

### **Women-oriented professions**

Traditionally, nurses, teachers, and secretaries were women. Due to many societal changes, such as having fewer children, postponing children and marriage, and single-mom households, we are looking at the role of men and women in society differently. Women are now taking on more male-dominated roles. Why can’t men go for the women-oriented roles? There must be many men out there who would like to enter women-dominated professions.

This nation is facing a shortage of nurses. In the past it was easy to find nurses. It was one of the few fields where women were welcome. But now the more ambitious women are becoming doctors and lawyers. Registered nurses make a good salary. There is a demand for men to become nurses.

In the past, women who had a mind for math and science became math and science teachers. Now they are becoming scientists and business administrators. The engineering profession is also starting to attract more young women. And there is a dreadful shortage of qualified math and science teachers. English teachers are being forced to take math classes so someone at the school can teach math.

Unfortunately, teaching typically offers low-paying salaries, an indicator of society’s low value placed on teaching (it doesn’t bring in money this quarter) and on women. Since women were willing to take on the task for low pay, men have been indirectly discouraged from becoming teachers.

As far as I know, there is no shortage of secretaries due to women avoiding the field, most likely because many secretarial duties have been taken over by electronics. Perhaps soon teaching, nursing, even parenting will be replaced by computers. It wouldn’t surprise me.

Men sticking to masculine roles may be about feeling afraid to be made fun of for looking or acting too girly. Men need to see role models of respectable men who can take on typically “feminine” roles and still be strong, who are secure enough with their masculinity that they don’t feel embarrassed about taking on roles stereotypically filled by women.

## ***Minority role models***

When I was casting for the RoleModels series of internet videos, most of the responses I received were from young African-American men. I specified that most of the characters would be white. Does society give African-American men stronger messages than other groups that they should become actors?

Unfortunately we still live in a society where people have ill-informed preconceived notions about African-Americans, Hispanics, Muslims, engineers, etc. After society becomes used to seeing these people in different roles, the stereotypes will fade away.

### **Intellectuals**

On NPR one morning, the newscaster mentioned a survey that asked people whether they thought there were more African-American men in jail or in college in the United States. Now I've never been to jail, but I have been to college, taught college, and worked with people who have been to college. Of the students and coworkers I have encountered, many were African-American men. I live not too far from Howard University, which has thousands of African-American men. And there are many more colleges in the United States than there are jails. So I figured there had to be a lot more African-American men in college.

But the survey results said people thought there were more African-American men in jail.

Luckily, the truth is that there really are more African-American men in college. Which means that although many young African-American men are doing quite well, their role models are not keeping up. The public sees too many African-Americans as gangstas and dog-fighters. We need to see more of the African-American men dedicated to learning and improving themselves.

Bill Cosby himself was a believer in education. He preached, "The time spent acquiring a drug habit and kicking it is time you could have used to educate yourself."

Cosby didn’t start out on the education track. He dropped out of high school to join the Navy. Later he earned his GED. But he didn’t stop there. He eventually went on to earn a Ph.D. (note: earn, not granted as an honorarium) in education from University of Massachusetts in 1977. His thesis was called "An Integration of the Visual Media via Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids into the Elementary School Curriculum as a Teaching Aid and Vehicle to Achieve Increased Learning".

Even Bill Cosby’s acting career made him a role model. Before his 1960’s show *I Spy,* no African-American man had ever held a starring role in an American television show. The few blacks on television typically portrayed butlers, bus drivers, or poor families. Cosby's character was a Rhodes scholar.

In the 1980’s, people complained that *The Cosby Show* (my favorite show during that era), about an upper class black family, was unrealistic because it didn’t show any of the problems faced by real African-American. But there are real smart and responsible African-American. People needed to see blacks who were doing well; that their life was possible. The Huxtable family members were role models.

Even when minorities do have the opportunity to obtain an education, they may not have much guidance regarding how to go about that education. Like women, racial minorities are also not encouraged to enter engineering or other technical professions. They have few role models in those fields.

“Scott,” a young African-American computer science professor, did his research as a part time employee at a company where I used to work. Scott’s family was from the south. His grandmother had only a few years of elementary education, resulting in illiteracy. His father never went to college, but figured out how to run a business. His father owned several gas stations and did well enough to give Scott his older Porsche when Scott completed his Ph.D.

Scott lives a good life. He teaches classes at Georgetown University and lives in a nice suburban neighborhood. His wife is friendly and well-educated. They have a healthy young son.

Scott is always positive and upbeat. When management no longer supported his research topic, he didn’t complain or blame. He looked around until he found someone else who would be supportive. I didn’t even know he had been having trouble until it came up casually in conversation. He never whined about not getting his way. He always focused on what was going well for him.

The best aspect of Scott was that he chose to look at the positive side of his situation. He never acted like a victim, never thought like a victim. He didn’t expect others to give him all the breaks. He knew he had life better than most people, and that goes a long way toward finding people who will be supportive of whatever cause you want to champion. He did a lot of good work for African-American causes, but didn’t use his race as an excuse for why he should get special treatment.

Many minority role models do not necessarily champion the cause of their race, but of humankind in general. It’s about transcending race. Being seen as a good citizen, not as the good black/Hispanic/other-person-who-is-not-the-same-color citizen.

Many people of Hispanic heritage live in the Arizona community where I grew up. At my Catholic grade school and high school, many of my classmates were Hispanic. Arizona State had many students from Mexico attending graduate school. It was natural to see many Hispanics as leaders in the community.

When I was in high school, there was a loud-mouth little bratty kid in most of my classes. He was a year younger than the rest of us because he was smart enough to skip a grade in elementary school. He was also Hispanic.

Sometimes he bugged the heck out of me, but most of the time he made me laugh. I had a lot of respect for him because even though he tried to be annoying, he was a good kid. He was really smart and he worked hard.

I also admired him because he knew what he wanted to do with his life. He wanted to be a doctor. His father was a doctor, so he spent his free time volunteering at the hospital. He beat me out for a scholarship for being focused on his volunteer work. That bugged me too.

Years later, a friend of mine was preparing for the birth of her child. She was having some medical trouble, and bounced from doctor to doctor. None of them could help her. They all recommended that she go to a certain doctor because he was the best in the field.

It was Loud Mouth.

A good movie about minority role models that overcame all the problems and prejudices they lived with is *Stand and Deliver*. This movie showed that kids from poor neighborhoods do have the ability to learn calculus in high school as long as they work hard at it. And when people accused them of cheating, they proved themselves instead of allowing themselves to be slandered.

### **Don’t let poor treatment get them down**

I live in a large metropolitan area where everyone is used to seeing people of all races, beliefs and lifestyles, and we’re all pretty much fine with it. I occasionally hear a few unfair comments, but I don’t see people getting treated poorly on a regular basis because of their race. I’m sure there are subtle slights that occur in the workplace, and maybe in social situations because of someone’s race.

But in some communities, especially the rural South, African-Americans are consistently treated like a lower class. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. were examples of people who didn’t let the way white people’s laws treated them make them believe they weren’t worthy of the American dream.

Condoleezza Rice grew up in an educated, wealthy family. Still, one day she when shopping with her mother when she was a young girl, the store clerk told them they weren’t allowed to shop there because they were black. Condoleezza’s mother said she’d take her money elsewhere. She didn’t reinforce in Condoleezza’s young mind that they deserved to be treated that way.

Rosa Parks had spent twelve years helping lead the local NAACP chapter. The she attended civil rights training sessions and discussed the U.S. Supreme Court decision banning "separate but equal" schools. She was part of an existing effort for change at a time when success was far from certain. She was a role model, showing that any regular person can take a public stand.

When a person is treated so poorly all their lives, they start believing that they must not be a good person. The bad treatment keeps getting reinforced in their brains. But some people are able to overcome that. Condoleezza’s mother taught her daughter dignity and grace. Rosa Parks didn’t allow herself to be pushed around. They knew that if someone treated them poorly because of their race, it was because the other person had issues. Because they didn’t deserve to be treated that way.

### **Political leaders**

For the 2008 presidential race, the black community has seen the value of a role model in politics. The experience and exposure of running for office in this election will give him more credibility to future black candidates, whether Obama’s campaign is successful or not.

The Hispanic community also had Richardson as a candidate, but he didn’t do as well. Unlike female versus male political leaders, the line between white and minority leaders is not as black and white (pun intended). Oddly, some people have latched onto John McCain’s birth to a U.S. military officer in Panama and Mitt Romney’s ancestors’ births in Mexico when they were escaping U.S. polygamy laws as evidence that they have Hispanic heritage.

Louisiana recently elected the first Indian-American governor in the United States. Bobby Jindal was born in India and moved to the U.S. as a child. Over a hundred thousand Indians have migrated to the U.S. over the past twenty years. I had never even seen a person from India until the day I started college. (I went to a sheltered Catholic high school.) Jindal was first elected to Congress when he was in his early thirties. An inspiration to young immigrants!

Also unlike the line between men and women, some day the line between minority and non-minority will disappear. The projected population of Hispanics in the U.S. is expected to exceed the population of other whites by 2023. Interracial marriages are becoming common, resulting in mixed-race children. At some point, although not within our lifetime, the entire planet will become a homogeneous mix of people that have ancestors of all races. Supposedly we all have African ancestors anyway. And we’ll all speak the same language so we can all communicate together.

## ***What is your role in this world?***

Think about what you spend your time on and what you enjoy doing the most. Think about what you care about or might like to spend more time doing. How could they be combined? Does someone else share the same values and spend time the same way you do? There’s a story in your actions toward achieving those values.

After recognizing myself as the smart, friendly person my freshman year of college, I became the graduate Teaching Assistants’ informal helper, out of necessity. The line out the TA’s door was so long it went out the building. I knew I’d never get to him before his office hours were over. So I’d ask the person in front of me what they needed help with. I’d help them solve their problem and go on to the next person in front of me. Soon the whole line was cleared out. And I got to ask the TA my question.

There were five hundred students in that class, so I got a reputation after I cleared out the line a few times. The TA’s from that class still remember me.

I had discovered that most people kept to themselves in new situations where they didn’t know other people. This was a point of opportunity for me. I felt less inhibited on the first day of class than the other students.

Realizing my affinity for pulling people together in learning environments, I took leadership positions in student organizations. Finally my senior year of college, I ran unopposed for student body president of the College of Engineering, the official title for the Queen of Clubs.

I went on to teach a few classes of my own once I got to grad school. I became the teacher and facilitator. When asked at my interviews for teaching positions, I told them that teaching was who I was, what I was about.

In those days, the upperclassmen in the engineering college bragged about how everyone else got weeded out freshman year. But I put students into study groups to give them a support group. Probably good for student retention, especially in a demanding program at a large university where many got lost in the crowd.

That was my role. To help them feel a part of the university. They weren’t alone in the big pond.

You create your own role in life by the way you carry out your work differently than others would. Recognize what you bring to the table and communicate your values through your actions. Sometimes what you don’t say is more powerful than what you do say. Do your actions correspond with your words? Practice what you preach.

How are you making a difference in your community, at your office, or in your family doing the things you do every day? Perhaps if you found the answer to this question, you will find the meaning of life. At least the meaning of your life.

### **Technical role model**

Engineers are responsible for our quality of life. The average American today lives better than kings did a hundred years ago. We have instantaneous communication and access to information, homes kept at a constant temperature all year, a constant and plentiful supply of food, and access to almost any part of the world in less than a day.

Engineers have done more for world health than the medical profession. Without clean drinking water, people would die of hundreds of different water-borne diseases.

I recently attended an interesting talk by a professional actor. He said that his next gig was to travel the country playing the character of an energy-saving light bulb. This gentleman was doing well in his career, for an actor. Not to knock his life choices, but I couldn’t help but wonder why he wanted to become a person who ran around a stage with a spiral light bulb on his head when there are so many more important – and dignified – jobs out there that pay much better.

Probably because he never saw or heard any technical role models at a young age, while he was exposed to many actors. These days kids are exposed to technology more than when I was young. However girls are not introduced to technical concepts as much as boys are. Boys and men in technical educational environments are not welcoming towards girls and women.

Janet Schofield, a psychology professor at the University of Pittsburgh, studied K-12 computer learning facilities. Seventy-one percent of male teachers said that boys were more interested in computer technology, while female teachers said girls were not only more interested in computer technology, but more competent.

Computer labs and clubs, open during lunch and after school, tended to exaggerate gender and racial differences more than the computer classes did. The labs became facilities that catered toward playing violent competitive games. Even the educational software was based on rockets and bombs. And the Disney game characters were all boys except for a dumb blond who said rollercoasters were like kissing her boyfriend.

The boys ganged up and chased away any girl who wanted to play. They had logged into illegal sites and were afraid the girls would tell on them. The boys visited online chat rooms and typed sexual remarks.

Most of the girls were indirectly taught that using computers was tedious and antisocial. One of the middle school girls said, “Girls are more interested in what they have to get done and boys just want to play around.” Another girl was quoted saying, “The reason why you see more men doing computer stuff is that girls are more ambitious than that. My parents say to do something with computers because it is stable, but a lot of girls don’t want to be at a desk from nine to five.”

In India and China, engineering and scientific careers are highly revered professions. Not so in the United States. The media glorifies singing, playing sports, and some acting. Only a handful of Americans can make a living performing these activities. But with technical careers, people make substantial livings.

My husband and I are both engineers. We live in a three-bedroom house in a well-manicured suburb of Washington, DC, and own one modest car.

We don’t have lots of newfangled electronics. My husband has an mp3 player to listen to books on “tape” – or books on flash drive. I have a reconditioned cell phone. We don’t replace our home computers until they’re over six years old.

We go out to dinner occasionally. We go to classy engineering conferences with nice banquets and attend other cultural events throughout the Washington metro area. We travel occasionally. All of our overseas travel (England, Germany, China) has been for work.

But while still in our thirties, neither of us work to support our standard of living. We work to contribute to society. We’re not atypical. This is a common financial situation of engineers. that gives financial freedom.

My hypothesis regarding technical role models in the media is that people in technology and people who decide upon and create stories don’t mix much, creating a chicken-and-egg problem. The stereotype of geek guy engineer is perpetuated, even though there are more young women in the field, and media creators don’t care to mix with engineers because they’re too geeky.

But part of it is that because engineers and media people don’t have common classes in college, then they don’t work together and they don’t live together. So they go on to run in different circles. That’s changing somewhat, since more advanced technology is being used to create media in recent years. But the people responsible for the story are still removed from people with typical technology careers.

Media departments of engineering companies don’t typically create stories about their engineers. They create methods to communicate about their products. Generally, these videos don’t go out to the general public; they’re meant to communicate information within the industry. Thus internal corporate media is not used for, nor meant for showing role models to the general public.

One of my former employers tried to get the engineers to create their own visual media to communicate information about their products. Like engineers doing their own word processing when computer software made document creation easy, it made sense to have the engineering staff involved at some level in making digital videos to create stories about their work. Except that it still took a lot of time to document the stories – more time than it would have taken to communicate the stories to the media staff. That resulted in the engineers spending most of their time making flashy videos, while little work got done on creating the technology that the videos claimed we had accomplished.

The interaction of engineers with a media department is a potential vehicle for bringing stories about engineers to people who may some day create stories about role models. Corporate media professionals do interact with broadcast and art media professionals to some extent at professional organization meetings, however that interaction does not interest in the more artistic media professionals to create stories about technical role models.

### **Environmental role model.**

A big trend in setting examples for others lately is to become an environmentalist. Al Gore used media and his contacts to spread the word about global warming. Many people latched onto this theme and now it’s a popular topic.

My husband and I purchased our car seven years ago and it has less than thirty thousand miles on it. When we were looking to buy our house, our priority was to find a place close enough to walk to bus routes and a subway station. We take the Metro whenever our destination is within walking distance of a station.

We also use low-energy light bulbs, dress warm in winter and cool in summer, and make good use of our windows to keep our house cooler in the summer and warmer in the spring and fall.

We didn’t just join a trendy new lifestyle. My husband, a traffic engineer, and I, a former traffic engineer, have been taking the bus or riding our bikes to commute since 1992 (and before that I lived on campus). And we’ve been opening or closing windows and window shades to keep our homes warm or cool all our lives, learning energy-saving habits from our parents. Whose parents have never told them to turn off the light when leaving the room? Or to keep the refrigerator door closed? Or not to run the water for so long?

Heck, when I lived in Wisconsin, I didn’t know anyone who had air conditioning. We all had big square fans. Which made great entertainment when our cousins came to visit and would talk into the fan. So much more fun than the latest Wii games.

I recently visited the home of the president of a local environmental organization. He created a video of how he and his family use low-energy devices and alternative power throughout their home and vehicle. It is an excellent example of creating media about true environmental role models. The video shows viewers how they too can modify their homes and lifestyles to leave a smaller energy footprint on the planet.

### **Business role model**

Maybe you provide a great service or product to your community. Generous in the community. Or just smart about growing a business.

In the early 1990’s, there was a small ice cream shop run by a young couple that graduated from business school at Arizona State. I liked to go frequently because I could make up any flavor combination I wanted. You could order regular or low fat ice cream with any mix of flavoring, such as pumpkin or blueberry, and get any variety of chunky treat mixed in.

It was a popular place for college students, and equally popular among the families of the neighborhood. On spring and summer evenings, the line to buy ice cream went out the door.

After a few years, they were doing very well. The owners were still young and had lots of energy, so they sought to expand the store. One day after final exams, I stopped by in the afternoon while the store wasn’t too busy. The young woman who owned the shop was talking to a consultant about starting franchises.

Within a year, there were a few more stores around the Phoenix area. A year later, there were several more. Soon their ice cream stores were popping up all over the Phoenix metro area.

A few years later, I moved to Virginia. One day my husband and I were in a mall and smelled waffle cones baking. All of a sudden he stopped in his tracks and asked me, “What does the sign above that ice cream store say?”

I looked at the familiar sign I had seen so many times that it seemed commonplace. I read it out loud. “Cold Stone Creamery.” Then it hit me. We were across the United States from where that sign belonged. It followed us all the way to Virginia.

Now there’s a Cold Stone Creamery within walking distance of my house. And the last time I was in New York City, there was a huge Cold Stone Creamery sign flashing in Times Square.

The Cold Stone Creamery couple were role models because they started a business from scratch and took the initiative to make it become something. Incase you were wondering whether the young couple ever burst into song as they were scooping ice cream, the answer is Definitely Not. I don’t know where that started.

A role model for business can be very general. So you can craft a business role model however you like. Everyone who has a job, and some who don’t are involved in a business. But you have to include one important piece of information in any story about a business role model. What business are they in?

When I taught statistics at American University, a few of the courses were specifically geared toward business majors. The book was called *The Practice of Business Statistics* and was written with several examples meant to capture the interest of business majors. If you ask me, Statistics for Business is no more specific than Statistics for People. Aren’t all people who work involved in some type of a business, whether it’s for profit, nonprofit or government?

My favorite line in the movie *Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion* was the one that wasn’t said. Romy and Michele were on their road trip to their reunion in Arizona. In their own opinions, they had gone nowhere with their lives, but decided they were going to impress all their former classmates by looking important and telling everyone that they were businesswomen. So they dressed in suits and headed out on the road. They stopped at a diner in the middle of the desert and told the simple diner waitress they were businesswomen. The waitress, who didn’t care to be impressed, asked a simple, polite question. “What kind of business are you in?”

Silence.

If anyone is going to be a “business person,” they have to be in some kind of business. I asked my business major students what type of business they wanted to be in. Most had no idea. One young woman said she didn’t care, as long as she was in charge.

Actually, she was the best student in the class, so I think she’ll get to be in charge of something some day. When you’re nineteen years old, it’s OK not to know exactly what business you’ll be in charge of. The choices you make along the way to becoming in charge – if you ever get there – dictate what kind of business you’ll end up in.

A business role model could also be someone who improves business practices, such as Henry Ford who invented the assembly line or Edwards Deming who took his statistical process control methods to improve manufacturing in Japan in the 1950’s when American manufacturers refused to bother with his methods. Look up his seven deadly diseases, because I’m convinced American companies are infecting the United States with them (emphasis on short-term profits, excessive costs fueled by lawyer fees, etc.).

### **Health role model**

Some people, like Richard Simmons, are role models for encouraging healthy eating and exercise habits. One study claimed that people are more likely to gain weight if their friends have already gained weight, the logic being that if your friend gains weight, you are more likely to think it’s OK to gain weight too. The heavier friend becomes the role model (whether that’s positive or not) for health habits.

In January 2006, I went to Phoenix and caught pneumonia. In January 2007, I went to Phoenix and ran a marathon, never having run more than five miles straight before July 2006. I would never have thought I’d be able to run over twenty six miles in one day had I not run into an old friend who had gone from being twenty pounds overweight to training for marathons. I figured if he could do it, I should be able to finish a marathon too. He was my role model for getting into shape. And I’ve continued to run twelve miles every Saturday.

A powerful form of being a role model for good health is to stand for something else, but live a healthy life. The healthy lifestyle may not be part of the message, but since the role model lives that way, people indirectly see the lifestyle and the results. A healthy lifestyle not only builds strong muscles, but a strong brain.

A health role model might also run marathons to raise money and awareness for cancer research. Team in Training is one of the larger organizations that train people to run marathons as an effort to raise money to fight lymphoma.

The Dove commercials are a laudable effort toward providing healthy role models to girls. Although the women are shown in their underwear, the ads are tasteful. It’s unclear as to how scarily thin girls became popular in the first place or why the public fell for extreme thinness.

### **Uniqueness role model**

Uniqueness is rather broad, but an interesting way to be a role model. A unique cause might be something odd, yet harmless. It could be uniqueness for the sake of uniqueness, a call to people to be themselves, not follow a crowd. Which could be an oxymoron – Be unique! Follow me!

Or, instead of being a role model for a unique cause, being unique can cast attention on mundane causes.

### **Family and relationship role model**

Half of all marriages end in divorce. The other half end in death. The way spouses treat each other affects how children think men and women are supposed to treat each other. Children believe that whatever their parents do is the way relationships work.

I learned that women do all the “doing” of the relationship, that women have to put in all the effort to keep the relationship together. I was still taught that the boy was supposed to do the asking. But no boys ever did any of the asking, so I decided I had to do that too. That turned out to be a good thing. I asked my husband out on the first date. Like most of my twenty-one-year-old college classmates, he wasn’t in that “asking” frame of mind yet.

After I moved out of my parents’ home to go to college, I saw other models of relationships and learned what I wanted to expect from my relationships with others.

While I was dating the man who became my husband, I asked him to drop off a scholarship application on campus. I had been studying for exams all week and finally had time to fill out the application the day before it was due. But I couldn’t turn it in myself the next day because I had to go to the other end of town very early for an all-day training course for my summer job.

I left him a copy of my apartment key and told him the completed application would be on the kitchen table in a manila envelope for him to pick up the next morning. I was completely trusting the delivery of my application to the scholarship office to him.

He understood this was important to me. And I knew he understood. I didn’t worry about whether he would forget or get distracted by other things to do on the way to running my errand, doing me a big favor. I knew that if I had asked the same favor of other friends, or of previous boyfriends, the task may not have gotten done, even if they had said they would do it.

This was when I realized that I trusted Randy with my life. Which is what you do when you marry someone.

And without asking for it, I got proof that he had turned in the application. I received the scholarship.

In addition to being an example for a good marriage, it’s important to foster other types of good friend, family, and professional relationships. Grandparents and aunts and uncles have an important role in a child’s life. When children see how relatives treat each other, they learn how to treat others as they grow older. Unfortunately, parents don’t have as much support from relatives in raising their children as past generations had.

### **Workplace role model**

These days it’s easy to find bosses who take advantage of their employees. But a good boss takes care of her employees. A happy employee has better effects on the bottom line.

While I was working on my Ph.D., I taught as an adjunct faculty member at Scottsdale Community College. The department chair was hoping to hire a full time faculty member the following year. I enjoyed teaching there and hoped I had a shot at getting the position if he could get a new opening approved.

Meanwhile, I had been offered a fellowship to do my graduate research in Washington, D.C. for a year. Mid-semester, he offered me a class to teach in the spring. I told him about my fellowship, but that if I had a chance at teaching full time, I’d definitely want to pursue that.

The community colleges had a tough time recruiting adjunct professors because of the time commitment and low pay. He could have told me that I was the top candidate for a full time position just to keep me on so he wouldn’t have to look for someone else – the community colleges were known for stringing their adjuncts along. But he told me that it wasn’t looking like he was going to get approval for a full time position any time soon.

Unfortunately, I haven’t had any bosses who were that straight with me since then.

I really appreciated his honesty and would highly recommend him as a boss. He had the integrity to allow me to do something that had a much better chance of launching my career instead of holding me back for his own selfish reasons. Of course, the Washington, D.C. fellowship turned out to be a mixed blessing. For many reasons, it was a horrible place to work. Yet for unexpected reasons, it was a good experience and opened up my world to new possibilities.

### **Financial**

Role models do not live beyond their means. They do not show off their bling. They know they are much more valuable than the things they own, so they don’t surround themselves with fancy stuff to feel important.

Being a role model means being responsible, and that includes financial responsibility, no matter what your role model style is. I don’t brand myself as a financial role model although I could fit the bill.

Growing up on a farm, my family never had much money. Neither did anyone else we knew. I thought everyone was poor. It didn’t bother me. I didn’t know what could be done with more money and never expected lots of material goods. I knew I would have to be financially responsible for myself after high school, so I saved as much money as I could, rarely buying anything. I always packed my lunch for school, listened to the radio instead of records or CDs. None of my friends growing up were lavish spenders either.

I have always lived below my means. While we can afford a lot of “things,” vacations, evenings on the town, we don’t really want those things. We weren’t handed everything on a silver platter as we were growing up, so we’re used to living simply.

We’re not interested in wine or lobster, so going out to dinner tends to be low-key. We always fly coach and stay with friends or family or at a budget hotel, unless a hotel was reserved by one of our employers.

The Washington metro area offers the rich life at little cost. We often go to talks by journalists, authors, and politicians. We go to events and chat with former ambassadors, congresspersons, reporters for national newspapers, and people who make regular business trips to meet the family of royalty in dangerous countries.

We bike through the hundreds of miles of forested trails in the suburbs. I meet an amazingly well-educated group of runners every Saturday morning and run past the White House, the Clinton’s house, the cherry blossoms, etc.

There are many swank events in the Washington area that anyone may attend, as long as they pay a hefty admission. But there are also many events for free. You just have to know the right people or belong to the right organization.

My favorite event was attending a screening of “Iron Jawed Angels” at the Library of Congress. Two of the actresses attended, along with congresspersons and their staff. Afterward there was a reception on the balcony. The marble stairs are worn, so you have to watch your step. As I reached the top of the stairs, I plowed over Julia Ormond. I said excuse me and went on my way. What else are you supposed to say?

Since the event was about women’s suffrage, the attendees were mostly women. I was in the dessert line with a gentleman and a few very young women. I figured he was encouraged to attend for political reasons. I asked him where he was from, to find out if I could learn anything interesting from him. The young women moved on and he was left there with me. I had no agenda. He seemed a little nervous, like he wondered what I wanted from him. Maybe he thought I was hitting on him. (He wore a wedding ring.) I looked him up the next day and found out he was a congressman.

The Washington Post has a columnist, Michele Singletary, who writes about personal financial issues. One could say that she has made a career out of being a financial role model. Suze Ormond has branded herself as a financial role model for the younger crowd. She writes books on how to live well with what you have and appears on talk shows. There are thousands of other people who write books and speak on financial topics, investing, how to be rich, etc.

If you were looking to fill a gap in society’s needs for role models, you could create a fictional show, perhaps as in YouTube episodes, of a college student who has to make it on her own financially. She wouldn’t buy many material goods, looks for bargains on clothes, books, and groceries. She attends a public university, lives in the cheap dorm (if you call them dorms, the student resident assistants will correct you and say that they are “residence halls,” but everyone else who lives there will call them dorms anyway), and takes public transportation.

Wait, an engineering major financially on her own in college who lives in the cheap dorms and takes public transportation. That’s not fiction. That was me twenty years ago!

In my parents’ day, nobody went to college. Especially not from the farm. My dad’s father never even went to high school. And he became the town chairman. Most of my aunts and uncles didn’t go to college, although my younger cousins and a few older cousins did.

The three major Arizona universities offer four-year full tuition scholarships to everyone graduating from an Arizona high school in the top five percent of their class. But of course there are other expenses – books, dorm or apartment rent, groceries.

I realized before I moved into the dorm that it would be cheaper to buy my own groceries rather than pay for a meal pass to the meal halls. Plus I had more freedom to eat when and where I wanted. Since there was only a small kitchen in my dorm and hundreds of students living there, my parents bought me a small microwave for Christmas after my first semester, which I sold to another student several years later when I moved in with a roommate that had a better microwave.

I worked on campus off and on and took a full time internship every summer. In addition to the four-year free tuition for keeping up my grades, I racked up a few more scholarships each year through local professional chapters of engineering organizations, such as the Society of Women Engineers.

Besides Christmas gifts and staying with my parents for the first two summers of college, the only other financial assistance I received from my parents was enrolling on my dad’s health insurance until I turned twenty four.

There’s a role model for affording college. If you think your kids can’t afford college on their own, or if you want to go to college but think you can’t if your parents won’t pay for it, rethink your lifestyle.

### **Education**

Twelve years of college is not for everyone. Certainly not necessary for most people. It probably wasn’t even necessary for me, but I think it suited who I am and I’m glad I went through that experience. It was horribly tough! And it made me ready and willing to stick out whatever I had to do to accomplish any goals I set for myself. College isn’t about learning to calculate the integral of sine squared. It’s about learning discipline, learning how to solve problems, getting out of our shells to network with future colleagues, and learning to accomplish what we need to get done.

When you are close to finishing all your coursework for a Ph.D., you have to pass some type of qualifying exams. In the department where I earned my Ph.D., the exams were a seventeen day take-home set of questions created by your graduate committee, a set of three professors in your field.

During the seventeen days, my father went into the hospital for liver failure. His fate was uncertain. I told one of the members of my committee about his illness, just so it wouldn’t be a surprise if I disappeared for a day or two for a funeral. But I knew it was still my responsibility to finish the exam on the deadline date, regardless of the timing of my family’s illnesses.

I never mentioned my father’s illness to any of the other students. One of them said I didn’t seem like I was going through my qualifying exams. I was too calm. He didn’t even know the extent of what I was going through. I figured there was no use in getting hysterical.

My father made it through those seventeen days. In fact, he held on for another year, but passed away before I finished my degree. But I never used his illness as an excuse for not getting my work done.

Whenever a student of mine has his grandmother die several times during the semester, I think about how that may be a reason, but not an excuse, for doing poorly the entire semester. Although I usually suspect he would have done poorly, grandmother or not. Everyone has problems. Everyone is responsible for dealing with those problems. How we deal with the inconveniences life throws at us determines how well each one of us fares in life.

But the story about my qualifying exams went even deeper than that.

I had just tossed out my original Ph.D. committee for fraud on the part of my committee chair (a whole different story!), and quickly pulled together a more trustworthy committee. And you thought you had it rough at work. Unlike most grad students, I wasn’t getting paid by these guys to get treated like this. I was bringing money in for them!

It gets worse. Even if my father passed away during the seventeen days, I couldn’t ask for mercy from my professors to let me take the exams a different month. I was on a deadline for something bigger than my college degree.

I had to quick get their approval of my research proposal, take the exams, give them two weeks to evaluate my responses before I could defend my research proposal. I had scheduled my proposal defense the day before I interviewed for a faculty position at Virginia Tech!

I suppose I could have gone to the interview without having completed the process and they wouldn’t have known the difference. But when you go on faculty interviews, it’s generally expected that your research proposal has been approved and considerable progress has been made on that research. They don’t want to be hiring you, only to find out you can’t graduate before the job starts.

Needless to say, I didn’t get that job. I think they knew I wasn’t likely to graduate in time.

But that’s the reason employers respect college educations. It means you have the discipline to finish something long term, even if the baby steps are outlined for you, instead of chickening out when you don’t want to do something.

Going through the whole college experience is the best way to learn how to learn. That’s really what college is for. It’s not for getting a job, because that’s not what college courses teach. Learning how to get a job is an indirect byproduct of the networking skills and self-learning skills that you pick up by going to college.

Being an education role model doesn’t have to be about college or good grades, although those are important. Education is about so much more than just going to college. Don’t use this as an excuse for why you didn’t or won’t go to college, but some people don’t find the best atmosphere for learning at colleges and universities. An education role model could be about lifelong learning. This could involve taking classes, or even better, about setting your own curriculum. Deciding what you want to learn and plotting a course for learning it. This works well for independent learners or for people who have already gone to college and learned how to learn. Creating your own informal, unstructured education plans and goals – and sticking to them – is much more difficult than simply going to college and letting experts define the learning process for you. So if you are thinking about skipping college because you think you know better, at least try college first.

### **Persistence**

Most of what people go through during their college education has more to do with commitment and dedication to a learning goal rather than brains or ability. A little persistence can go a long way in life. So many troubles could be alleviated if people had the willingness to stick things out when life gets tough.

I had a student who dropped out of school and moved back home because she was diagnosed with a serious illness. The sad thing is that she was doing well. She was a credible student and I might have believed her hypothesis that dropping out temporarily was the best way to deal with her health issues.

Except I had been diagnosed with the same illness three years earlier. It affected my brain and muscles for five months before treatment worked fully. But I didn’t go home and do nothing for those five months. I continued to do my job. I was just a lot more tired at the end of the day.

I got my best employee evaluation that year. Must have been because of my reduced brain functioning abilities.

Thomas Edison tried five thousand different designs before he discovered a product what would make and effective light bulb. Abraham Lincoln lost several other political elections before he won the presidency.

### **Volunteerism**

Most people do not receive all their fulfillment from their paid occupation. They spend the rest of their productive hours working toward other causes, perhaps related to their career, their church, or some other goal they believe in.

Volunteerism is about leading a productive, useful life. There are so many good causes out there that need people to help out. Most churches set up volunteer activities to help the less fortunate, but many non-religious organizations also make it their mission to do good.

Mother Theresa is the ultimate role model for volunteerism. She lived a life in the service of healing others without material gain for herself.

Not everyone agrees to what causes are good causes. Political parties and religions exploit these differences among beliefs to create publicity or passion in their followers to be against “the others.” Defining what causes are or are not good is left to the reader.

### **Redemption**

This does not necessarily refer to religious redemption. People can also be redeemed from a wasteful or desperate life. Many people live in despair. Some are homeless, some are addicted to drugs, some alienate their families, others are habitual thieves. Often they don’t do anything to turn their lives around until they hit rock bottom, something happens to shake them into the reality that they can’t live like that any longer. It pushes them to seek a better way of going about their life, back on the straight and narrow.

A woman I met in a writers class had lived in her car for several years. Her family was not emotionally healthy. She let them convince her she was crazy.

She finally realized it wasn’t her, it was them. She gained the self esteem to turn her life around and now functions well in society. She doesn’t seem any more odd than the rest of us.

She is also smart enough to write well. And she’s telling her story so others may learn. Unfortunately, the people who need the help the most may never have access to her story if they don’t run across her book. But people whose work helps those who are homeless or live in their cars may gain access to her story and might be able to use the story to bring their lives around.

Many people think their lives are lost causes. But if they see enough people who have come back from the brink, they might realize that they too can fix their situations and live productive lives.

In fact, stories about coming out of drug rehab clean for the rest of their lives would be great to show to rock stars. You know, the ones who can’t stay out of the media, the default glamorous role models to teens. Rock stars need some good role models to show them how to stay away from drugs. In fact, rock stars need everyday people to be their role models.

### **Modesty and abstinence**

This one’s a little weird to me because it sounds like something that would come off as a token speech from most people. I’d rather be modest without telling everyone about it. And I certainly don’t want to go around telling others they have to be modest or else they’re bad people. But I’m sure some of you want to discuss the topic.

This isn’t necessarily about leading a “pure” or religious life. I hesitate to mention abstinence or monogamy as a lifestyle role model choice, since pretty much everyone you meet in public is out in public not having sex at the time. I don’t want to encourage role models to go around talking about their private sex lives, or lack of.

This coming from a woman who made a series of videos about sexual harassment. Now, that wasn’t my private sex life. That was someone invading my physical privacy. And it’s an issue that needs to be understood better, regarding how it affects women in the workplace.

As a married woman, I can’t go around telling others not to have sex outside of marriage. Easy for me to say. I’m not an example. And abstinence isn’t the kind of thing people do just because of one person.

But if you can pull off making it look normal not to have sex all the time, great. Shows such as *Sex In the City* make it look as though everyone is having sex all the time, and I believe that is not true of majority of the population. I tend to believe there really isn’t as much sex going on as the media makes it seem. There’s not much sexy about not having sex, so when someone isn’t having sex, it doesn’t get played up much by the media.

Even when I was in high school, and granted, this was a long time ago, people feared that high school kids were having too much sex. Some of them were. But at my high school, most of them weren’t even dating. In fact, they were so averse to dating that the sports coaches required the boys teams to ask a girl from our school to go to prom. No, our school wasn’t militant about forced dating, the coaches felt sad that prom the previous year had hardly any girls from our school in attendance. I was one of the many who missed junior prom. I preempted missing senior prom by asking a boy who no longer went to our school. Ha. That’ll teach those boys in my class. Then my prom date joined the seminary; hm, a role model for abstinence. I don’t think that had anything to do with me, though.

Showing people living a clean life would be stronger as a group effort, like the opposite of *Sex in the City*, than showing an individual, who might come off artificially pious. And the sole purpose can’t be to show a bunch of people who don’t have sex, like a convent. It would have to be about a broader aspect of their lives, such as a show about a bunch of nice, down-to-earth people. Maybe the dating life of several nice-girl roommates trying to meet nice-boys in a world where being nice isn’t being given the attention it deserves. Although I imagine this project morphing into a bad comedy about a bunch of guys who can’t get any.

## ***Exercise: Which type of role model are you?***

These are just a few ideas to get you thinking about your own role in the world and what cause you want to present through your role model.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Make a list of causes you are passionate about. Write a few goals you might be able to accomplish toward the causes.

#### *Medium term (This month)*

Select one of the causes to champion. If you’re having trouble deciding, write down the attributes you like most and least about each cause. Evaluate each attribute on whether it is important to you or not important.

## ***Learning & Communication: Champion a cause***

##### Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a method for coming up with ideas. When brainstorming in a group, start by allowing everyone to blurt out crazy ideas.

Have one of the group members write each idea, without evaluating its merit, on a whiteboard or easel. Do this for about twenty minutes. If the group runs out of ideas, throw some off the wall ideas into the mix to get more possibilities out there. The goal is to get as many ideas as possible. Do not comment on the technical feasibility, cost, or practicality of the ideas at this point.

Once you have a list of ideas, you can sort the ideas into categories. You can mix and match ideas, come up with criteria for evaluating the ideas, such as costs to interview potential role models, originality of the idea, or time needed to track the right people down.

When I taught a freshman engineering course, one of our first in-class exercises was to brainstorm a method for transporting tomatoes from a farm in California to a store in Arizona. The students started with the most obvious methods, such as truck or train. Then they didn’t think of much else.

So I suggested a catapult. This spawned ideas such as carrier pigeon and pipeline.

Then we changed our paradigm. We talked about pulverizing and canning the tomatoes first, sundrying them, and moving the farm to Arizona.

A good exercise in brainstorming is from *Six Thinking Hats* by Edward deBono. Each hat is a different color: blue for big picture, green for creativity, white for objectivity, yellow for optimism, black for pessimism, and red for emotional reactions to ideas.

Start with the blue hat. Figure out what the big picture is, the real goal you’re trying to accomplish.

Then put on your green hat. Let your mind come up with all sorts of wild alternatives or new approaches. Everything goes. This type of idea generation allows you to come up with ideas for speculative projects.

White plays a neutral, factual role. List all the known information. The white hat focuses on data, facts, and figures without evaluating whether the information is good or bad.

Next is the yellow hat. It is positive toward speculative ideas. Go through each of the creative ideas and come up with reasons with each of them will work.

The black hat has to balance the yellow optimism by looking at the downside. List all the reasons why ideas might not work. It’s to figure out how cautious and careful you need to be. The idea is not to be negative, but to make sure you know the risks.

Red goes last. Explore your emotions and feelings toward each idea. Allow yourself to experience both the positive and negative emotional reactions. Write down opinions and what your intuition tells you.

#### *Learning exercise*

Brainstorm to come up with ideas for a story about either a fictional character who champions your cause or seek out a real person who champions the cause. If you decided either to be the role model or to go with a piece of fiction, solidify the storyline in a few sentences.

If you prefer a nonfiction story about someone other than yourself, look up information about the champion role model. The champion may be a local citizen or an entire group of volunteers, such as the Society of Women Engineers. Perhaps someone has already written a few stories about this person or group in local newsletters or community newspapers, or the role model may have a web site. If she or he is someone you can arrange to speak to, think of a few questions you would like to ask her or him.

#### *For advanced learners*

Become the role model who champions the cause. Perhaps you already are, or you might belong to a service organization doing an ambitious project. Develop a list of activities you would like to cover in the story. If you have not already done those things, schedule time to do them.

Go through the six thinking hat exercise and document your process. Post your outcome on your blog or as a comment on the RoleModel Enterprise Facebook group page at http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=10131726588

# **WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A ROLE MODEL**

The first question I often get when I tell people that I’m working towards putting positive role models in the media is, What do you mean by role model? I thought the concept, or at least definition of role model was common knowledge. But it isn’t as straightforward as I expected.

The short answer to what I had in mind has two parts. A role model is someone who is working toward a cause that benefits others. The second part is that role model does that work for the purpose of benefiting others, and not for the purpose of furthering a political or religious, or other agenda. The cause may be political or religious, but that cannot be the reason for doing the work.

According to Wikipedia, the term role model was introduced by Robert K. Merton, a sociology professor at Columbia University from 1941 through 1979. Merton said that people often compare themselves with "reference groups" who fill the social role to which they aspire. Today the term generally means a "person who serves as an example of a positive behavior".

Not everyone would agree on what causes are good. Some people are prolife, others are prochoice. There can be role models working toward either cause. Some people would consider one of those causes as benefiting others, while others would say that same cause has no benefit. As long as a case can be made saying that some people were benefited - and both sides have made their cases - the cause might be worthy of being considered a prerequisite for being a role model. Then there are the causes relating to preventing unwanted pregnancies in the first place, but I don’t want to belabor the point here.

Techup.org, a collaborative online meeting of 16 small organizations for women and girls, created a forum on the Mentoring, Support, & Sacred Spaces section of their web site. If you go online to www.techup.org, you can browse the entries that several women and girls submitted to discuss their opinions of what a role model is.

Another way to look at the definition of role model is to think of someone who has passion for what they do. Being a role model isn’t just a job or just fulfilling a task. It’s a calling. It’s about setting a good example to others.

## ***Role models aren’t necessarily famous***

Being a role model doesn’t mean you’re famous. In fact, nonfamous people are better role models because whatever makes people famous is often a fluke. Others can’t replicate a fluke. But they can replicate everyday acts of kindness and persist toward a goal. Most everyday people make better role models than famous people because we can relate to them better.

Role models’ stories are much stronger if they can say they were personally affected by the cause they’re working on, such as a story by someone whose aunt immigrated to the United States illegally, then went on to save lives as a doctor. Likewise, someone might be able to say they personally foiled a drug running operation when they were protecting the border in Arizona.

## ***Always treat others with respect***

When others treat you poorly, it’s not about you. Don’t react with revenge. Take the high road and others who matter will give you the respect you deserve.

Think of all the people you consider to be candidates for being a role model. Are they ever rude to others? Rude actions do not endear others toward considering someone as role models.

My image of the professor who was my Ph.D. committee chair is of a very nice, gentle man. He was calm and friendly toward everyone. He was nearing retirement and saw his own role as being a father toward us, leading us toward graduation.

The janitors came around to the offices and graduate labs on our floor in the late afternoon. The same janitor usually came to empty our garbage every day. Our janitor had a learning disability, but was conscientious about his job.

Whenever I saw the janitor go in my professor’s office, I always heard my professor greet him with kind words, and ask how his day was going.

My professor and the janitor didn’t have much in common. The difference in their intellect and education level was vast. But my professor recognized the janitor as someone who deserved to be treated kindly and to be given the same courtesy he’d give anyone else who did a good job.

## ***Role Models have a strong sense of self***

They don’t need to look to others to tell them who they are or what they are supposed to be. They may see examples of what others do and figure out how they can adapt certain traits into their own lives, but it comes from within, not from direction from others.

Role models don’t rub their achievements in others’ faces. People who feel they need to constantly tell others how great they are, are really trying to convince themselves. A true role model lets his or her actions speak louder than their words. Nobody wants to listen to a braggart. Everyone wants to observe a genuine person.

Role models don’t allow the words of others to cause them to stray from their mission, their calling. Others may not see the long term benefit of their calling and try to discourage them from working toward their goals.

Oh boy, do I receive discouragement from others about writing a book, starting a business, running a marathon, etc. all the time. Other people can’t imagine doing any of those things themselves and project their image onto me. They don’t see how putting role models in the media could be a business. Then I ask myself, how is Oprah a business? YouTube? Night clubs? Book publishing and selling? There are so many business models to pull ideas from. This is why you need to meet people working toward goals similar to yours.

People say I’m being unrealistic without listening to any of my details. It’s a good way to weed out whom to share details with. I, on the other hand, have a completely different imagination. I imagine my life if I don’t do any of those things and think, What a waste. If I didn’t do any of those things, what would I ever accomplish with my life? I’d sit in a high-paying job going nowhere, sucking taxpayer money, without any achievements to show for it. Anyone else can do that. I don’t need to spend my time on that too. I’d always wonder what could’ve been.

When you set out to undertake your calling, no matter how noble a cause, people are going to pick your idea apart. When they don’t listen to or don’t understand your simple explanation for how you will succeed, don’t shove it down their throats, but don’t let them discourage you from plowing ahead either. If they aren’t willing to understand upfront, they don’t need to. You need to be the one who understands. Let them figure it out as you implement your plan and your success unfolds.

## ***Being a Role Model is about defining who we are***

Role models are not doormats. They don’t let others tell them what to be. They are strong enough to make their own decisions. They know what they want to be regardless of what society thinks they should be.

When I was in grade school, I learned that the qualities people liked in a girl or a young woman were to be blond, a cheerleader, a tomboy, and pretty. I was a brunette, quiet, a bookworm, and wore glasses.

From what I saw around me, smart was of no value. My mother told me classmates didn’t like me because I was smarter than they were. There were many times when I thought I should purposely put wrong answers on homework and tests, because people were supposed to do what pleased others and apparently my classmates didn’t like that I got all the answers right. Although looking back, I don’t think they cared.

The only reason I didn’t throw a test at that time was because I thought I’d get in trouble from the teachers and my mom.

By the time I was halfway through high school, I started to notice that people respected my opinion. I was still one of the smartest in the whole school. Even when we played Communism in government class for a week and everyone else did poorly on their quizzes because the teacher was going to give everyone the average grade over all students in the class. I got A’s on my quizzes for myself, not to please my teachers or my mom.

Well, really it was because I knew he was just playing head games with us and in the end we’d get our real quiz grade.

Sometimes we don’t define who we are until we grow older and can look back on our experiences. The time and distance from the defining situations gives us more perspective. Sometimes who we are changes. Change can be slow as we evolve into ourselves, or it can be an Aha! moment.

In eighth grade, I spent all my free time for several months on my science fair project – looking through library books, drawing my posterboard, writing a report about electricity. Everyone would be paying attention to my project because I was the Big Brain, savvy Science Kid. So I had to make my project into something really special. On the day of the competition, I went to the cafeteria to set up my display for the judges.

Meanwhile, the Class Clown came in with his huge posterboard that said something about “Onion Skins for Insulation.” Onion skins! For insulation! What kind of a science fair project was that? All the girls gathered around and teased him. Where did he get such a silly idea?

He said his mom was making dinner one night and shoved the onion skins into the garbage disposal. The skins clogged up the disposal, so they had to dig them out of the sink and get rid of them. Class Clown thought it was too bad they couldn’t do something else with the onion skins. Something more useful. He tried a few things and realized they had insulated the onions, why not try insulating other things?

The next morning, we all returned to the cafeteria to find out who got first, second, third, and grand prize. We started with all the smart kid’s projects. A few first and second prizes. All I got was a crummy honorable mention. Where was the grand prize?

On top of the onion skin posterboard. Was this a bad joke? How could onion skins win? It was so hilarious to me that I couldn’t stop laughing. Too hilarious to even be upset that I didn’t win.

I had to rethink my self image as Science Kid. And I had to rethink Class Clown’s role. Maybe he wasn’t just a clown.

The judges were impressed by recycling a natural product for insulation. In fact, they thought it was so clever that they suggested looking into patenting the product.

I had never heard of patents before. I was intrigued with this method for the formalization of an invention. Since I was Science Kid, I figured it was important to know what a patent was. A few months later I followed up with him on the status of his patent idea. He said his parents decided not to go ahead with it, since paying a lawyer to look into it would be too expensive and it wasn’t likely that they would get anything out of it.

But it seemed important enough to me that I always kept it in mind. I earned a technical degree with the intention that I’d learn to invent something. And it wouldn’t have to be the most technical, complicated invention. It could be simple and useful. Who would’ve ever thought that Class Clown and his onion skins would be my role model for inventing?

Ever since I was an undergraduate, I knew I wanted to be a research professor, to invent something in addition to teaching university courses. To make a big career for myself in a technical field. So I went on to get my Ph.D. in engineering.

Along the way, I applied for research grants and fellowships. I was accepted to go to Washington and to Wright Patterson Air Force Base to work on research projects. I took on local consulting jobs at engineering companies to meet people and get experience in a variety of engineering firms. I taught classes to get teaching experience. I presented papers and met other researchers at conferences.

Upon graduation, I didn’t get any offers to teach at a strong research university. I had been told that most engineering departments prefer several years of industry experience before hiring a professor, so I went out and got a job at a research company.

At that company, I tried to force my life in the direction of becoming a research professor, but my career circumstances drew me farther from that goal no matter how hard I tried. It got to the point where I knew that forcing my career to check all the right boxes to be attractive to a top ranked university was no longer worth the battle against my employer. No matter how much they claimed that they encouraged the staff to write articles for publication in technical journals, most of us had neither the resources nor management support to bring our careers in that direction.

I had to change my expectations. I had to change my entire career goal that I had carried for years.

People shift and redefine themselves several times throughout their lives. It took me several months to realize and accept that my goal was never going to happen. I was so angry about it at some point in that process that I threw a chair across my office one Friday afternoon after everyone else had left. It took me two years to figure out what my new goals were and a few more years to figure out how I could carry them out.

Now I’m redefining myself to be a “professor” to a much broader audience than I ever imagined. And the “research” I do isn’t so much about mathematical algorithms and processes. It’s now about creating an original business and figuring out the process of accomplishing a large goal with many vague facets.

## ***Role Models can handle tough situations***

Role models do not pretend that everything is always fine. The world is full of conflict. When you have the freedom and the confidence to define who you are, you can handle the conflict. It will be painful, but it’s less scarring than running away and hiding in a corner every time someone tries to walk all over you.

While working on my research at the Federal Highway Administration, I picked up a research topic that they wanted me to continue upon returning to Arizona State University to complete my Ph.D. They arranged to send the grant money to the university so I could be paid as a grad student from their funds.

Since I was a grad student and not a university employee, the money had to be sent in my professor’s name, giving him the authority to decide how it would be spent. Over the summer, instead of paying me my salary, he paid himself.

He told the department chair that I was a bad student and that he was displeased with my work. He told the other professors that he had written proposals and attended meetings to bring in the Federal Highway contract and that he was doing me a favor by putting me on as the student to work on the project.

As soon as the funding period was over, he wrote me a memo, copied the department chair, and told me he refused to be on my thesis committee any longer. He may have expected that I’d drop out of school, crawl away, and never be heard from again.

But I formed a new thesis committee that day. I submitted my research proposal to them, took my qualifying exams, and was on my way to finishing my degree.

Role models are not victims. Someone may do something mean to them. Bad things happen to everybody. It’s how people handle the big bumps that determine whether someone emerges as a role model.

I taught at a community college in a bad part of town. All the students had excuses for why they couldn’t do their work. Several grandmothers died every semester. How many grandmothers do they have? Are they going to use those same excuses for why they can’t perform on the job? It has become more and more common for college students to turn work in whenever they feel like it. They take holidays whenever they feel like it. When I was an undergraduate, we had tests the day before Thanksgiving. Now students have their parents go to the dean and complain if you schedule a test during that time – when classes are scheduled. When did this become OK? They are adults. They need to learn not to cry to mommy for everything. What kind of example are we setting for our young adults?

My father was dying during my entire last year of grad school. He went into the hospital during my seventeen-day Ph.D. qualifying exams. Did I use that as an excuse not to finish them? Of course not. If it wouldn’t have been my father in the hospital, it would have been something else. But it was my responsibility to finish those exams. Not to make excuses.

## ***Being a Role Model is about relationships***

Role models are glad to be with others, to learn about their lives, to get to know other people and become involve in their world. You can’t have a true effect on someone’s life if you don’t care to know anything about them. With new technology, we can reach out to others farther than ever possible in the past.

This doesn’t mean you can’t be a role model to someone you’ve never met. The role model has the strongest effect on the people they interact and work with. Their story is about improving specific people’s lives. It is the stories about the direct interaction that affects even more people indirectly. So not only do they help people in their community, they also help people throughout the world when someone shares their stories.

Role models care about the people they interact with. People aren’t just commodities to be counted. They are unique individuals that need to be helped in unique ways.

Our brains are filled with data about the people we meet: names, hair color, phone numbers, favorite food, etc. Some of the data is difficult to describe with numbers or words, such as exactly what a person looks like. We need a picture, which is a complex combination of spatial and color data. But even the picture is not a complete description. When we see someone we know from different angles, we can still recognize them. We know what they look like, how they walk, other mannerisms.

We can add other data, such as how they sound. We can recognize their accents, the tone of their voices, the kinds of things they say. But to truly know a person, we have to understand how they feel about situations and issues. We have to know what they value; education, church, hard work, material goods. We have to understand their goals, what they are trying to get out of life.

Some of us barely know ourselves. How can anyone expect to get to know someone else if they don’t know who they are themselves? If we don’t know our own goals and ambitions?

I made a point of getting to know my students’ names within the first three class sessions. I asked them to write down something about themselves and to tell it to the class. I needed to understand who they were to be able to know how to communicate with them. But this little bit of data doesn’t sum up who any of them are. That was something I had to learn over time by observing them and communicating with them.

And people change over time. You may think you know your sister, but once you move out of the house, you won’t have as much contact with her and the old definition of your sister fades away as her life changes and becomes something else. You have to update your knowledge through communication.

The day you marry your spouse, they fit a certain expectation. You may wish for them to grow the same way you do, but they change as they get older. Their definition of themselves grows or shrinks with their life experiences. They change their minds about their goals.

You may try to control what your child becomes, but she will be affected by outside influences. It is not your place to manage what they become, like a project. You have to lead them, like a person. When they move out of the house, they are no longer under your influence as strongly. You have to hope that the role model you were to them was adequate to guide them to become productive adults after they have gone.

## ***Role Models practice lifelong learning***

I learn, therefore I am. Once you stop learning, life loses meaning.

You cannot grow if you stop learning. You cannot teach others if you yourself are unwilling to learn. Teachers are required to take refresher courses. Professors are required to do research in their field, a form of self-directed learning. Teachers have to be willing to learn in order to be a role model to the students, who also need to be willing to learn.

Technology is affecting all aspects of learning. The internet is full of information to look up. All academic subjects have corresponding computer methods for teaching the subject. These days you have to learn how to use technology if you want to teach.

If you run a business that is doing well, you can’t just keep doing things the same way and expect to continue to do well. Because someone is going to come along and invent a way to do it better. Film used to be the only way to take pictures. Polaroid could create pictures instantly. They became hugely successful in the 1970’s with their product. Then digital technology came along and people were able to create and erase pictures instantly. Plus you could send out thousands of copies through email instantly. Polaroid has already stopped making instant cameras. And they manufactured enough film to last through 2009, their official date for going out of business.

As with companies, role models can “go out of business.” We can become stale and out-of-date if we don’t continue to learn and keep up with modern technologies. Just as in a professional field, role models need to keep up on new developments in life. Otherwise they won’t even know what it is that they don’t know. Role models need to be knowledgeable in their area, or style, of being role models.

## ***Role Models communicate through positive behavior***

Role models bring up bad news as factual, not as a whiner. Nobody wants to listen to a whiner. Certainly nobody wants to look to a whiner as a role model.

Role models do not start and spread rumors. They do not put down their colleagues, even when their colleagues are not working up to their potential. Instead, role models try to bring their colleagues up instead of knocking them down. Of course, sometimes people don’t want to be brought up. They are angry and wish to wallow in their anger. You can try to help them get over their anger, but sometimes others need to put in their fair share of effort.

Instead of getting upset, role models take the bad things that happen and turn them into something positive. They don’t want to spend their lives living like victims, letting bad circumstances control them. They take control of themselves. Role models often have to make lemonade when life hands them lemons.

After I was fired for being a model employee, the shock kept me from getting a good night’s sleep for three nights in a row. I knew it was for the better. But I wasn’t sure how it was for the better until two weeks later. I finally noticed that they actually handed me the story on a silver platter. It didn’t feel like a silver platter. It felt like a bullet. But the bullet only nicked me. I was strong enough to carry on with the small pain in my side.

Silver platters are never what they seem to be. They come in the form of bullets. You have to put the bullets together yourself to create the silver platter. You have to look for the pattern in the bullets to piece them together.

## ***Role Models are realistic, not one-dimensional***

Even though role models do not focus on complaining, they also do not embrace the other extreme, which is to pretend that everything is great, even when things are falling apart. Role models are not annoyingly upbeat cheerleaders or naïve Pollyannas. That would not be believable. They recognize that problems exist and do not sweep them under the rug. They do not hide problems from others. They face problems.

Role models are not naive voice boxes for someone else's agenda. The agenda has to be her own. Role models do not justify the existence of or make excuses for selfish deeds. They do not blindly follow what their elders tell them.

A few years ago, I participated in a middle school girls science day. We told the girls how great our jobs were. Then at lunch, we all sat around complaining about how miserable our employers were. I felt like we were all pretending we were good little engineers, telling the kids lies because that’s what we were told to do. Maybe some of us were paid to do it. We were being obedient to The Man. When in reality, we all thought The Man was an idiot. If we think The Man is an idiot, why would we follow him? Role models do not follow idiots.

A role model’s story would be boring if everything went perfectly for her. Nothing goes perfect in life. Nobody would be able to emulate her life if everyone was one hundred percent behind her, supporting her goals. And her story would be trite and difficult for the public to accept as truth. The truth is that life is messy.

Role models are people that others can relate to, like Mary in *Something About Mary*. She was a good person with a good heart. She did good things because she wanted to, not to prove she was better than others. Role models don’t need to prove anything to anybody. They know they are useful people.

Sometimes people have different priorities and are just trying to slide through certain parts of life that they have to get through to reach their next level. A role model recognizes where others want to place their efforts.

When I taught a freshman engineering class, I had two students who had slipped by without taking the class until their senior year. I placed all the students in homework groups, which they were allowed to move in and out of until the final project. Sometimes I broke apart groups that had weak computer skills and assigned them to learn from group partners with stronger skills. But once the final project started, they had to commit their partners.

The work of the two seniors was half finished and sloppy, even though they were already beyond that stage in computer skills. I asked the two seniors if they would like to be split and assigned to groups that could help them better when they were in the computer labs. “No! No, definitely not. We’re happy as a group,” they responded.

The problem was that the class, although required for graduation, was not helpful once the students passed their sophomore year. If they were happy, it was fine with me. They had different goals than the freshmen. They just needed to graduate and get out. They didn’t need to establish a social network with the freshmen and they didn’t need to improve their computer skills. They just wanted spend their efforts getting a job.

Like anyone else, a role model doesn’t have to be a perfectionist at everything. We all need to prioritize. And role models don’t need to shove perfectionism down anyone’s throats.

## ***Role Models aren’t afraid to go against the grain***

If your boss told you to go jump off a bridge, would you do it? Role models know how to use their own judgment. They do not rely on others for judgment. They are confident that they know how to make decisions and have experience using their own moral compass.

Computer Whiz was creating a computer software that would analyze a bunch of data and help people at the federal government make better on-the-spot decisions for determining how to route air traffic a few hours in advance, depending upon where storms might be.

A few months into the project, the managers told Whiz not to bother completing the project. But it was a great idea and Whiz knew the government needed it.

So he worked on it anyway. The rest of the team didn’t know what else they were supposed to do instead, so Whiz was able to lead them into continuing on the project.

Within six months, their computer program was complete. They presented their results to the government client. It is now in use in several locations and improves productivity in several facilities throughout the federal government.

Managers and leaders are there to guide. Not dictate. They are not there to tell anyone exactly what to do and how to do it. The reason to pay employees is for their decision making skills. They do that so much better than computers.

Often parents and clergy think they need to make decisions for their underlings. Sure, children and teens need guidance from their elders. The younger they are, the more they rely on adults. But children need to learn to make their own decisions and to gain confidence in their own decision-making skills. As they grow older, we must let them pull away. They may make mistakes, but at least those mistakes are their own. They will learn better from the mistakes that they own.

Role models don’t do things just because everybody else is doing them or because someone else said so. They do things because it’s the right thing to do.

## ***Exercise: What a role model means to you***

Let’s experience the meaning of life, the meaning of being a role model.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Define what a role model means to you, and not to others, in three or four complete sentences. In your relationships, who is a Role Model to you? Who do you want to be a Role Model for? Is it a family relationship or a business relationship?

#### *Medium term (This month)*

Contact someone you consider to be a role model. Ask them about their calling. Take notes so you can use the material in a story. Make sure your subject is on-board with your intention to share the story or post on the internet. They may even ask you to include a link to their web site at the end of your story.

## ***Learning & Communication: Getting your story straight***

##### Story research

To be a writer, you must be a reader. Fiction must be structured and believable or logical for anyone to read through to the end. Nonfiction can be a little less believable or logical, but must also be absolutely true. No matter whether you are telling stories about a fictional or real role model, you’ll have to do some research to keep your story either believable or true.

The internet has made it easier than ever to research terabytes of information quickly. Online encyclopedias, blogs, and websites for millions of companies and organizations can be used to prepare your story. I don’t know how anyone ever got a graduate degree before the internet.

Make sure you check the credibility of sources you find on the internet. You may find all sorts of skewed opinions or bad advice from novices. I like to use information from expert-reviewed sources, such as academic journals, otherwise I check if several sites agree with each other before including the information.

If you are writing about a real-life role model, you can write your stories either in a news style (informational) or a story-style (follow characters through their experience over selected periods of time). My blog is news-style (http://compositepost.blogspot.com) while my videos are story-style (http://www.youtube.com/RoleModelEnterprises). Complete World News has a good tutorial on their web site for how to be a good citizen journalist. Here are a few of their tips:

* Use verifiable facts
* Be clear about whether you are stating your own opinion
* Show all sides of a story
* Use quotes to show personality
* If you misquote, you jeopardize your credibility and could cause trouble (although your story may cause trouble anyway)
* Give credit for anything done or said by someone else
* Seek out more than one witness to an event to make sure that their stories match
* Use more than one source for background research
* Make sure your sources are credible. If you are interviewing an “expert,” check their credentials

#### *Learning exercise*

Do some research toward your story about the cause you identified in Chapter 4. How did you, or another role model, or group of role models get started working on the cause? How much progress has been made and what remains to be done? How does this work impact society?

If the story is fictional, find out how a similar role model started their cause and adapt your answers to fit your character.

#### *For advanced learners*

Start a blog. You can do this for free on sites such as blogger.com. Browse through their existing blogs for ideas of what other people blog about and how they run their blog. I update my blog about once every month or two at http://compositepost.blogspot.com, and write a news story about an event I went to or post letters I wrote to editors. Many people post a short thought for the day.

Create a simple entry. Write about someone who has been important in your life. Or, write about something great *you* are doing for your community. Link your blog to http://RoleModelEnterprises.com .

# **WHY YOU SHOULD BE A ROLEMODEL**

What else are you going to do with your life? If you don’t do it for yourself, at least do it for others. In the end, you’ll realize you’re doing it for yourself. When you do something for others, you get more out if it than you put in. The good deeds come back to you.

## ***The world is full of bad examples***

When there’s nobody around that you would want to emulate, become someone to emulate. Ask not whom you want to be like, ask what you want to be like.

So many poor role models are taking the attention that positive role models deserve. Usurping the media. I’m sure most parents would like to see teens who are doing useful, positive activities featured more often in the media. They don’t want their children growing up thinking that living life like a gangsta is the way to gain respect. They don’t want their children to think that going to wild parties is the glamorous way of life.

When I was growing up, there was no benchmark to compare myself to what other kids my age were capable of. When I lived on a farm, all the kids around me were content with showing up to school and going home to watch TV and do chores. When I moved to Phoenix, my peers were hanging around after school smoking pot. I didn’t know there were other kids like my husband who attended after school programs for gifted children. I didn’t know kids could publish the stories they wrote. I didn’t know kids could learn more about foreign languages or more about programming computers than I had already learned. I didn’t know about and couldn’t afford science camps. But there were smart kids doing that. They had a better network of resources than I had. It wasn’t until I got to college that I was bombarded by so many people who as kids had so many more opportunities and outlets for their creativity than I had.

With the pervasiveness of the internet, adults and children alike can get ideas for things to do by browsing the internet. They can find out what people in other communities are doing and try to implement similar projects in their communities. Girl scouts can get ideas for badge projects, boy scouts can document and communicate their Eagle Scout projects, and church groups can show others the impact of the service projects they work on. Kids can find out what other people their age are doing and emulate or modify their good deeds.

## ***Impact others: How powerful are you***

We’re all on this earth together, we might as well help each other. When you help others, people become so willing to help you. Some people will thwart your efforts, but the majority of people will see that you are trying to do helpful life’s work. If you are focused and your heart is in the right place, people will sympathize with you and at least give you the benefit of the doubt. They will want you to succeed in your goals (whether it is paid or volunteer work) and point you to resources you may not have known existed. They will want to meet you, get to know you, and be supportive of you. They will give you respect – provided that you have earned respect.

The ability to impact others is the ability to give ourselves power. Not evil powers, but positive energy. When we brand ourselves as the person who… (insert your own vision of yourself here or select one from the chapter on Role Model style), we empower ourselves to be a source of inspiration for others. We fill our souls with the power to do good, to be a source of positive energy in other people's lives.

Psychologists John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Raven developed a theory that there are five basic forms of social power (The bases of social power.  In D. Cartwright & A. Zander (Eds.), *Group dynamics:  Research and theory*, pp. 607-623. New York:  Harper & Row, 1960).

I first heard about the five types of power in my undergraduate engineering management class in the early 1990’s. It was one of those classes that could have been useless with the wrong instructor, but we had a terrific guy come in from one of the big local engineering companies who had us do great role playing exercises in class every week. The idea of five forms of power seemed important enough at the time that I still remember it.

These forms of power are: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent.

### **Coercive**

Coercive power is the power to punish or to force someone to do something against their will. Bosses have coercive power because they can fire an employee or assign an employee menial tasks that go nowhere. (Another important tenet learned in engineering management class: Never give technician work to your engineers. Which can more generally mean, Don’t continually give people work that doesn’t challenge them or they will leave to find a job that has opportunity for growth and promotion.)

Dictatorships use physical harm to coerce information out of captives. Coercive power is the weakest form of power. It causes others to do the minimum to avoid punishment. It gets the least productive result and does not foster long term loyalty, which may be why child psychologists do not recommend spankings. Coercion is not the way to become a role model.

### **Reward**

This is the power to give incentives. Bosses have this type of power in the sense of giving raises and bonuses. In exchange, their employees will do what’s asked of them. Giving rewards in and of itself does not necessarily qualify someone as a role model. It may be generous, and generosity is worth emulating. Treating people kindly is also worth emulating.

### **Legitimate**

You get legitimate power due to the position you hold or have been given by a recognized authority. A professor has legitimate power over the students in her class during a given semester because the university gave her the power to assign grades. Bosses have legitimate power to give raises or to give bad performance reviews. Police officers have power to arrest someone or give them a ticket. Presidents have legitimate power within their jurisdictions or departments. People with legitimate power often don’t realize that their underlings are obeying the position, not them. When they move on to other positions or their people move on, the people who used to brown nose them no longer give them attention. Which is probably why I never bother with brown nosing. But someone who uses their legitimate power to do good work is a great role model.

### **Expert**

Expert power comes from education or experience. Like legitimate power being relevant only in the applicable jurisdiction, expert power is relevant only in the right subject area. This is when the employee has power over the boss. Expert power is used by unions when they encourage their members to strike for better pay or working conditions and by individual employees when they threaten to leave unless they get raise. It would take the boss a lot of time and stress to replace an expert employee. It’s also the power to help others with your knowledge or to be a role model in a given field of expertise.

### **Referent**

Referent power is respect that others have for you. This is the ultimate power of a role model. Another person not only likes you, but wants to be like you. It is the power of charisma and fame held by worldwide celebrities as well as community leaders. Referent power is the strongest and longest-term form of power. It causes others to do good work because they believe in what you stand for. Think of the great effect you can have on others when you have the power to do good.

## ***Have pride in yourself***

Don't allow others to have too much power over you. Have power over yourself.

Aristotle believed that striving toward excellence based on your unique talents and potential is the noblest goal in life. Personal growth is more robust and satisfying than happiness based on goods treasures things materials experiences given to you without your earning them. They engage different parts of the brain, according to Richard J. Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Continually taking on new challenges and fulfilling one’s sense of purpose in life. (Five things happy people do, Gabrielle Leblanc, *Oprah Magazine*, March 2008, p. 234)

When you are old and you look back on your life, what would you like to know you have accomplished? What do you want to be proud of ten years from now? What do you need to accomplish within the next ten years in order to have better opportunities available to you by then? How about five years from now? Life isn't just today. What you do today will affect where the rest of your life goes.

Often people are motivated by what’s in it for them today, rather than how today’s actions will affect their opportunities down the road. When you are motivated by the right reasons, when people do bad things that affect you, you have the peace of mind knowing you have good friends on your side. That you are good. There is nothing wrong with you. You just have different values than others.

This is not to be confused with blaming others for your problems – even it if it is partly or mostly their fault. You need to face your situation, learn from what happened, and figure out how to prevent those situations from happening to you or someone else again.

When people don’t think highly enough of themselves, they do things they might be ashamed to have someone else know they did. Like shoplifting. They know they did it. But they wouldn’t want anyone else to know they stole something. They don’t care enough about themselves to be upset that they did something wrong. But they care enough about their neighbors, aunts, or nephews – and other people’s opinions – to hide the truth from them.

If you ever catch yourself doing something you don’t want others to know you did, stop and ask yourself if you could still give yourself the respect you deserve if you did that.

Sometimes people impose values on you that you don’t agree with. If someone else thinks you would be a bad person for doing something, but you wouldn’t think less of someone else if they did it, then perhaps that person is too judgmental. You don’t need to rely on them for moral support.

Or maybe they’re trying to guilt you into doing something that will benefit them, but not you.

When I was getting my Ph.D., I did research at the Federal Highway Administration for a year. When the year was up, I negotiated with FHWA to pay me to continue my research through a contract with Arizona State University when I returned to finish my coursework. Since I was a student, the contract had to be in my professor’s name.

When summer came around, my paycheck stopped. I mentioned this to my professor and said I was going to talk to the department administrative assistant to ask about it.

My professor shouted, saying I must not ask anyone what happened to my pay. That he was using the money to pay himself for the summer and that he wasn’t going to pay me overtime for work I should be doing during the school year.

Overtime? How was working in the summer overtime? I immediately went to a professor in another department and asked what kind of a policy was this. He said if the money is in the professor’s name, he can do whatever he wants with it.

When the contract ended, my professor paid himself my last two weeks of salary and sent me a threatening letter. It turned out he was fooling the department chair into thinking he had brought the money in. It worked because as a student, I never had any meetings with the department chair. My professor ended up getting a promotion and I got “fired” as his student.

If I had done anything wrong during the contract, I may have felt I deserved this. But I knew that sometimes other people are selfish and I went on with my life. I didn’t quit pursuing a degree just because something terrible happened to me for trying to earn the degree. Besides, something worse could happen to me for not trying to earn the degree: nothing. Having nothing good ever happen to you in your life is worse than having something bad happen to you once.

I keep a blog where I write an article about my engineering activities about once per month. Shortly after taking a new job, I was fired for keeping this blog. I was sad, but I knew I had been doing a good job, thus I didn’t get upset. I was proud of my blog and had been working hard in spite of the obstacles I faced.

I didn’t react with anger. I didn’t yell, cry, or get upset. It was a dysfunctional work environment, so I knew it was for the best.

I didn’t feel bad about myself or sorry for myself. I looked for ways to learn from that experience and to use that experience to help others.

## ***For business and career reasons***

Does it make financial sense to be a role model? It can in the long term. Coworkers will invite you to meetings, consult your expertise. When people look to you as an example, you will be sought after for committees, panels, and general advice. Which will make you the candidate for a promotion or a new job, or put you on the path to become a business leader. People with good reputations have more business and career options. Business leaders give more breaks to those who have good reputations.

Professors spend a lot of time mentoring their grad students. In return, they get career brownie points for having their name on any articles the students publish about their graduate research. These articles don’t get published until after the student finishes her thesis and graduates, so it’s rare for a student to change professors before graduations.

When my professor sent me a memo saying he was resigning as my committee chair, I was able to put together a new committee that day. All because the other professors knew I had a good work ethic and that I did good work.

Building a good reputation is important at every step of your career. When you are starting out you are forgiven for a few youthful mistakes, but people expect more from you as you get older. Role models learn to make good life decisions. You may be able to make a career out of being a role model.

## ***Improve your standing in society, relationships***

Relationships are built on respect. How much do you enjoy spending time with people you do not respect? How much respect do you have for your friends?

You can’t marry someone you don’t respect. You would ignore their opinions and become angry over their choices. You would override their decisions and never consult their input. Your words and actions would belittle them. They would get frustrated and continue to act in a way that would be difficult to respect. It would become impossible to live with them. And you would become impossible to live with.

When people see that you do positive work, you will earn their respect. When people respect you, they include you in their decision processes. They will ask your opinion before making any decisions that affect you. People will want you to be a part of their projects and committees. People in positions of power will give you opportunities. They will think of you as an essential piece of the community.

If you choose to be a role model in a volunteer capacity, you may get lots of invitations to help on many other projects. Nobody ever has too many volunteers. But make sure you stick with a workload you can handle. You can’t say yes to everything, and nobody expects you to.

Others will treat you with more respect when you do the right thing, even if they don't agree with you. Those that leave you for doing the right thing were not worth associating with in the first place. True friends and good colleagues will stick by you.

Altruism triggers the pleasure centers of the brain that are often associated with food or sex. Changing brain activity reinforces change in thinking. If you act like a role model, you will think like a role model. Being a role model will become your norm.

## ***Self esteem and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs***

Abraham Maslow, a psychology professor, studied human potential. Most psychologists before Maslow’s time studied people with psychological abnormalities. Instead, Maslow studied high achievers, those who had positive mental health. He believed that psychological growth and healing came from within a person more than from external resources.

In 1943, Maslow developed a taxonomy, or a hierarchy of human psychological needs. The pyramid in Figure 6.1 is a simplified version of how Maslow’s hierarchy is often depicted. Sometimes it’s depicted with five levels, sometimes seven, depending upon the hypotheses held by the person using the pyramid.

This is another theory that struck me as interesting and has stuck in my mind. I first heard it when a family member was discussing a workshop she attended about teaching children from poor families. She said that different factors motivated poor children and their families may not be as supportive of their education because they had other things going on in their lives. The teachers were trying to get the kids interested in self esteem and intellectual activities (top of the pyramid) when the children and their parents were worried about where their next meal would be coming from (bottom of the pyramid).

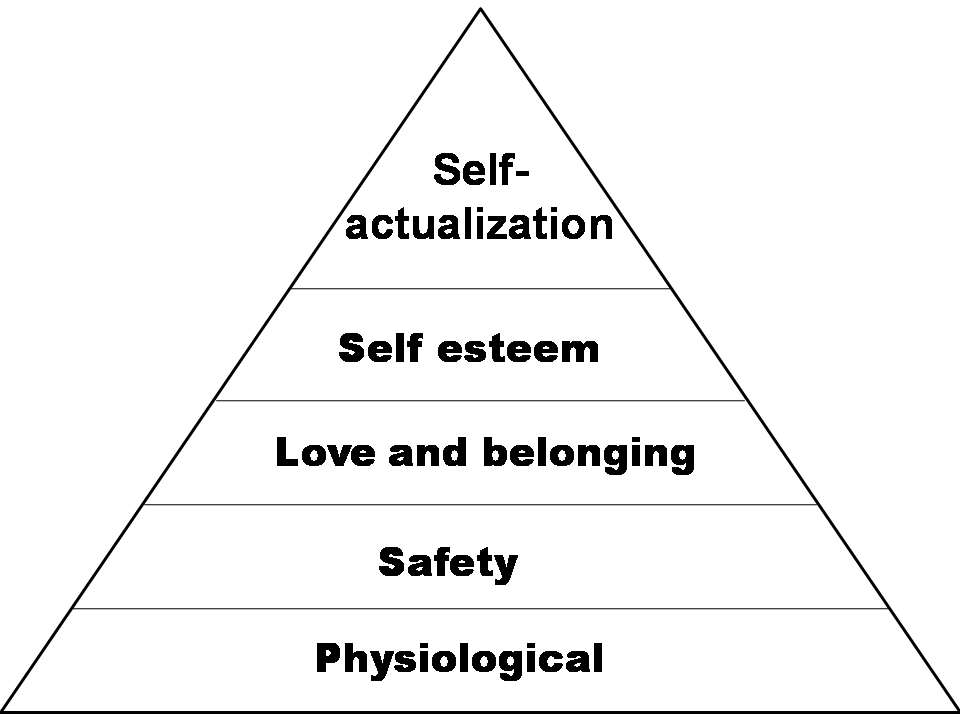


Figure 6.1 Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

In Maslow's theory, psychological needs are arranged in a hierarchy of importance. Once the physical-level needs, like hunger, near the bottom of the pyramid have been satisfied, those needs no longer influence behavior. Instead, thinking-level needs, like getting good grades, near the top of the pyramid take over.

This is also a good theory to be understood by managers. Managers often use money and other material incentives to fix problems with morale and productivity. When the case may be that participation in decisions about their work, the flexibility to be creative, and recognition for their value in the workplace (respect) would be better solutions. In the United States, most people do not have daily threats to their food supply or their personal safety. We focus more of our energies on socializing, self esteem, and recognition from others.

The bottom of the pyramid are the psychological needs manifested through physiological needs. If we do not have sustenance and must focus the efforts of our minds on finding the means for staying alive, the rest of the pyramid does not matter. Our brains won’t care about anything else but finding a way to stay alive. If you were choking and couldn’t breathe, would you care about self esteem or whether you felt you were reaching your lifelong goals? Somehow, I don’t think that would be the first thing on your mind. Likewise, a person who has devoted their whole life to their career (esteem from others) will throw it all out the window if they have to deal with cancer first (physiological).

The top of the pyramid represents what people want when they already have it all. Notice it’s not bling. Bling, or material goods, is not a part of the pyramid. Bling does not improve one’s psychological well-being. The top is about achieving your true potential. Most Maslow scholars believe that very few people reach self-actualization.

## ***Self-actualized people***

A concept Maslow attributed to Kurt Goldstein, one of his mentors — is the instinctual need of humans to make the most of their abilities and to strive to be the best they can. According to Maslow, self-actualizing persons tend to be aware, honest, free, and know what to trust. You can find a description of these four traits in the Wikipedia entry for Maslow’s hierarchy. If you browse that entry, however, you will note that many psychologists do not agree with each other upon the content. I’m sure they will be even less happy with having an engineer throw her two cents in. Regardless, I have included my own summary and interpretation below.

### **Aware**

Self-actualized people are aware in the sense that they embrace the facts and realities of the world rather than denying or avoiding them. They can tell when someone is disingenuous. They do not pretend things are what they aren’t. They can tolerate change and the unknown. They appreciate simple pleasures in life and don’t need to surround themselves with bling to distract themselves from what’s really going on in their lives.

### **Honest**

Self-actualized people have a social interest in the world around them and feel a bond with other people. They generally appreciate life and want what is fair for everyone. They don’t base other people’s importance on their economic class, education, political beliefs, race, or color. They believe it is possible to learn something from everyone. They don’t need others to feed their ego. Don’t need to put on a façade.

### **Free**

Self-actualized people can work without direction. They don’t need to follow the crowd. They are motivated more by internal goals than external goals. They are self-disciplined and make their own decisions, rather than act as a helpless pawn ruled by others. Their creativity and originality isn’t stifled by “the way we’ve always done it.”

### **Trust**

Solving problems is often a key goal of self-actualized people. They trust their own judgment and are able to view things objectively. They are not ashamed of their shortcomings. They focus on the needs of others rather than wallowing over everything that goes wrong in their own lives. People who are not self-actualized need a god as defined by an external authority to tell them their system of morality.

Look at your own life and find evidence of your own potential for self-actualization. Keep yourself aware by refraining from drugs – including alcohol, nicotine and caffeine. Care for all the people you deal with by teaching them. Trust your own opinion above others. Think about what needs to be done without waiting an authority to tell you what to do. Think of important work out of your own creative experience.

To become self-actualized, become a person who cares about the world around them. Be willing to do something about it no matter what others say or how others do it. A role model is someone who is self-actualized, someone who dictates their own norms of enculturation, who teaches others a suitable role.

## ***Always remember: there’s something about you that’s better than anyone else***

Maybe you’re the only daughter your mom has. Or you’re the neighbor who always greets everyone who walks by. There’s something about you that people will remember you for.

Remind yourself every day that you are a role model to someone. Write a note to yourself, “I’m the best brother to Jenny,” and stick it on your bathroom mirror. Or write, “I showed Joe how to make the best pancakes,” or “I’m saving the environment by taking the bus.” It doesn’t matter how simple the message is.

Or if you want something more permanent, get yourself a symbol to remind yourself of who you are. Put your message on a T-shirt or mug. Or wear one of the RoleModel Enterprises T-shirts and drink from our mugs. “Let’s put positive role models in the media.”

## ***Exercise: Be a role model***

Make a goal, do activities toward becoming a role model to someone important in your life, such as a daughter or nephew or to someone you haven’t met yet, someone who will be inspired by a story you create and post on the internet.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Whom do you know that needs a role model? A younger relative? A neighbor? A coworker? Do something nice for someone you want to be a role model for, like call on the phone to say hi or send a cheerful email.

List a few things you have done within your job or in your personal life to help others or make their lives better over the past year. Try to think of a few accomplishments from the previous year. Is there a progression over the years of how you have made a larger impact or affected a larger population?

#### *Medium term (This month)*

Research service groups that do projects related to work you have done in the past or projects that you would like to get involved with. Attend one of their meetings. Discuss with them the effort RoleModel Enterprises is undertaking or talk about a video about a role model. Find out who in their organization is there best role model.

## ***Learning & Communication: Outline your story***

##### Story structure

All stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end, also called Act I, Act II, and Act III. The beginning, or Act I, is the introduction, where we find out who the main characters are and what the story is about. At the end of Act I, the protagonist commits to solving a problem or to seeking a goal.

A typical outline of Act I includes five important pieces of information. I’ll illustrate with the first episode of *Budget Justified*, the RoleModel Enterprises video series.

* An opening with action or intrigue (In *Budget Justified*, the boss comes into work in the morning with a woman he’s been sneaking around with. Makes the audience want to know if something’s going on.)
* Introduction of the protagonist
* Introduction of the antagonist (We meet Lisa and Alan right away. We don’t know they are engineers yet, but we know they are in a professional office by the way they are dressed.)
* Introduction of the problem (Alan slaps Lisa on the butt right after seeing management treat a staff member questionably.)
* Complication when the protagonist takes on the problem (Lisa takes on the problem by continuing to work in that atmosphere. Therefore she has to continue to put up with it. She keeps quiet at work, but tells her husband about it. He becomes unhappy.)

Make sure everything in Act I is relevant to the story and character.

In Act II the protagonist goes through all kinds of crazy hoops to reach that goal. There are setbacks and wrong moves. The protagonist likely has a fatal flaw that ruins the search. The true goal may change slightly, due to whatever is revealed during the search. At the end of Act II she overcomes that flaw and recommits to the true goal.

A typical outline of Act II includes:

* Aftermath to the complication
* Backstory of the characters – the information about the characters that the readers or viewers need to be able to understand characters’ actions
* Set up/foreshadow future scenes
* Antagonist does something bad to the protagonist
* Something relevant to the theme happens
* Show a sympathetic side to the antagonist. Complex characters and shades of gray to an issue always add to the story. Nothing is ever black and white.
* All seems lost when the protagonist seems defeated by the problem or the antagonist

In Act III, the protagonist figures out what she needs to do to reach her goal. She carries it out and lives happily ever after.

* Set up the climax
* Resolve any subplots
* The antagonist wins
* Optional epilogue

How does the antagonist in *Budget Justified* win? As of this writing, we don’t know. If all the episodes have been released by the time you read this, feel free to write an epilogue in your own view of the story.

If you are interested in an in-depth study on story structure, read *Story Sense* by Paul Lucey. Steve Martin was one of Paul Lucey’s students. *Story Sense* will help you with story outlines and plot points. The book is geared mostly toward writing screenplays, but is relevant to writing any type of story.

#### *Learning exercise*

Outline your story about your selected real or fictional role model. Decide what scenes and information belong in Acts I through III.

#### *For advanced learners*

Volunteer to write a blog entry or do the web site for a service organization or other organization. Write a short story about a role model in that organization

# **ROLE MODELS IN THE MEDIA**

When people see others like themselves in certain roles, they have an easier time visualizing themselves in those roles. If children grow up seeing all the women on television in submissive roles, they think that women are supposed to be submissive. But when they see women as politicians, CEOs, and engineers, they think it is normal for women to hold positions of power and to be interested in technology.

## ***CSI***

After CSI became popular, the demand for forensic science as a major skyrocketed. Teens and young adults were able to envision themselves as forensic scientists.

The good thing about seeing forensic scientists as they work, or sort of how their actual work is, is that it is an actual profession that young people can expect to enter if they earn their degree and get some internship experience. The bad thing is that now there is a glut of forensic science majors, and the profession has become something that is no longer available to everyone who studies the field.

That’s why we need to see professionals in other fields at work. We need to see engineers, nurses, math teachers, and other important professionals that are in short supply. We need to see them carrying out their daily mission.

## ***Rock stars***

Shows such as *American Idol* and *Hannah Montana* glamorize the music profession. While they are nice, wholesome shows, they do not show the hard work that goes into creating an album as a work of art or the long hours traveling and attending media events. Or how the singer is at the whim of music company executives.

Teens have little concept of how likely it is that they will become rock stars. The percentage of people they see as rock stars is disproportionate to the actual percentage of the population that are rock stars. They don’t see all the time and dedication it took toward developing their talent.

## ***Gangstas***

Rap, or hip hop, music videos glamorize bling, girls wearing revealing clothing, acting tough, and gang violence. This hasn’t been as much of a problem among whites because most hip hop music has been associated with African-Americans. Young black men see these “gangstas” as getting lots of material stuff and women. They see that being tough gets them respect. They do not see the respect that African American professors or CEOs get. That looks like something that white men are supposed to do.

Barack Obama has been a good counter-role model to the hip hop culture. Young people of all races look up to him. His campaign has caught the attention of our future generation and got them involved in the leadership of our country.

## ***Fashion models are not role models***

Pictures of women in magazines, women in the movies, they are all stick thin. Models in the 1950’s were healthy. Today teens are growing up thinking that the girls they see in magazines are what they are expected to look like. Nice girls, smart girls, who are perfectionists starve themselves so as to minimize the fat on their bodies, thinking that all fat is bad. It’s not about being sexy. It’s not even about being pretty. Most models are scary and depressing looking. It’s about the competition to lose fat.

Dove soap models are beautiful. Their bones aren’t sticking out, but they certainly aren’t fat. I’m not sure that they really need to be in their underwear, although I supposed they are showing that they aren’t ashamed of being normal-sized, rather than skeletal.

The result of fashion models’ careers being dependent upon their thinness is dependence on drugs and stimulants to keep them from being hungry. We don’t need that to be the standard for young women.

## ***Engineers and computer geeks***

There aren’t very many engineers in television or movies. *Star Trek* shows positive images of technical people in the future. The early versions of the show in the 1960’s had women play supporting roles, but *Star Trek: Voyager* had Captain Janeway leading the ship.

Jodie Foster does a great job of playing an aeronautical engineer in *Flightplan*, a movie about a woman whose young daughter goes missing while on board a flight back to the United States after her husband dies mysteriously. Foster’s character is smart and cleverly foils the villain with her engineering knowledge of the plane.

*Office Space* is a comedy about software engineers working in a *Dilbert*-like office situation. The plot is far-fetched, although the story plays off the stereotype of cubicle land. The movie works because we know it’s far-fetched and the stereotypes are based in truth. But as with the *Dilbert* comics, the movie heavily reinforces the stereotypes. Perhaps engineering managers should take entertainment such as *Office Space* and *Dilbert* as a hint to examine their own organizations and figure out how to avoid becoming stereotypes themselves. After all, the stereotypes came from someplace.

My favorite novel is *Disclosure* by Michael Crichton. It was also made into a movie, which turned out somewhat different than the book. You may wish to see the movie first. Crichton did a great job of bringing the reader into the real world of big corporate engineering. Great twist ending! But written by a man, of course (it’s about reverse sexual harassment).

In March 2008, the United Kingdom Resource Center for women in science, engineering, and technology held a conference called *Raising the Profile of Women Scientists & Engineers within the Media – Creating New Partnerships* to discuss the impact of media on young women’s decisions to enter technical fields. According to Jenny Kitzinger, professor of media and communications research at Cardiff University, “Much of the media have, at least in the past, presented scientists in general in a negative light, and the media have specifically ignored, trivialized or misrepresented female scientists.”

## ***Studies about media for aimed for children***

Women will continue to struggle with equality if the popular culture continues to teach the next generation to pigeonhole women into stereotypical roles. According to a recent study by the See Jane program, a project of Geena Davis, children’s television perpetuates gender stereotyping in the roles, occupations and personality characteristics displayed by male and female characters.

Gerry Laybourne, Founder and CEO of Oxygen Media says, “One of the things TV does best is breaking down stereotypes. When we make an effort to show girls who are popular for their ideas, their initiative, their brains and not just their looks, we see the difference it makes for both boys and girls.”

Television is a major presence in the daily life of most young people. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation national survey found children ages 8 to 18 spend a daily average of 3:04 watching television, compared to 2:17 with parents. Alvin F. Poussaint, Harvard Professor of Psychiatry, states, “The early exposure of children to less stereotyped gender roles will contribute to less sexism and improved relationships between the sexes, as well as a balanced approach in rearing male and female children.”

Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman in space and CEO of the biotech company she founded, says that too many adults exhibit "belligerent ignorance" about the sciences and their relevance. When adults refuse to promote science literacy, children notice. Dr. Jemison believes that media should make science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers more visible and appeared in a 1993 episode of Star Trek to help make it so. “Women today are very absorbed with what’s being shown to them in the media. It’s a bombardment now that many of the roles girls see are very highly sexually charged and dependent upon looks.”

Many of the values and behaviors shown on TV are not what parents want for their children: materialism, drinking alcohol, and casual sex. According to Ronald L. Pitzer, family sociologist, children see an average of about 20,000 commercials per year and up to forty sexual encounters per week. Alcohol is consumed an average of four times during a one-hour crime show.

## ***Role models for the current “role models” in the media***

Who should be the role models to the models, athletes, and rock stars? Us. Well, why not? The average regular person seems to be much better adjusted than the regular rock star. There are many of us out there healing the sick, inventing the next version of the internet, and teaching our children. The average person does not need drug rehab.

Brian May, the guitarist of the band Queen (*We Will Rock You, Bohemian Rhapsody*, etc.) is an interesting exception to the typical rock star. May earned his Ph.D. in astrophysics and is currently continuing his research in that field. He has earned his right to be a role model to other rock stars. I think anybody who is a part of the music world and the science community should be featured prominently in the media.

Granted, models, athletes, and rock stars have to deal with the pressures that come with fame, so they might have difficulty relating to the average person. Unlike the average person, they can’t enjoy a stroll to their local ice cream parlor to enjoy a simple ice cream cone without people staring or bothering them. Their handlers and other people whose income depends on them are always pressing them (I assume) to appear for this and show their face at that when they really just need to rest. But they do get to enjoy a lot of other interesting experiences that the rest of us don’t.

## ***Exercise: Collect stories about role models***

This week learn something about role models in the media.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Think of someone who is not an actor, singer, or athlete who is a current figure famous for something you admire. Here are a few good examples: Hillary Clinton, Bill Gates, J.K. Rowling, Erin Brockovich, Bob Woodward, Brian Greene, the female engineer on the Ford commercials.

How did creativity influence their work? How did their experiences influence their work? How did they capitalize on the circumstances thrown their way?

If you can’t think of anyone, search the internet or your local community to find out who is similar to the kind of person you’d like to become.

#### *Long term (Over the next year)*

Build a collection of stories about role models. Put them on the internet as a list of links or summarize one story each week and post the summaries on a blog. Or photocopy or print each story and bind them to create a book to pass around to your family and friends.

## ***Learning & Communication: Taking pictures and locating video equipment***

##### Lighting for photos and video

Even when your story is in written form, versus video, people will want to see an image of your role model. Blogs and other web media are great for posting pictures.

One thing to remember about lighting is that it’s best not to light people from too far above. Noon sun will cast beard-like shadows. And don’t have the light behind your subject, otherwise they’ll look like a silhouette. Indoors, watch for how light bounces off ceilings and walls. Make sure there is light behind your subjects so they don’t cast weird shadows on the walls behind them.

For a few good tips for beginners, I recommend reading *The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video* by Tom Schroeppel. At eighty pages double-spaced with simple sketches, it really is bare bones. The book is out of print, but can be purchased used at Amazon.com and is available in some libraries.

When storing photos that you wish to share, you can use free sites such as Flickr and Facebook. But be aware that anyone may be able to look at these. Flickr is not a private site. Kids have posted photos of their friends online that have ended up in ad campaigns in Australia.

#### *Learning exercise*

Take pictures of the role model in your story. Edit them to cut out extra background and resize them so they would fit in your blog or other document you are creating your story in. Store them either on-line on photo sites in a folder on your computer. You might want to email them to yourself to store backup copies.

#### *For advanced learners*

Some of you may have already created your own videos. Others will have to spend a little time looking into: 1) purchasing or borrowing a video camera, adequate computer, editing software 2) learning how to use the camera, getting the footage onto your computer, and using the editing software. You may also wish to collaborate with others who already have equipment and know how to use it.

You can find a lot of information on the web to help you decide what to buy and how to use it. But don’t let the plethora of information stall you from starting something. Most people who post videos on the internet learn from trial and error. Your first projects don’t have to be great.

If you do not already own a video camera or editing software, research the type of equipment you may wish to either purchase. You can get a reasonable video camera for under $300. Simple video editing software comes free on most new computers. Editing software with lots of features can cost several hundred dollars. Software that can handle multiple sound tracks, for recording voiceover narration, is available for under $70. You will need a firewire to transfer your videos from your camera to your computer. You will also want a computer with a big hard drive because video files can be hundreds of megabytes for just ten minutes of footage!

If you don’t know where to start looking to find out what equipment you want, go to an electronics store and ask the salespersons about the equipment. When I went to buy my camera, I went to a store near a university with a film program. The salesman was a student and knew the technology inside and out.

You could ask to borrow a camera from a friend or relative. Perhaps they would like to collaborate with you on your project. You could also look into renting cameras.

Unless you are using the free editing software that comes with your computer, your software comes with a manual which should help you get started. You may be able to figure out how the software works by trial and error, clicking around. Play with any sample videos that may have been included with your software.

If you are a college student, check the media department at your school. Colleges and universities will let students check out video equipment, sometimes for a small fee, to make videos for class projects. They should also have the equipment you need to transfer footage from your camera or digital tape to a computer in a school lab. The lab will also have assistants or a tutoring session to show students how to use the editing software.

You may also look into joining a local cable access station. They teach classes on how to use their cameras, lighting, sound equipment, and editing software. They also have professional studios for members to reserve. If you are interested in doing only one show without the commitment of taking the courses, you can find out if one of the station’s members would like you to provide content for one of their shows.

I belong to a local branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), that reserves a studio at the Fairfax County Access Corporation (FCAC) once a month to produce half-hour shows. The cable station broadcasts the shows four times per month and owns the rights to each show for a year. I have volunteered to help out with simple tasks during taping to learn about how they create their shows. After assisting on their shows a few times, I proposed a show about three high school girls at a science fair and another show about a woman engineer who started her own business. AAUW was more than happy to have them on our show. I interviewed the guests, while other AAUW members and FCAC volunteers worked the cameras, lighting, sound, and directed the crew.

# **CALL TO ACTION: GRASSROOTS MEDIA**

Activists try to get politicians to make laws that support their cause because the general public can’t implement laws. Laws govern what cannot be shown on prime time television, the internet, and in newspapers. But laws cannot govern what must be shown in media. We certainly wouldn’t want the government to micromanage us that way.

Of course, news and entertainment media doesn’t work like government. Citizens don’t lobby Hollywood or large news outlets. News outlets have criteria for what constitutes news and Hollywood decides what to do based on what the executives think will bring in money.

So lobbying Hollywood and news outlets to create fiction stories and news stories about role models wouldn’t be very helpful. It may work that way for American Idol contestants, but Hollywood and news executives don’t keep their jobs based on our votes. Although advertising agencies keep them in their jobs by voting with their dollars based on how the advertising executives think placing ads will bring in money from us.

So originally, I thought about getting a show about a role model, say a woman engineer, on network television. Usually to get a show approved, a Hollywood writer or producer – someone in the business – pitches an idea to a network executive or to some of their subexecutives. The networks worry about getting the advertisers. If they think the show will attract viewers, they think they can get advertisers.

I thought if I could show that engineering and technology companies would advertise on a show about a woman engineer, and if I could show that there was a community of people who wanted to watch a show about a woman engineer, I’d have more leverage in getting a network to support the show. But the big engineering companies told me they didn’t commit to advertising on shows until the show already had a stable track record.

I also asked a Hollywood writer if he or anyone he knew would want to get together with an engineer to write a show about a woman engineer. He said it’s better for writers careers to work with other writers – other insiders – than to work with someone outside Hollywood.

None of this means it can’t happen. It means I have to try another approach. Revolutions aren’t started by insiders, who have a stake in doing things the way they’ve always been done, the way they’ve been done that got them into power in the first place.

And with modern technology, we can do things differently. We can create our own media. We don’t need their permission.

Instead of feeling like victims who need the government and big business to do things for us, we can empower ourselves to create the kind of media we want available for our children and for each other. Rather than begging Big Brother to keep underwear-free pop stars out of our media links, we can create our own media for people to link to. If we all band together, we can eventually inundate the web with role models for people to pay attention to, attract attention away from those who don’t deserve it.

This book has twelve chapters, each outlining small steps to get you going toward putting role models in new media. But there are three main things to do to Grassroot the media: join a group, create your own media, and spread the word.

## ***Join a group for support***

The whole point is to do this for others, so don’t go at it alone. Recruit others for support, even if it’s just moral support. You’ll be surprised at how helpful people will want to be once you have them hooked on your idea. Your social and professional networks will be crucial to finding the information you need during your project.

There are thousands of service organizations and professional organizations out there begging for members. Look into groups at your church, community center, or chamber of commerce. Almost every organization has a web site, so do a web search if you want to compare organizations. Service and professional organizations are more than happy to find anyone who wants to help out and get involved. If you wanted to work with them to create media featuring one or more of their members as a role model, they’ll be happy to help you out. It’s a great way to meet people because you already have a conversation starter. “Hi, I’m creating a story about role models who… (insert what the organization does here) to put on the internet. I was hoping we could help each other out.”

If you live in the Washington, DC metro area, attend one of our RoleModel Enterprises events. If not, get together with a group of friends and watch our videos on YouTube. You can also participate in the teleconferences from your own home. Soon we will have our events on the web for you to participate in. Eventually we will bring events to locations all over the country, maybe even the world.

If you haven’t already, join RoleModels as a teleconference member and join our monthly teleconference calls to find out what others are doing toward getting positive role models in the media or how others are creating their own media. See http://RoleModelEnterprises.com/ for details on how to join.

## ***Create your destiny***

Become a role model through the act of creating. If you think you don’t have time to work on this because you need to be with family or friends, involve them in your effort. It’s a good way to spend time together. If your friends don’t believe in your cause, expand your horizons and meet friends who do. With YouTube and blogging, we can all put the role models of our lives into the media.

Before technology changed word processing, secretaries used to do all the office typing. Now everyone does their own typing directly instead of writing it down for someone else to copy onto a computer. And the secretaries can spend their time on tasks that require more human brainpower. Before technology changed video processing, video stories about people's lives were done only by production companies because it required fancy equipment. Now anyone can put their story on the internet. Stories that weren't being done can now be readily available to the world. Scientists don't have writers create their technical publications; the publications are written by the scientists themselves. Role models don't need to wait until a filmmaker wants to document their stories; we can do it ourselves.

There will always be demand for high-quality work done by production houses, and there will always be garbage posted for all to see. But I've seen the work done by college students with simple equipment in a video production class. I was impressed by the clever stories and storytelling techniques. Most of it is acceptable quality and highly entertaining.

Don’t worry if you think your project isn’t good enough. I thought mine was dumb when I started, but as I worked on it, it took shape. After seeing it on paper or in video, I noticed what needed improvement and came up with better ideas. You can’t improve on something until it exists.

The creative process starts with an idea. You add pieces to the idea, refine the pieces, until it becomes a product.

## ***A new literacy***

Is society on the verge of a literacy revolution? Will this revolution change whose hands our media lies in? If we are at a tipping point, this is the time to take the media into our own hands and use the literacy of visual and temporal communication to communicate a new message.

Susan Jacoby, director of the New York branch of the Center for Inquiry and author of books and news articles, says videos make us lose literacy. (Call me a snob, but really, we’re a nation of dunces, *Washington Post*, February 17, 2008 p. B-1)

While I don’t disagree that reading is important, I am not convinced that reading web sites has no value or that it is necessary to read a novel to be literate. Where’s the proof? Or is this some novelist trying to justify her existence.

I have to admit that when working with people who have experienced neither a vast array of literature nor a focused depth of literature, they do not have adequate judgment for determining what belongs in a book and what does not. Or even for determining what belongs in a series of adjacent paragraphs.

Howard Gardner, a professor in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, says we are entering a new age of literacy (The end of literacy? Don’t stop reading. *Washington Post*, February 17, 2008 p. B-1). Plato feared that written language would erode our ability to remember stories. Instead, it has created the ability to access other people’s thoughts and “memories” to enhance our own knowledge.

Perhaps the gap between Jacoby and Gardner is not the consumption, or reading and watching of the literature and media, but the creation of the new media. We learned how to read and write when we were young. Our writing improves as we get older and practice. It is common to watch films and videos. But we don’t learn how to tell a story in video form.

“Writing” a story using video media is different than writing a story with only words. Sure, we still have to use sentences, but we storyboard, or outline, differently. With videos, we use more than just words to show our story. We use objects, angles, acting, lighting, motion, music, and so many other forms of symbolism. If we truly want to have our society be “literate” at watching stories, we need to teach them to “write” (create) watchable stories. When we learn how to create a visual story, we learn how to look for the subtleties of each item placed on the screen before us. Like learning to evaluate the quality of the writing as we improve our writing, we learn to evaluate the quality of filmmaking, of telling a story through video, through improving our video story-creation skills.

## ***News: Spread the word***

Mainstream media still has influence over what we see and don’t see. Even though we can create our own media, if we have something newsworthy, the mainstream media is very helpful in spreading the word. Show media companies that there is a market for stories about people who use technology to create products that affect our lives – that we want to know what those lifestyles are about. Write letters to the editor. Write letters to the networks.

Once you have something created, you have something to talk about and show around. So talk about it! If you are well connected or the idea has strong enough news potential, the word about your role model story will spread fast.

To qualify as newsworthy, your story must have at least one of the following:

* *Conflict* – Role models aren’t very interesting if everybody stands around them singing Kumbaya. If everything went smoothly in our lives, we wouldn’t need role models.
* *Shock* – Sometimes people are role models for doing the unexpected. Not everyone goes with the grain during times of conflict.
* *Simplicity* – If people can’t understand the story, nobody will pay attention.
* *Kids* – It’s important to help the next generation. If kids are doing something beyond the normal expectancy for their age, people want to know about it.
* *Celebrities* – People like the familiar. People like to know how the famous live.
* *Strong imagery* – People retain more of what they see than what they read or hear. They like to be able to understand the details of what happened.
* *Action* – Not only do people want to know what happened, they want to know what anyone did about it. Non-action is boring. When you have action plus shock, you have tragedy.
* *Local impact* – Nobody cares about events that aren’t relevant to them. It has to be pretty important for someone from Tempe to relate to anything that goes on in Dayton. People in Tempe don’t need to know about a small garden show in Dayton. What is someone in Tempe going to do with plants that thrive in Dayton?
* *Novelty* – Anything that doesn’t normally happen is interesting.
* *Humor* – People like to laugh.
* *Irony* – Irony causes emotion.

The more of these qualities your story has, the farther the word will spread.

Let’s analyze my video series about sexual harassment with the above criteria. If you need to refresh your memory on my videos, the link to watch them can be found at http://RoleModelEnterprises.com.

*Conflict* – Lisa had conflict with Alan because he was locking her in their office and touching her inappropriately. She also had some conflict with Tim because he frequently made sexist comments. There was conflict with the managers because they gave her conflicting instructions on what projects to work on, telling her not to work on some projects, telling her to work on other projects that were already complete. There was potential conflict in making up her own project, since the managers were not supportive of any of the work done by the staff.

And the final conflict was getting fired in spite of having the best work ethic of the office. What makes all these conflicts even stronger is that this is a true story told about an existing government organization. Which means that just by putting the video out there and in the news, the government organization is going to retaliate.

*Shock* – Alan’s groping was shocking. Firing Lisa was shocking. And most of all, making a video about getting groped and fired instead of crawling in a hole was ultimately shocking.

*Simplicity* – If you wanted to simplify the message of the video, you could simply say a woman gets groped, then fired. But this story really isn’t all that simple. And that’s the message. That sexual harassment isn’t simply about getting groped. It is a complex interaction of other things going on in the office. It is a result of mistreatment of everyone in the office. It is a power struggle.

And the message isn’t just about sexual harassment. There’s the waste of taxpayer dollars. There’s the ignoring of Congress’s mandate to improve air traffic congestion and the resulting delays. It is about the abuse of power by people who think they can get away with it, the use of power to make insecure people feel better about themselves. It is about the way managers are using the intellectual resources – engineers and mathematicians – in the face of a “shortage” of technical knowledge.

*Kids* – This story has one kid roaming through the office, but she’s only a minor figure that represents how adults reinforce stereotypes of men and women in children as they grow up.

*Celebrities* – The closest we get to a celebrity in my video series is featuring the previous FAA administrator in actual footage taken at a Town Hall meeting I attended. She was included to show that the work in the government office I worked in was not supposed to be about a bunch of engineers making electronic slides to entertain themselves. Even though that is what the work resulted in being. The work was supposed to be about fixing national problems. Even though it was never used for that.

*Strong imagery* – The reason I used video was that it told the story with much more impact than writing a whining email about it to my Congressman. It enabled the audience to see who I was and experience the atmosphere of my workplace.

*Action* – When I didn’t know what I was supposed to do for my job, I didn’t twiddle my thumbs and complain. I came up with an idea and started working toward solving it. After I was fired, instead of pouting and hiding in a corner, I created a business. I had been planning to develop some type of nonprofit or for profit company before I took the job, but didn’t know where to start or how it was going to work. But once I had this story, I knew I had something to work with.

*Local impact* – My story has local impact on all the federal workers in Washington. Thus, it is relevant to Washington news outlets. However it has less relevance to other areas of the country. Yet it is not completely irrelevant to the rest of the nation. Everyone in the U.S. is a taxpayer. The way federal employees are treated and how their work is used is of interest to the entire country.

*Novelty* – There are already several video series on the internet. Most of them are commentary, such as brief political analyses of news, or analyses of the meaning of words. There are not many story series on the internet. And they aren’t about stories that happened in real life.

*Humor* – There is some humor sprinkled throughout my video to show that the characters I worked with were fun to talk to. I hoped you would find them interesting to listen to.

*Irony* – There is irony when someone who thinks they have so much power of others that they can take away their jobs, loses all their power over those people by firing them. And that’s when the people who were fired can really test the dictator’s power. There is also irony when someone gets fired over posting a minor joke on an obscure blog read only by friends and relatives, then posts the whole controversial story on the internet and gets it written up in national news.

I figured if they were so concerned about having a joke posted on my blog, they must be hiding something else much bigger.

When you find the aspects in your story that makes it newsworthy, play up those aspects in your story.

It is important to expose your stories in multiple forms of media to increase your exposure. Internet videos can link to blogs, which refer to web sites, which advertise events, which feature role models. You can also appear on other people’s stories to get their audience to find out about you. People who create news stories for a living need people like you to help them with the news. Likewise, they can help you get visibility for your stories.

There are several ways to get visibility for your story:

* *Local news stories* – Local newspapers have a small staff. In fact, all papers are short on staff these days. You can get a story in a local newspaper by summarizing an event or information on something related to current news and sending it to the appropriate editors. But first check with them to find out if they are interested in having you send a story. Newspapers list their staff and email addresses on their web sites. Check the paper’s site to find out which editor to send the story to.

I sent an email to the Gaithersburg Gazette asking if they wanted to cover an activity that the Society of Women engineers prepared for their local Girl Scout troupe. They did not have the staff to cover the event, but they were interested in the story, so they asked if I would send them a few lines about the event along with a photo.

Figuring they needed the help, I wrote a story for them. I thought it might also increase the chances that they’d actually run the story if they didn’t have to do much work to make it into a story.

They did print a story about the event, but they pretty much rewrote the entire article. I assume they wanted it to fit with a certain tone, and may have a policy against crediting non-staff authors, especially without paying the author. But I was glad they ran the story, and they included the photograph I sent them, crediting me with the photo.

* *Letter to the editor* – This works if your story relates to a recent article run in the paper. They may edit your letter before printing, and rarely include web addresses.
* *Guest column or editorial* – If you have something to say about your role model that ties in with current news, you may be able to pitch a column to a small paper about your role model.
* *Local TV and radio broadcast news* – If your role model is putting on an event, invite newscasters to cover the event.

When I was in grad school in Tempe, I was involved in a week-long summer engineering camp on the campus for high school girls. I helped run a lab session for the girls to try different experiments and learn about what engineers did. We had local TV news come by for an hour and tape what we did.

The entire news segment ran for about a minute, I appeared in it for about five seconds, demonstrating an environmental engineering chemistry reaction in a flask.

This news story was appealing to the TV station because it had kids, strong imagery (girls working with engineering equipment that did something you could see happening), local impact (all the high school girls were local).

While an engineering camp for girls in Phoenix was newsworthy in the Phoenix news market in 1995, I doubt it would capture much attention in the Washington D.C. news market. High school kids in the Washington suburbs have so many more opportunities, much better high schools, and such higher advanced opportunities than Phoenix high schools that this is not news around Washington.

Now, if the story was about engineering camp for poor students in the bad areas of Washington D.C. (not the suburbs), that would be news. Washington has a reputation for having the worst public schools, drug problems, and teen prostitution. Any learning going on in the public schools in Washington is news. (Although the private schools in Washington are adequate.) Desperate needs, big opportunities for role models in that community.

Washington also has much bigger news stories in general that girls doing science is not a big deal. But if you live in a smaller news market, you should be able to get some interest in local TV and radio news if your role model has any impact on your local community.

* *Newsletters* – I frequently submit short articles to organizations I belong to. No questions asked. People are always looking for something to publish in their newsletters.
* *Talk radio* – Depending upon the time of day and the market, radio shows have a need for guests. My husband was asked to be interviewed on a live radio show at 8:00 on a Saturday morning. I don’t know how many people were listening, but it was a good experience for him to go through. There are also radio slots at public access cable stations. If you join your local station, you might be able to have your own weekly show.
* *Public service announcements* – Radio and TV stations often donate some of their air time towards public service announcements as a tax writeoff.
* *Podcasts* – You can create your own radio talk show and post it on the internet. There are web sites for storing your audio files that can be found through search engines.
* *Web* – Post comments on other people’s web sites and include a link to your story, blog, or your own web site.
* *E-card* – Keep an updated address book of all your friends’ and relatives’ email addresses. Send out messages when you update your story on your web site or blog. Most free email services will only allow you to send a message to a maximum number of addresses in one message and have a limit on the number of messages you send in a day. If you wish to send messages to a much larger list, say for a national organization you belong to, you can pay for a service that will allow you to send as many emails as you wish and in most cases will prevent your messages from getting filtered out as junk mail. Some services provide an option for people to sign up for your emails so you don’t have to manually enter people’s email addresses to your address book.
* *Fliers* – Libraries and universities often let you post fliers for nonprofit events in their facilities.
* *Blog* – Most blog services are free. Some blogs are managed by only one person, others are managed by a group in which all the members can post entries. If you belong to a service organization or if you own a business, you may wish to have some of the members or employees make posts as a group blog.

So, not only can you post your story on the web, you can post announcements and links about your story on other people’s and organizations’ sites on the web.

## ***Exercise: Grassroot with media professionals***

Let’s do an exercise about a grassroots movement toward getting more positive role models in the media. Fill in your written stories about our role model. Your written story may be either intended to be a blog in its final form, or a screenplay, which won’t be read by your audience, instead it will be used when you shoot the footage.

#### *Short term (Today)*

What are the media outlets in your community? Online? Look up who the media people in your neighborhood are. It’s easier to start with smaller publications and public access cable volunteers.

#### *Long term (Months, years)*

Contact these people with an idea for a story. Volunteer to help them with the story. Write letters to the editor. Build a relationship with the media.

## ***Learning & Communication: Fill in your story outline***

##### Adverbs and adjectives

We don’t need to be literary geniuses, but there are a few techniques that make your writing more readable. Have you ever noticed that when writing a scene, as in fiction where people talk, do things, and something happens (as opposed to this book, which is informational and filled with adverbs and adjectives) authors don’t use many adverbs (ly words) and adjectives?

When people are following action, they want to know why the main character knows that the woman is smart or the how the train moves quickly. We don’t want to just take the authors word for it. We want to see what the characters see. We want to know what the woman said that made the main character conclude she was smart. We want to draw that conclusion ourselves. We want to hear the woman calculate the number of laps around the track in a ten-minute mile on the spot and experience her memories of meeting her little sister in a plastic chair on a shag carpet by the dining room table when she was two. We want to imagine the train’s logo woosh by in a blur and hear the pitch of the horn get lower as it disappears in the distance. That’s why authors use verbs to describe a scene. The scene has to be active and interesting. It can’t be flat and dull.

There are lots of books on writing. One of the highly recommended books about novel writing is *Writing the Breakout Novel* by Donald Maass. He has also written a corresponding workbook. You will find good techniques for making your story stand out and ideas to think about when evaluating whether others will be interested in the story or not.

Learning to write a large piece of fiction is an entire college education unto itself. There are thousands of books, courses, and workshops dedicated to teaching fiction writing. I've joined several workshops and read several books about writing fiction, in addition to reading other people's works of fiction.

I am still working on my novel about a female engineer. It took me four years just to learn how to write it. I've thrown out over a thousand pages of what I have written. But it's getting better. The next one won't take so long and I won't have to throw out as much.

Also, be careful whom you tell you are writing a novel. Some people will try to sap any energy you have for writing it. You don't need to defend yourself to these people. And don't listen to any advice you get from anyone who hasn't written a novel themselves. That may seem obvious, but it apparently isn’t obvious to those who have not written a novel.

#### *Learning exercise*

When the media won’t create stories about role models for you, take creating stories about role models into your own hands. Fill in your story that you outlined in previous chapter.

##### Screenplay format

Movie and video scripts have a certain format. One page equals one minute of video. It’s good to use this format when you’re writing the dialogue and actions for a scripted video because the dialogue for each character is separated out.

A draft script for part of the first episode of Budget Justified is included on the following pages. The format isn’t exactly correct because screenplay format assumes 8½” x 11” paper.

Typically, screenplays are in New Courier 12 point font. The setting is in all caps, designated by INT. for an indoor scene or EXT. for an outdoor scene. The first time a character appears, his or her name is in all caps. Dialogue is indented an inch on both the right and left. The name of the character who says the dialogue appears in all caps above their dialogue, indented two inches. There is a blank line after each scene/action description and after each block of dialogue.

To download scripts of several different movies, go to http://www.imsdb.com/ or http://www.dailyscript.com/movie.html.

Episode 1: Boss affair, Hidden camera

INT. WINDOW

Shot out of window of a man and woman walking from a parking garage toward the building. Zoom in on MIKE and JANE.

INT. HALLWAY

CUT TO ALAN, walks up and taps LISA, “holding” the camera.

ALAN

Hey Lisa. What are you doing with that box?

Alan taps the camera.

LISA (OS)

Just a box I’m bringing to my desk.

Alan looks toward the window.

ALAN

I think your boss has a new girlfriend.

LISA (OS)

Which boss?

ALAN

That one.

Alan nods toward the window.

INT. WINDOW

CUT TO Shot of boss and woman out the window again.

LISA (OS)

That one’s married.

INT. OFFICE

Lisa and Alan enter their office. Alan hangs his jacket, Lisa puts the camera “box” on a shelf.

ALAN

He lives way west of here. Virginia suburbs. Doesn’t she live in Maryland?

LISA

Hm. His wife is out of town this week.

ALAN

No wonder she got a promotion. Like I said. A new girlfriend.

He slaps Lisa on the butt. Lisa gives the camera a dirty look.

You’re probably wondering what this has to do with a role model. This is only a minute and a half of video, so give it time to unfold.

#### *For advanced learners*

Download and read several movie scripts to get a feel for the format.

# **IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS IN PEOPLE’S LIVES (ROLE OF ROLE MODELS)**

## ***Monkey see, monkey do: Kids’ role models***

### **Family**

Children come into this world without prior knowledge or skills. They eagerly look for someone to imitate, usually their parents. Parents are a child's first teachers and role models. According to Ronald L. Pitzer, Extension Family Sociologist, children are more affected by what their parents do than by what their parents say. They learn how to behave by seeing how their parents behave and by following their example. Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, says, “If you as parents cut corners, your children will too. If you lie, they will too. If you spend all your money on yourselves and tithe no portion of it for charities, colleges, churches, synagogues, and civic causes, your children won't either. And if parents snicker at racial and gender jokes, another generation will pass on the poison adults still have not had the courage to snuff out.”

Children learn their social skills and respect for others through their parents’ actions. A child brought up in a home filled with love, affection, and cooperation will show love to others. The way parents handle conflicts and cope with problems gets reinforced in the children’s brains. If a parent tackles a problem without placing blame on others, the child will be less likely to give up. Family counselor and parenting author Eda LeShan says, “Becoming responsible adults is no longer a matter of whether children hang up their pajamas or put dirty towels in the hamper, but whether they care about themselves and others – and whether they see everyday chores as related to how we treat this planet.” Punishments, rewards, threats, and spankings are nowhere near as effective as exhibiting the qualities and values that the parents would like their children to have when they grow up.

Sydney J. Harris, a former Chicago news columnist in the 1940’s through 1980’s, said, "When parents talk about discipline, they mean a rigid set of rules to prevent their children from misbehaving. But the only discipline worthy of the name lies in providing a solid framework of ideals—not for the child to live up to, but for the parents to live within. You can beat children until they are black and you are blue, but it cannot make them any better than the examples they see around them every day."

Siblings are also role models. Usually the younger siblings look up to the older ones, but sometimes the younger ones can be role models.

When my family first moved to Phoenix, we lived in an apartment complex near a small shopping center. My sister was about to enter fourth grade and I was about to enter sixth grade. I was the genius kid. She was smart enough, but her dominant trait was that she was much more outgoing than I. She made friends with the neighbor kids first.

When we went outside to play, we always noticed lots of shopping carts from the nearby grocery store all over our apartment complex. One day she decided to go to the store manager and ask if she could get a nickel for every cart she returned to the store property. She brought in ten to twenty carts every day for a week and he raised her fee to ten cents per cart.

At this point, she recruited me because it was a big task for a nine-year-old. We split the fees, bringing in carts every day except Sundays and Christmas. The store manager was concerned that our operation would be messed up by the neighborhood kids if they knew we were doing this for money, so we told them that we were doing the cart routine for fun.

I thought my sister was the genius. I may have been able to do math, vocabulary, and memorize history and science facts, but my sister saw a business opportunity and acted on it. I hoped that some day I would be able to figure out how to create business opportunities from a perceived need.

We did this job for six months, until our parents bought a house several miles away. We handed the operation over to the kids next door the day we left. As the store manager suspected, the whole business died out within a week. They didn’t bring in carts every day and soon all the apartment kids were coming into the store telling the manager that they brought in a hundred carts or more. This can also be taken as a lesson in teaching kids the discipline of doing a job every day and keeping their word.

### **School**

We look to others for ideas of what we are supposed to be and what others like very early in life. We associate with our peers and teachers from early on. We see the other kids and think we are supposed to be like them.

When I was in kindergarten, nobody else in my class knew how to read. The teacher taught us letters of the alphabet with giant blow-up characters. She had a shelf of picture books, like a magazine rack, for us to read. None of the other kids read the books with words. I thought that was because we were not allowed to read when were at school. One day I picked up a book from the lower shelf. It had words in it. I noticed the teachers name was written on the inner flap of the front cover. I quickly closed the book and put it away, thinking I was playing with something that belonged to the teacher, not for the students.

While this was happening, my dad was in the classroom fixing the television set. I wasn’t listening, but he told me later that he asked her what I had been learning. She told him I learned the letter K. The letter K? He told her that not only did I already know the letter K, and the rest of the alphabet, but that I could read a whole book. She didn’t believe him.

So she brought me the book I had accidentally picked up earlier. I thought I was in trouble for looking at the book that was hers, not the students’. And she asked me to read. Well, when the teacher tells you to read, you read. Even though I was afraid I’d be in trouble. But that was it. No trouble. In fact, she brought in more books for me to read. And I felt relieved that I was free to read if I wished.

Even five-year olds try to model themselves after what they perceive they are supposed to be. And they probably aren’t right. If they think they are supposed to “be” a certain way, they will pretend they are, even if they aren’t. When I was a kid in a small town, I never saw girls in sports. I thought all teenage girls were supposed to become cheerleaders.

This has huge implications regarding the effect of the school you send your kids to and the neighborhood you live in. If your kids grow up seeing older kids in gangs, they will think kids are supposed to join gangs when they get older.

### **Advertising on TV and internet**

I was part of the generation of kids who had a stay-at-home parent (always the woman) that parked the kids in front of the TV because the parent had so much work to do around the house. Luckily today’s generation can by food from the store. They don’t have to grow it themselves. In addition to the TV, kids today get the computer, which has a wealth of information and learning experiences. Unfortunately, it also has a poverty of time wasters, porn, and most scarily, predators.

Kids are inundated with media more than in previous generations. With so many electronic gadgets, advertising on school property, and advertising on toys and cereal, outside influences surround them. In the 1980’s, toy manufacturers started collaborating with television cartoon producers so that cartoon shows would feature their toys as characters in the shows. Kids food, like macaroni and cheese, have cartoon characters printed all over the packaging to make them think the food is specially for them.

I was at the grocery store with my mom one day when I was eleven. At the checkout counter, I saw a book with a picture of Mork on the cover. Mork, from *Mork and Mindy*, was my very most favorite TV character. I thought it would be fun to have him live in my attic so he could play house with my sister and me.

I never asked for anything except at Christmas. Even then, I asked for eleven pairs of underwear and eleven pairs of socks (mom did laundry every week and a half). But I asked if I could have that book. Books were sometimes fair game if there was a book sale at school.

The lady at the checkout counter told my mom that it wasn’t a good book to give to kids. So I didn’t get the book.

The book was *The World According to Garp* by John Irving. The man on the cover was Robin Williams, not as Mork, but as the T.S. Garp character he played in the movie.

Sometimes things get advertised to children where they weren’t meant to be.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, advertising that glamorizes certain lifestyles contributes to obesity, anorexia, underage drinking, and teen sex. Children view more than 40,000 ads per year on television.

With fewer households having a parent stay home with kids all day, kids are exposed to outside influences more. This is not a bad thing, since outside influences enrich a child’s life. I wish I had had more outside influences when I was a kid. But parents have to make sure the kids are exposed to good influences – whatever their definition of good may be.

Gender portrayals seen on television can have a strong impact on children. Studies of children’s television exposure indicate that heavy viewing predicts traditional sex-role attitudes, such as girls believing that females are less competent than males, or boys believing that household chores should fall along stereotypical lines. In terms of occupations, children who are heavy television viewers may believe that they have a smaller range of occupation choices based on their gender.

## ***Everybody’s doing it: Teens’ role models***

In a 2002 study of over seven hundred Los Angeles teens, fifty-six percent had a role model. Those who knew their role model personally had higher self-esteem and better grades. White teens not living with their fathers were less likely to use drugs or alcohol if they had a role model. Teens from families with higher incomes were more likely to have role models.

About seventy percent had a role model of the same ethnic group, and eighty-six percent had a role model of the same sex. Almost all the African-Americans selected an African-American role model. Boys were more likely than girls to select a role model of the same sex. About a third of the students chose a parent, sibling, or other acquaintance, such as a peer, adult friend, teacher, doctor, or lawyer.

Over a quarter of the teens chose either an athlete or a famous singer. (Role Models, Ethnic Identity, and Health-Risk Behaviors in Urban Adolescents. Antronette Yancey, Judith Siegel, Kimberly McDaniel. *Archives in Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 156, January 2002, pp. 55-61.)

### **Peers**

Peers become their role models for what teens want to be in their lives right now. In the grade school and high school years, kids are still learning what it means to be a good friend and how to find a friend that is good. It takes a strong kid to be friends with an unpopular classmate. But children and teens need to see that kindness is the appropriate way to treat all classmates.

There was a girl at my high school who was pretty, smart, athletic, and “popular” in the high school sense of the word, meaning she hung around with the outgoing, and often loud, crowd. But in our accounting class we had assigned seating and she sat behind the geekiest guy of the whole school.

Several of our classmates, especially the more “popular” ones or the ones who wanted to pretend they were popular, would make mean jokes behind his back and sometimes say mean things to his face. There was no reason for anyone to pick on him since he didn’t prompt the negative attention; it seemed to make a few of them feel better about themselves.

He rarely said much, but one day I remember him asking her what time it was. I was amazed he said anything to her at all. Not only did she tell him what time it was, she also said something about the homework assignment.

She could have pretended she didn’t hear, so she could avoid having others see her talk to him. She could have told him to shut up. But she didn’t. She treated him with as much respect as anyone else in the class. I had always thought she was a nice classmate, but at that point, I realized I had a lot of respect for her. Ever since then, I’ve looked upon her as a role model for what a “popular” high school student should be.

Geoffrey Miller, a University of New Mexico psychologist, says when teens are exposed mostly only to other teens, who are very similar to themselves, they don’t know many options to distinguish themselves and form their own unique identity. He recommends having colleges not reward overachievers, in the traditional academic sense, in their admission process.

### **Parents**

Parents still have a big influence. They’re the stable force in teens’ lives. They affect what teens will become later. Teens see and hear their parents frequently, so what they hear and observe from their parents become their norm.

When I was a child living on a farm in Wisconsin, the only grown-up women I knew with jobs were my teachers and one of several of my aunts who was a nurse in Phoenix. Everyone else was a farm wife and mother of five to fifteen children. (My family was an exception with only two children.)

Before I was born, my mom had been a secretary and file clerk. When we moved to Phoenix, she had been out of the work force for almost twelve years and started doing clerk temp work for barely above minimum wage. She soon found permanent work and quickly earned small raises.

She made sure I signed up for typing class junior year of high school. My English teacher had everyone put together a resume for a class assignment. Our typing speed, height, and weight was supposed to go right under our names. And this was the 1980’s! Not the 1950’s! During high school summer vacations, my mother encouraged me to apply for clerical temp jobs. (Meanwhile, teachers made sure I took calculus and physics classes.)

So when I was preparing to go out on my own in the world, I applied for secretarial jobs on the campus where I would soon be attending engineering classes. I was clueless to the irony of this mindset.

For my first summer during college, I cold called engineering firms I found in the phone book and sent my resume around to whomever was interested. One gentleman who asked me in for an interview was kind enough to recommend that I leave my typing speed off my resume, otherwise a potential employer might ask me to do their typing. I wondered, what else was I supposed to do at work?

Luckily that summer I was hired at a large engineering firm to do some technical drafting for a big project. I finally learned what engineers actually did in their jobs. The engineers treated me well and typed their own reports.

Teens tend to live up to parents’ expectations. I was expected to be on my own once I turned eighteen – that’s how it worked on the farm. This was a good policy. My parents couldn’t threaten to withhold money if I did something they didn’t like. The purpose of raising kids is to develop adults who function well and contribute to society. My parents had different expectations for my sister. She works at the same grocery store she worked at since high school and bought a house less than a mile away from our mom. She’s raising our mom’s granddaughter and grandson and sending them to Catholic school.

### **Adult relatives**

The study, The Potential Role of an Adult Mentor in Influencing High-Risk Behaviors in Adolescents (Sharon R. Beier, Walter D. Rosenfeld, Kenneth C. Spitalny, Shelley M. Zansky, and Alexandra N. Bontempo; *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* April 2000, pp. 327-331) shows the impact of parents and adult relatives of helping teens stay away from drugs. Fifty-one percent of the adult relatives were mothers, five percent were fathers, three percent were adult siblings, and seventeen percent were other relatives. (Other relatives have a bigger impact on teens than fathers? Where are all the fathers?)

Two-thirds of the adolescents in the study stated that they had an adult whom they could turn to for help and advice. Those adolescents were less likely to carry a weapon, use illegal drugs, smoke cigarettes, or have sex with more than one partner. However, the study found that having an adult to turn to did not influence alcohol use. Perhaps their adult role models did not discourage teen alcohol use. As discussed occasionally in the Dear Amy column, some parents hold beer parties for teens to be the “cool” parent.

Dating Experiences of Bullies in Early Adolescence (Jennifer Connolly Debra Pepler, Wendy Craig, Ali Ta radash *Child Maltreatment*, Vol. 5, No. 4, November 2000 299-310) Adults were found to be important influences in the lives of these girls, whether they were abused or not. For example, girls who have high-quality relationships with female adults (whether mothers, teachers, or other relatives or role models) are less likely to engage in casual sex. Sexually abused girls who report happier relationships with adult men (relatives, teachers, etc.) are less likely to grow up to be preoccupied with sex. In contrast, the quality of relationships with girls their own age did not influence girls’ later sexual attitudes or activities.

### **Television**

More than when I was a kid, the teens and young adults they see on television are the people teens look to as the norm for people their age. If they see high school kids walking around with their belly hanging out, they think everyone’s doing it, so why shouldn’t they. If they see teens on TV talking about all the sex they have, it looks like having sex is just what teens do. But also, if they see teens volunteering at hospitals or creating complex science projects, they see what teens can do and may challenge themselves to achieve the same or better.

Richard Hersh, former director of Harvard’s center for Moral Education, is concerned that parents have allowed their children to be socialized by television, peers, and the internet, rather than mentored by adults. He advocates that teens develop a rich life independent of peers. He believes that spending too much time in age-stratified schools isolated from diversity results in teens relying too much on peer approval.

In his four-decade Columbia County Longitudinal Study, Leonard Eron found that the best predictor of how aggressive a man would be at age nineteen was the amount of violence he watches on TV when he is eight years old. Children who watch television shows with an educational element are less aggressive, more cooperative, and more imaginative than kids who watch action, cartoon, and game shows.

It seems to me that the media overhypes teens having sex and teens having too much pressure to be superheroes so they can get admitted to college. First of all, if teens really are spending that much time being superheroes, they don’t have time for sex. It is possible that there are two separate populations of teens, one having too much sex, one spending too much time doing it all. Although, I suppose the definition of too much sex in high school could be having sex once. In that case, maybe it is the same population having both problems.

But honestly, from my experience, and from talking to a few people who have taught a college class lately, these superheroes do not exist. I wonder how half of them even got into college. Geez, show up for class, dude. Do the homework. I’m sure there are a few high school students doing an awful lot just to look good for college admission, but I haven’t met any of them. If the majority of college students don’t even show up for class all the time, I’m sure it can’t be too hard to get in. I went to college for twelve years and I probably missed class less than twelve times my entire college career. Once was because Ronald Reagan came to speak at my campus. I even went to class with a concussion after getting hit by a car. So maybe there are a few high school kids stressing themselves out about going to college, but it couldn’t be too many.

## ***Stick figure models: Young women’s role models***

Steven Levenkron, a psychotherapist, believes parents are outsourcing their role in teens’ lives. Those who aren’t mentored by parents turn to peers and the media for guidance, resulting in girls being too receptive to Hollywood’s portrayal of femininity.

Catherine Sanderson, a psychology professor at Amherst College, says college freshmen misread other girls’ statements about thinness and their actions. They place too much emphasis on comparing themselves to their dormmates and the media. (The skinny sweepstakes, Hara Estroff Marano, *Psychology Today*, January/February 2008 pp. 88-95)

I did not see this problem so much when I was in college, years ago. The women engineering majors may have developed healthy self esteem because they didn’t have too many women to constantly compare themselves to. Possibly as a result of being socialized by young men, we really didn’t make a big deal of hair and makeup. However it may be because the women who self-selected themselves into engineering curriculums were not only the very top brightest, but were very practical and already had an internal value system that glorified intellect over thinness.

It’s not clear to me why mostly women have this unhealthy attitude toward food and fat, but men do not have this phobia. Women naturally have a higher percentage of body fat, thus will always be fatter than men on average. And women are portrayed as skeletons wearing little clothing in the media. But does that explain it all? Why aren’t men objectified as much in the media? I’m certainly not suggesting that we start creating media that objectifies men. But we can certainly create media that empowers women.

Women do need to learn good lifelong fitness habits. Muscle tone and good health can go a long way toward self esteem. Fifty years ago, it wasn’t proper for women to exercise or play sports. But that stigma is long gone. And the sports clothing and equipment industry has picked up on the trend. There are lots of products marketed toward athletic women. Sign up for a marathon as a female, and just watch the junk mail pour in.

However men still far outnumber women as marathon participants, and sports participants in general. Why don’t women join more sports or participate in athletic activities? Is it because we’re still taught to do cute little ballet things when we are little instead of going out to the baseball field with a bat? Is it because boys push us off the playground and trample us if we try to play? Maybe that’s why I joined track. No shoving onto the pavement, no hand-eye coordination necessary.

On the website for Techup.org, mentioned in Chapter 5 as the online meeting of organizations for women and girls, several young women posted their responses to questions such as, What messages does the media send, How do media images affect us, and What do we want to see in the media.

## ***Keeping up with the Joneses: Adults’ role models***

Older adults have their values more firmly formed in their minds than children and young adults, based on their longer experience in the world. However people continue to grow and change based on outside influences.

### **Peers**

People want to be like their friends. People listen to media that validates their preconceived beliefs. They spend time with people who look like them, act like them, do the same things as them. I have a group of friends who all met their husbands in the same year and all got married around the same time. Let’s hope none of them get divorced.

I also have a pair of friends who both bought a house in the same neighborhood, got a dog at the same time, purchased the same model of car around the same time, even had sons in the same month. Although, I think the sons were a coincidence.

When you hang around with a group of people, their habits become normal to you. Like when I started to hang around with a group that ran over twelve miles every Saturday. At first that sounded preposterous. But some of the people ran again in the afternoon and ran fifty mile races regularly. Somehow, twelve miles didn’t sound so bad anymore.

People think that whatever they see their friends doing is “normal.” They unconsciously adopt the same attitudes as their friends. Friends pick up each other’s opinions toward politics, religion, even obesity. A 2007 study by Harvard and University of California at San Diego researchers published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that if a friend becomes obese, you have a fifty-seven percent higher chance of gaining weight than those with friends who don’t gain weight. If you have mutual friends who are obese, the likelihood that you'll veer from your healthy weight is 171 percent. Nicholas A. Christakis says, “People come to think that it is okay to be bigger since those around them are bigger, and this sensibility spreads."

Nando Pelusi, a clinical psychologist, says that hundreds of years ago, when humans lived in small groups of a hundred people, there was a good chance that each person was the best at something the community needed. But with global communication and media, we now have millions of “competitors” and compare our traits to celebrities and the people who dominate our profession. (No shame on you, Nando Pelusi, Psychology Today, January/February 2008, p. 65)

It’s a good idea for adults to associate with other role models. Go to meetings for varied interests. Get ideas from the knowledge and example of others. Meet someone beyond your comfortable peer group. When I started writing fiction, I didn’t think I belonged. I was used to writing excellent technical reports. I wasn’t a novel writer and didn’t know the industry. Some of the groups were for people in the business, librarians or people who wrote for trade magazines. After going to critique groups, I found out most people in the group were first-time writers, at the same stage I was.

### **Social capital**

Social networks have value. Just as a computer or an education increases personal and group productivity, social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. It’s not always what you know, but whom you know. In “Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital” (*Journal of Democracy*, Jan. 1995, Vol. 6,1) Robert Putnam, a political science professor at Harvard, describes the decline of "social capital" in the United States of America since 1950.

Putnam claims that most civic organizations, such as bowling leagues, have lost members over the past twenty years, and that those members have not migrated to new organizations. Instead, those people do activities by themselves and miss out on discussions that normally occur during civic functions.

The last time I went bowling was not in a league, but not alone either. That would be boring. I went with a group of friends without being affiliated with an organization. However, Putnam has a point. Joining an organization exposes people to activities and points of view they wouldn’t normally experience if they hung around with the same friends all the time. It’s a chance to meet other role models, people you can learn from. And where did I meet the friends I went bowling with in the first place? A church organization.

Before the 1950’s, people went to neighbor’s houses often when they wanted adult interaction. Then the television became popular and it was easier to sit in your own house and watch other adults without interacting with them.

My grandparents-in-law were popular among their neighbors and had many friends who would stop by to visit each other frequently. When they were young, they stopped by a friend’s house one evening. The friends had just purchased a TV set.

The whole evening, the friends paid no attention to my in-laws. Only to the TV set. My grandfather-in-law said all the neighbors stopped visiting that friend.

Although television has brought news and different cultures into our living rooms, it has also encouraged us to experience the news and cultures alone, instead of with a community of other people.

Before television was accused of isolating the individual, radio received similar criticism. Now people are leery that the internet is isolating people. However, unlike radio and TV, the internet is interactive. It may not be face-to-face interaction, but it can connect people from different cultures who would not have had the opportunity for interaction without the internet. It can be used to connect with people worldwide or within our community. I use it to find local social and professional organizations. And it can keep people connected after they move away or move on, when they would otherwise have lost touch. Like all my pre-email high school friends.

Television is not the only time thief in modern life. Commuting is robbing us of our social capital. According to the Transportation Research Board report *Commuting in America: The Third National Report on Commuting Patterns and Trends*, the average commute was 21.7 minutes in 1980, 22.4 minutes in 1990, and 25.5 minutes in 2000. Living in a suburb of Washington, I say – Twenty five minutes, so what? It takes me twenty minutes just to walk to the metro. Then another half hour before I even get anywhere. And I’m zipping past all the traffic. It’s unfortunate that people no longer live close to their offices.

## ***Spend time with your role models***

Surround yourself with people you like to be with. Not just with people who meet a set of criteria you can check off a list. What is it about these people that you like? Fun? Kind? What qualities do they have that you’d like to beef up in yourself? Are any of your relationships based on a lie?

Join a group that can challenge you. A group where most of the members know more than you do on a certain topic or are better than you in certain skill sets. Search the internet for organizations and associations near you. Check their events to find out what types of activities they have and where they meet. Meet people who have qualities you’d like to emulate. Find people who do things you want to learn about and do those activities with them.

My father-in-law’s wife has been involved in the Arizona branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) a national organization for years. She often mentioned very interesting activities they did.

When I moved to Washington, I wanted to learn about the Washington culture. I wanted to belong to the bigger picture, something beyond what the engineers at my workplace did. I looked into one of the Northern Virginia branches of AAUW.

At their meeting, they gave me a copy of their newsletter. It mentioned that some members of their group were going to spend a morning lobbying on Capitol Hill. Other members needed help with a cable show they were producing. There was a list of all the cultural activities they were going to attend over the next several months.

So I joined their Lobby Corps. I occasionally help out with their cable show. I speak at their events and am on their national Public Policy committee. One time I went to an event where Congressman John Lewis spoke. John Kerry made a surprise appearance.

I have learned so much about how Washington works from participating in AAUW and other organizations in the Washington area. My eyes are much more open to how different pieces of society works than when I first moved here. I slip from engineer social circles to writers to athletes to film producers to politicians and I feel I know enough about each profession to be conversational. And once you join the conversation, you learn more about how their profession works. So even if you’ve never met a film producer, go to an event or a lecture. Listen and pay attention to what others have to say, and you’ll learn more and become a part of their professional and social culture.

For those who do not live in large metro areas, you can join online discussion groups. The internet is a great tool for those who live in remote areas!

Yet people who live in remote areas, such as the farms of Wisconsin where I grew up, are less likely to have access to the internet. They don’t live near libraries, they may not offer DSL or cable in those areas, they don’t have fifteen dollars per month to spend on luxuries, such as the cultural education and connectivity to people around the globe that the internet offers. If you are that isolated from the outside world, you can join up with other people nearby and make trips to libraries to read books and view internet shows about writers, filmmakers, etc., however you probably wouldn’t have access to this book if that were the case.

## ***Exercise: Your role models***

Think about the importance of role models in your life.

#### *Short term (Right now)*

Who has been important in your life? How does your existence affect the people around you? Who is an important figure in your neighborhood?

#### *Long term (Over the next few months)*

Spend time talking with people you respect. Make a plan to meet with them, attend one of their functions, or help on a committee of their organization.

Use what you’ve learned from your role model to become a mentor to someone else.

## ***Learning & Communication: Elevator speeches and casting your role models***

At this point, you should be able to describe the role model subject you’d like to create a story about in a sentence or two, whether the role model is yourself or someone else you know. If you are taking on a video project, you will need to find actors willing to participate in your video.

##### Elevator speeches

An elevator speech is a fifteen second summary of the important highlights of your project. It is called an elevator speech because the idea is to say your entire blurb while you have a captive audience before you have to get out of the elevator and they get their chance to move on.

Of course, you don’t have to say your blurb while you are in an elevator, but if you take too much time to explain the highlights of your story, people may become distracted or disinterested and not catch the main point you needed to make.

To be a role model, you must show respect for others by not wasting their time. Be organized.

#### *Learning exercise*

Prepare for encountering people you may want to talk to about your story. Develop your elevator blurb. Why is your story important? How will it help others? Video tape your elevator speech and post it on YouTube.com.

Don’t be intimidated if you’ve never posted a video to YouTube before. It’s easy to sign up and upload a video file. You may have already signed up for a profile while reading about new technology in Chapter 3.

You can buy a cheap webcam over the internet for under $15 from Amazon or through Ebay. Once it arrives in the mail, all you have to do is install the software and plug it into your laptop or desktop. I received a free webcam with the purchase of my computer six years ago. Many new laptops today come with a webcam built in above the screen. You could also use the video feature of your digital photo camera and transfer the video to your computer the same way you transfer photos. The sound and video quality isn’t as good as a camcorder, but you don’t need to be perfect. This is for practice.

Once you have recorded your elevator speech, upload it onto YouTube by going to YouTube.com and clicking on Upload at the top of the page. If you don’t see the word Upload, click on your username at the top of the page and it will bring you to a page with the word Upload at the top to click on. Fill in the required boxes with a title and description, then click on the button that says Upload a video. Browse your hard drive for the video file and click on the button to Upload Video. Instead of uploading a video, you have the option to record your video from your webcam directly onto YouTube by clicking the Use Quick Capture button. However, I’ve never been able to get that feature to work. I don’t think my webcam data format is compatible with YouTube.

##### Casting your characters

Whether writing fiction or nonfiction, you will have to find either the actual person or actors to fill your story roles. It may be obvious who your main character, or the role model is, but take a moment to think about the other characters. Who represents your antagonist? Even if the antagonist is not a person, but a bureaucracy or a natural disaster, people will best relate to the conflict if the antagonist is represented by a person.

If you are shooting a short video (YouTube only allows videos under ten minutes), the first place to look for people to play the roles would be a group of friends who would like to hang out with you for an afternoon, or your family members who live with you. Neighbors or members of an organization who believe in your role model’s cause would also be a good choice.

If you are lucky enough to have a choice, select friends who are lively and loud. I have interviewed introverts on camera and though they are fine in person, they are stiff and don’t come across as sympathetic to the audience.

If your video is controversial and you don’t want to put your friends in a situation where people will question their involvement with the video (such as the case with *Budget Justified*, the RoleModel Enterprises video), you may be able to recruit some local actors to get involved with your project. Actors thrive on controversy.

If you live near a university, you may be able to find college students who are willing to do some acting for the experience. And pizza. But don’t expect much of a response if you don’t have a lot of publicity to offer them. If you don’t have a funding source to pay your actors, at least spring for lunch and snacks. Sometimes college students will work for food. Even if you are able to pay them, make sure the actors and camera crew are well fed. You don’t want them rushing through the film session so they can leave and get a snack.

If you don’t have a university with a film program nearby, you can also look into casting web sites such as mandy.com, filmrunner.net, or exploretalent.com.

Prepare for your shoot upfront to make the best use of everyone’s time. Don’t necessarily shoot scenes in order. Analyze your script to group together scenes with the same actors. You want to respect your actors’ time, especially if they are volunteers. Shoot so not all actors have to be there at the same time, so they don’t have to stand around and wait for their scene to come up.

#### *For advanced learners*

Find the cast for your video script. Schedule times with them to shoot.

# **ROLEMODELS DON’T NEED TO EMBODY PERFECTION: LOSE THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS**

This may sound like an oxymoron. Isn’t the purpose of being a role model to be someone that others admire and look up to? If so, shouldn’t you be self-conscious? Yes, you should be conscious of your actions and how you treat others. It is good to be self-aware. I’m not writing about the big stuff, the actions that require thought and decisions. I mean the small stuff, like tripping over your own feet or snorting when you laugh.

## ***Focus on others***

Self-consciousness destroys self confidence. And when you are paying more attention to the needs of others, you tend to forget your own imperfections. I’m referring to minor imperfections here, not major mental issues that cause you to premeditate something harmful or immoral.

Role models care about others. Og Mandino, a motivational speaker says, “Whenever you feel afraid, stop focusing on yourself and start focusing on other people.” Steve Harrison, publisher of the Radio-TV Interview Report, calls this our superpower for success in business and in life.

When we do something out of love, people are more willing to give us the benefit of the doubt. They want to do something for us in return. People want to spend their time with those who make them feel like they are welcome. They want to know that someone is glad to see them.

An older gentleman I used to ride the bus with had never married. He often seemed generally unhappy.

He once asked me how I keep upbeat. I told him I don’t focus on everything bad that’s happened to me, or all the good things that haven’t happened to me, or all the nice things I don’t have. I focus on what’s going on in other people’s lives.

Life isn’t all about me, me, me. It’s more interesting to learn about others than to spend effort on how I can get more stuff for me, myself, and I.

## ***Don’t focus on others***

No, I’m not trying to confuse you. It’s good to focus on others’ needs. It’s not good to focus on what others think of you. This is why there’s an old adage saying you should imagine the audience in their underwear when you feel nervous about giving a speech.

Whether you’re giving a speech or attending a cocktail party, don’t worry whether someone might think you are goofy. Goofy people can be likable and get their message across. Both Hollywood and Washington are full of fun nerdy people who are also smart and get their point across. You can accomplish more when you’re not worried about whether you’re going to mess up. Anyone looking for you to mess up is not worth pleasing.

A role model is someone who has enough self confidence that they don’t need to please others. They do things that make them confident and it shows in their actions. They focus on their achievements rather than their failures. They focus on who they are and what they like about themselves. They prepare for meetings and tasks and work on the skills they need to do what they want. They set reachable goals for themselves and break difficult tasks into smaller steps.

It’s OK if other people are watching you. We all watch each other to communicate with and learn from each other. Just make sure they aren’t stalking you. If they are, then you can be worried.

When you compare yourself to others too much, you’re trying to live up to their goals instead of achieving your own. You’re trying to make yourself into who they are instead of understanding who you are.

So instead of worrying about what others think, focus on what’s important. The bigger picture. Your goals. Being comfortable with who you are. Your unselfconscious actions make you unique.

## ***Body conscious***

If you display intelligence, people will pay attention to that more than physical appearance (unless you come looking like a slob). Dress for the role, to draw attention to competence.

The best way to feel fine about your body is to stay healthy. Feeling and looking healthy is better than looking skinny. You’ll look fine wearing properly-fitting clothing. Which I’m guessing is how most people see you. No need to impress people with how you look naked. Hopefully the people who get to see you naked are already impressed with the rest of you.

If you aren’t in shape, don’t write it off as impossible to get into shape. Maybe that’s the type of role model you aspire to be – the one who finds out how to motivate yourself into living a healthier lifestyle and goes on to motivate others to get into shape.

I’ve run a marathon and make a point of running twelve miles each Saturday morning. Although it took a little while to get back into my regular workout routine after suffering from pneumonia four months before starting marathon training, I was in pretty good shape. But had never run more than five miles straight. A marathon sounded impossible. But I had heard of people coming back from heart attacks or losing over a hundred pounds to run marathons. I figured if they could do it, so could I.

In June 2006, I set my sights on a marathon seven months out. Based on the research I had done on the internet, it seemed like that was the amount of time I’d need to train. I joined a running group too late to be a part of their marathon training program, but I went to their track practices and Saturday runs anyway.

Before I showed up, I didn’t know anybody there and couldn’t run as far or as fast as the rest of them. I just came to run and did the best I could, sometimes running faster than I really could sustain. I still wasn’t fast enough to keep up. I probably looked like a cow, maybe even sounded like one.

They gave me advice for how to train. I met some people that ran about my pace and kept up with them. I hit foot troubles twice and wondered if I might not have the right bone structure to last a whole marathon.

At mile twenty-five, I ran into an old high school rival whom I hadn’t seen in almost fifteen years. Literally. I was low on brain oxygen and grabbed his shoulders to keep balance as sounds resembling words leaked from my mouth in an attempt to greet him. When you’re in that much pain, you really have no ability to be the least bit self-conscious.

I’ve learned not to care how sweaty I am, how messy my hair is, how my thighs are shaped, or even how nonsensical words come out after I’ve just finished a race. I’m still in the runners group, still one of the slowest. And at 5’5” and 135 pounds, probably one of the fattest. But that’s nothing to be self-conscious about. I’m grateful to be able to run twelve miles. I’m definitely not fat, and don’t feel fat when I hang around with them. Just different-shaped. I find it interesting to analyze everyone’s different bone structure while I run. Keeps my mind off the pain.

Set attainable goals for yourself. Start gradually and reach for something you can sustain. It helps to join a group that fits your schedule and your abilities. You can be in shape without running twelve miles straight. Work it in as a regular part of your life and you’ll feel great just knowing you’re in shape and doing something about it. You won’t be overconcerned with a little flab here or there because in the grand scheme of things, you’re healthy. That’s what’s important. And if you’re already happy with your body and health, great for you.

## ***Role models don’t care if everyone likes them***

Life is not a popularity contest. That’s for presidential elections. Role models are not always liked by everyone. But they are liked by the right people. People who spend their mental energies worried about who likes them and who doesn’t don’t have mental energy left to work on what’s truly important.

Role models may care whether or not the people they respect like them. You can’t be a role model to everyone. Like we discussed in the chapter on role model style, you have to narrow your focus on the type of role model you can be.

Ripley, the character played by Sigourney Weaver in Alien, was a role model in that she had the confidence to make tough decisions and take on tough actions. It was rare to see female role models like Ripley in the 1970’s. But not all her crew members liked her. She wasn’t there to be liked. She was there to do a job.

Don’t worry about what others’ opinion of you might be. If nobody gets upset about what you’re working on, you’re probably not doing your job.

## ***Always room to learn***

From time to time, seek an activity where you aren’t the best, something you just want to do for fun. Learn from those who are good, but accept that that activity will not be the one where the spotlight shines on you. It’s OK not to be the best at everything.

When I joined the runners group, I found out that many of the members were former college track stars. Really fast, extremely lean, serious athletes. It is not my goal to become one of the best in the group. In fact, I will never even make it up to the middle. I’m not built for speed. I don’t have a narrow enough bone structure. But I show up. And I run hard enough to really wear myself out for the day. But I know when to stop. I don’t run foolish enough to make myself sick.

I’m not the best writer, the best computer programmer, or the best filmmaker. I’m not even the best role model. But I’m not bad. And I’m willing to put all those skills together to come up with something useful.

The character Mary in Something About Mary was a smart, sweet doctor who did lots of volunteer work. But she wasn’t perfect. Her love life needed some work. It made her more human. And more humorous. We admire her for her good work, but we love her for her foibles.

Life is about learning. When you’re done learning, you’re done living. Be aware of your strengths and weaknesses, but also your likes and dislikes. Play up your strengths. If you don’t have the skill set for something you’re interested in doing, take a class, join a group, or just practice. But don’t feel that you have to improve areas you aren’t good at and don’t care about. Tasks that require those skills are better left for someone else to do.

## ***Exercise: Perfecting your verbal story***

Although perfection may not be achievable, you can always improve on your role model story. Critique groups are great for helping with weaknesses in your writing style or story plot.

#### *Short term (Today)*

Select a piece of the story you wrote about a role model after reading Chapter 8. Practice reading that piece and speaking about your cause or your role model in front of the mirror as if you were giving a talk at a meeting for a local service organization.

#### *Long term (Within the next few months)*

Arrange to give a talk at work, at a school, at a women’s center, or any other local event. Or attend a Toastmasters meeting. You can find their local chapter at toastmasters.org .

## ***Learning & Communication: Critiquing written stories and visual composition for videos***

##### Critique groups

After you have either finished your story or written over twenty pages, you will be ready to have your work critiqued. Select people you know will be rigorous and who you trust to make informed comments. You can pass your story around a writers group. But don’t depend solely on a writers group. You will find many irrelevant comments, I’m sure I’ve made many myself when critiquing other’s work. Ultimately, you will have to rely on your own judgment to determine what to leave in, what to leave out, and what words to choose.

When you do not agree with the comments people give you, look at your story it from their perspective to evaluate whether their comment has merit. If they wrote something that doesn’t make sense to you, they may be pointing out something you didn’t explain clearly, and they were unable to clearly communicate the problem they had when reading the passage.

But sometimes people just have weird opinions. I’ve been in sessions where one or two critiquers wanted to change the point of the story itself. That could mean that either the story was weak and boring, which the writer needs to fix, or it means that the critiquer just didn’t prefer that type of story. You can’t please everyone.

#### *Learning exercise*

After you have written the first draft of your story, put it aside for a few days. Then go back to proofread, edit, and rewrite the story you fleshed out. Have someone else proofread it for you also, incase you missed something.

Make several passes through the story. The first, top level pass should look at story structure. Don’t worry over word choices or paragraph completeness at this stage. Many critiquers look not at the forest, but only the trees. Don’t fall into the trap of waffling over word choice before analyzing story structure. That whole paragraph or chapter may be gone after your first pass through the document.

Ask yourself: Did you clearly delineate acts one through three? Does your character commit to a challenge about a quarter way through your story? Do you describe trials and tribulations in a logical order? Does the story take a turn towards the end where the role model has a clear challenge that needs to be overcome? Does the role model solve the problem and wrap up loose ends? You may need to rearrange pieces several times before you are content with your story logic. You may end up cutting several pieces of information out if they are not important, compelling, or relevant to your point.

The time to pick apart your paragraphs is when you make the next pass through the story. Are there stray sentences that don’t support the scene or surrounding paragraphs? After you are satisfied that each sentence is relevant and meaningful, then you can go through and pick apart word and phrase choices.

You may need to try several groups before you find one that works for you. There are lots of groups in the Washington metro area, such as Washington Independent Writers, the Writer Center, and groups at local bookstores and libraries. There are probably similar groups in your neighborhood.

##### Visual composition

There are many things to watch for to make sure your videos and pictures turn out the way you intend. Here are a few of the main tips.

**Colors** Do not wear white, very bright colors, tiny patterns, or bold patterns. Blues and greens typically look the best on camera. A foundation makeup or a pancake makeup is recommended because natural skin can look bright white or shiny on camera.

Viewers’ eyes will be drawn to the object that is either the brightest color or best-lit.

**Rule of thirds and leading looks** When you place a person 1/3 of the way across the screen, it looks like the person is looking at something. If you put them right in the center, or ½ way across the screen, the person looks like they don’t have anything to look at.

The same with a shot of a tree. If the tree is in the center, it appears that the tree is the only thing there to look at. But if the tree is 1/3 of the way across the screen, it looks like the tree is part of a complete scene.

Mentally divide the screen into thirds, horizontally and vertically, like tic tac toe. Place your main subjects’ eyes at one of the four intersections of the tic tac toe lines, like in Figure 10.1. Placing the subject in the center can be too jarring of an image if it’s close up, or can make the subject look isolated.

Notice that the subject is placed so she looks at the empty 2/3 of the screen, rather than having the majority of the empty screen behind her. That way it seems like she has a scene to look at, rather than having her face against a wall.

**Balance** The screen in Figure 10.1 is somewhat balanced because it seems like she’s looking toward something on the right. However, it would look even better if we saw something small (yet relevant) that she may be looking at or someone she is talking to, rather than an empty space, especially since this is not a close-up shot. Also watch the balance of color on both sides of the screen, as the eye will be drawn to the bright objects.

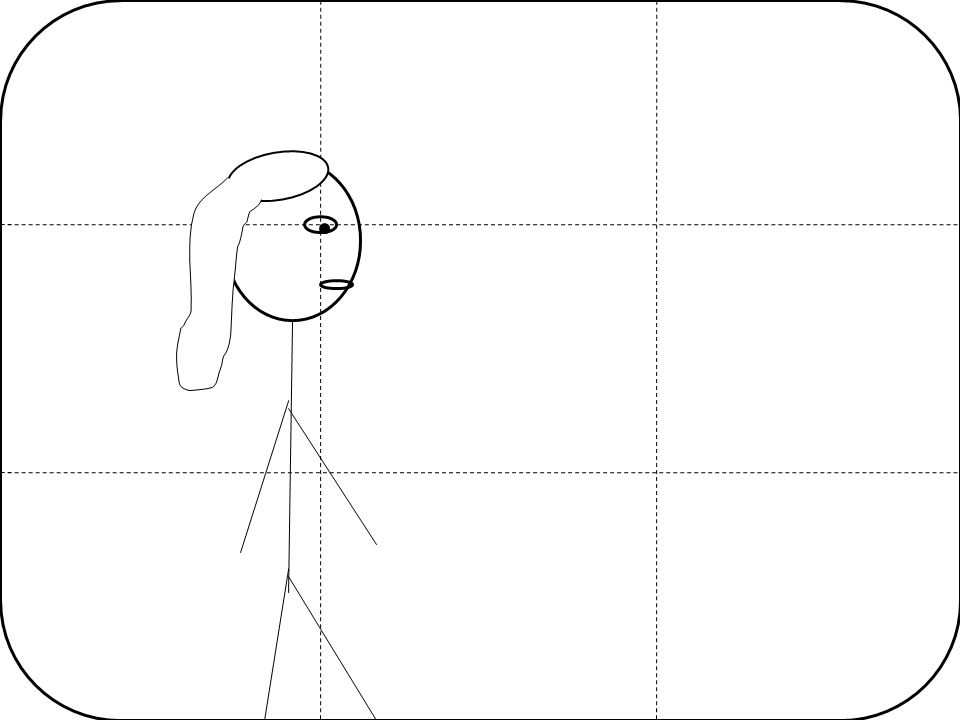


Figure 10.1 One (stick) person on screen (the kind of model the media normally portrays)

**Backgrounds** Be careful to make sure it doesn’t look like a pole is growing out of the back of anyone’s head. Don’t use backgrounds that are too busy, are the same color as the actors’ clothing, or attract attention from the actors. Either move the camera or the actors so the distracting background is out of view.

*The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video* by Tom Schroeppel has a few good tips for beginners on several important visual techniques.

#### *For advanced learners*

Shoot your video. After each filming session, upload your footage to a computer so it doesn’t become an onerous task to do all at once.

Video files are large and may not fit on your computer if you are filming several hours of video. If you expect that editing may take you awhile to complete, I suggest backing up your video files somewhere in addition to your hard drive. Editing can take a while, especially if you’re taking live footage of an event as it happens, as opposed to scripted readings or acted scenes.

One time I filmed an award ceremony at a science fair. I taped the whole thing because I didn’t know what parts I’d want to use later. Editing took at least a week and I would’ve hated to lose all that work.

There are several storage services for backing up your video online. ADrive http://adrive.com/products offers up to fifty gigabytes of free storage.

# **CHALLENGES: SOMETIMES IT’S HARD TO BE A ROLE MODEL**

Not everybody is in the position to be a good role model or to live up to their full potential. Much of the time, the obstacles are psychological. Everybody is dealt hardships and challenges in their lives. But not everyone deals with those challenges as well as others. One needs to be mentally strong to see roadblocks as temporary challenges, not permanent obstacles to success.

## ***Psychological needs***

Sometimes people don’t grow up with people they like or respect. They develop a warped set of values regarding what they look for when choosing friends and associates. Because they grow up without role models of how productive people in society live.

It’s hard to be a role model when your needs aren’t met. People act out when their emotional, psychological, and social needs aren’t being met. They feel as though they are not valued. At a previous job I held, our task leader kept giving us makework. We weren’t valued. Those with good self-esteem left the company. Those who felt they couldn’t find anything better stayed.

Everyone has disappointments. The way people handle them makes the difference between successful people and the downtrodden. Look at John Kerry. Losing a presidential election is a huge defeat. But no one would call him a failure. Look at all the successes he had to have before getting to the point where he could run for president. If he had given up every time his grandmother died, he wouldn’t have made it as far as being a senator.

Forget your own disappointments and move on. Nobody wants to listen to people complain about how they are always the victim. When you feel bad about how your life is going, it helps to focus on helping others.

According to a study published in the February 2008 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Kennon M. Sheldon, a psychology professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, found that the most important psychological factors for happiness are autonomy, competence, relatedness, and self-esteem. All four factors are helpful in becoming a role model. Popularity, influence, money and luxury were found to be the least important for happiness.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy is about choosing your own activities. When people have autonomy, they have control, options, and free will.

Having control means having an effect on outcome. You can be proud of your accomplishments when they are a result of your decisions and actions, rather than a result of detailed instructions the boss told you to follow or a result of good luck.

According to Dr. Douglas Engwall, a psychology professor at Central Connecticut State University, if your accomplishments are due to the boss’s control, you feel that others have power over you and that you have little power over yourself. Being a pawn in someone else’s goals can be stressful because you feel like you are being pushed around and you aren’t in charge of your own life. Results are due to luck are also due to external forces, not internal control.

With free will, you feel you can participate in an activity if you want, and if you don’t want to participate, you don’t have to do so. You have the free will to act as a role model, in the style you feel suits you best.

People need to feel their actions are their own ideas, not force upon them by others. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar. When people feel they are responsible for something, they are more likely to take action and participate.

Langer and Rodin, professors at Yale, did a study in a nursing home to see how small amounts of responsibility affected mood, social activity, and alertness. Nursing home residents on one floor were given opportunities to decide upon the arrangement of furniture, visiting hours, and entertainment, and they were given a small plant to care for. On another floor, the nursing staff made all the decisions and took care of the plants.

The residents on the floor that was involved in the decisions about their environment were rated as having a better mood, more social, and more alert than on the floor that had everything done for them. Each floor held a contest to guess how many jellybeans were in a jar. On the floor that had responsibilities, ten residents participated in the contest. The other floor had only one participant.

The study didn’t mention how well the plants did. But plants can be replaced. People can’t. It would be interesting to try this experiment on people in a work environment. Or on children as they grow up and find out which children become more involved in their communities and take more responsibilities for their own lives.

### **Competence**

Competent people are effective in the actions they undertake. They are active versus reactive. They know what needs to be done and if their work is going well.

People are most effective when their level of challenge matches their skill sets. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, a psychology professor at Claremont Graduate University, describes it as living as a work of art, rather than as a chaotic response to things happening to you. He believed there was an effective zone, as a function of challenge and skill levels, shown in Figure 11.1, where people did their best work.

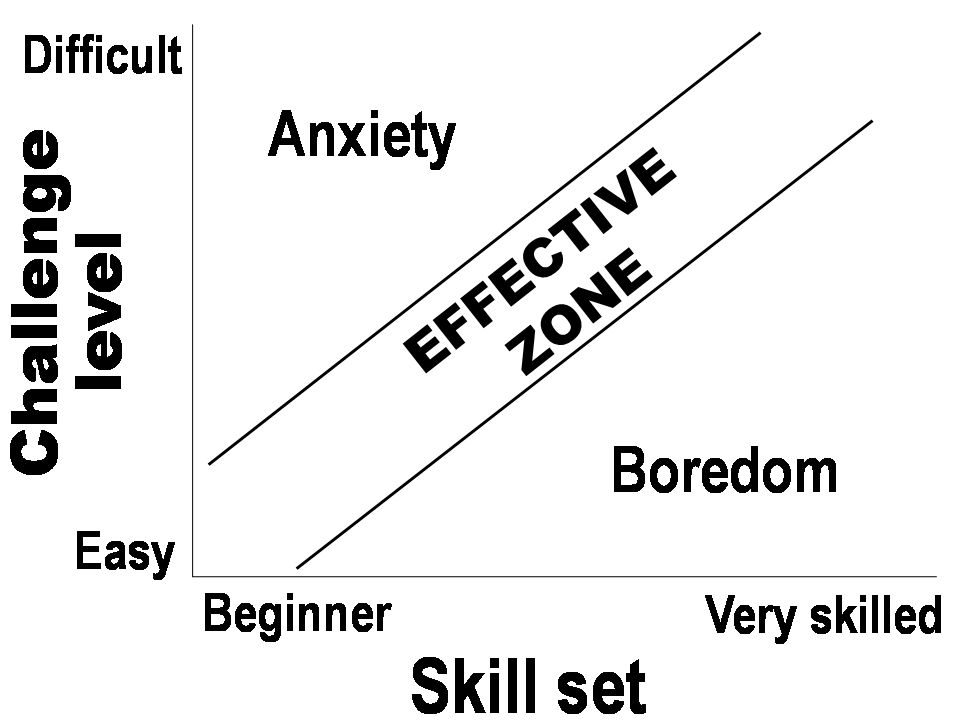


Figure 11.1 Channel of effective behavior relating skill set to challenge level (adapted from the work of Mihály Csíkszentmihályi)

I was on a project where the group leader brought a tape recorder to the meeting because the manager kept changing the project every week. The staff wasn’t allowed to go to the meetings with the client to discuss their needs. All information was funneled through the manager.

Nothing got done on the project over the several months I was assigned to the project. Nobody knew what needed to be done. Each effort was a glimpse of maddening chaos.

Everyone fled the project to prevent themselves from contracting a mental illness, falling into career chaos.

When you take on the project that you intend to accomplish as your path to branding yourself as a role model, make sure you have the right skill set to be able to accomplish the project. If you need to add other skills, you may wish to enlist other people with the right knowledge to help with your project.

### **Relatedness**

Relatedness is about being emotionally close to others. Social contact is a better predictor for emotional wellbeing than wealth, education or career. People are social creatures. Social contact is also important for physical wellbeing. Men who are married live longer than men who are not.

Just about everything we do is for others or related to other people. Even the tasks we do in isolation, such as reading, writing, creating other forms of media, or consuming media. We write for others to read. We create videos for others to watch. We read and watch videos to learn from others, to teach others, and to have something to talk about with others.

In the movie *Castaway*, Tom Hanks’s character slips into mental instability after being isolated for several years and becomes normal again when he is reintroduced to society. When people feel isolated, they don’t have anyone to interact with, to be a role model for.

### **Self esteem**

Self esteem can be a result of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Like a chicken and egg problem, self esteem is needed to be up to the task of becoming a role model, and becoming a role model will bring self esteem. In Chapter 6, we discussed self esteem as a reason to become a role model.

Role models do positive work of their own volition, as a leader not a follower. They do their work well with a clear, unchaotic plan. Otherwise they wouldn’t be worth emulating. Role models accomplish their work and deeds because they care about others and they care about themselves. Without autonomy, competence, relatedness, and self esteem, anyone would have difficulty in becoming a role model.

## ***Look at me! Getting people to pay attention to your cause***

Many people will tune your message out. That’s OK. You don’t need to preach to everyone to be heard. My sister never wanted to hear how college was better than our lives before, so she didn’t want to go to a university. But she wants her kids to go to college. Eventually people will listen to you and take your message to heart.

What’s a good way to get someone to hear your message? In *Principles and Types of Speech Communication* by Raymie McKerrow, Bruce E. Gronbeck, Douglas Ehninger, and Alan Monroe mention nine stimuli that gain attention: activity, conflict, familiarity, humor, novelty, proximity, reality, suspense, and vital relevance.

### **Activity**

Things that move, flash, or blink catch our eye. A message can “move” through a process or history. Emergency lights and sirens catch attention. It is boring to stare too long at something that is standing still.

On the other hand, if you are creating a video, don’t go overboard with the camera angles and zooming. It’s distracting and can make the viewer dizzy.

### **Conflict**

People pay attention to a good fight. That’s why sports are so popular. And why politics has become so polarized. It gets the public’s attention.

Be accurate. Avoid lying about, or “spinning,” your antagonist’s position, especially when it is obviously untrue.

### **Familiarity**

People need a context they can attach ideas to, to be able to compare and contrast information to something else they already know. If people feel that the topic is unique or special to them, they will feel that your story was purposely meant for them. Aiming your story toward a niche audience is often more effective than trying to catch the attention of the whole world.

### **Humor**

People pay attention to things that are funny. Be relevant. Jokes and anecdotes must reinforce rather than divert attention from the central ideas or claims.

Avoid humor during situations meant to be serious and don’t use risqué and ethnic humor that may offend your listeners and detract from your message.

### **Reality**

Real, concrete, sensual things are more attention-getting than hypothetical, abstract or mental. People need concrete words and images. Anecdotes help.

The *Budget Justified* video series is more compelling in video form because we get to see what happens to Lisa. If it were written as a two-paragraph set of facts, we’d write it off as yet another thing that happens every day.

Write your story as a series of scenes. Scenes create “presence.” They keep a reader interested and make them feel they are experiencing the story. When you read a novel, you will notice that the reader follows the characters through scenes, as opposed to a newspaper article that describes facts. No movement through time, no insight into a character’s experiences.

### **Proximity**

People pay more attention to things that are near to them than things that are far away. This is why events with local impact are newsworthy, as mentioned in Chapter 8. People in Tempe may not have any context to attach to a story that happens in Dayton. Think of what news stories get your attention. Relate your story to recent news stories.

### **Novelty**

People pay attention to things that are new and different. Use new or unusual information to get attention. What’s the unusual hook in your story? What makes you or your role model different than others?

Armed with balls of yarn and a few good needles, the Post Office held a nationwide “knit-in” in December 2007. The event wasn’t just for grannies in rocking chairs, it was popular with the twenty-something crowd too. Similar to the sit-ins of the 1960’s, people came to sit peacefully to call attention to a cause.

The participating locations held knitting demonstrations and collected sweaters, scarves and other knitted items and mailed them to local charities, shelters and hospitals. To commemorate the event, the Post Office sold stamps designed with knitted winter images inspired by traditional Norwegian sweaters and knitted Christmas stockings.

Although knit-ins may not be so novel anymore. They’re becoming a popular social activity across the nation.

### **Suspense**

People pay attention to things that build suspense, like the classic horror movie.

When using suspense, do not make the story so complex that your audience won’t understand it. And make sure that the climax of the story is large enough to warrant the suspense you create. Audiences are irritated when the story promises a big surprise, then either never gets to the point or the surprise ends up being not such a big deal after all.

### **Vital relevance**

People nearly always pay attention to matters that affect their health and safety, their reputation, the things they own, or their job. Show that your topic is critical to your audience’s lifestyle or wellbeing.

## ***When you aren’t the boss: lead from the bottom up***

Martin Luther King once said, “Anyone can be a leader because anyone can serve.” Sometimes you may not have legitimate power, the official authority to lead (described in Chapter 6), but you do have referent power to lead from the bottom up. Like a former coworker of mine told me, “The job of the staff is to make up for bad management.”

In Catholic school we were always taught that obedience was the most honorable virtue to exhibit. That’s great for grade school kids. The teachers needed to keep the kids under control. But when we became adults, seeking control by others – seeking directives for what to do and who to be – no longer helped us on our journey to becoming productive citizens. It was time to think for ourselves.

“Well-behaved women don’t make history.” Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, a professor at Harvard University, researched women who helped shape early American history. People don’t accomplish great things by simply following what others tell them to do. Role models see an unfulfilled need and fulfill it on their own, without first asking for permission.

Richard Kopplin, President of Kopplin Search, Inc., says there are ways to influence communities even when you haven’t been given legitimate power.

### **Control the written record**

You can volunteer to record the minutes for meetings and write or edit a monthly message via newsletter, blog, or website. Putting your written work out there makes you visible. It’s an opportunity to let your views shape other people’s opinions, to become an opinion leader.

### **Learn from your critics**

Whether you’re at the top of your organization or the bottom, people will be ready to criticize your efforts. The person who probably receives the most criticism is the president of the United States. The more visible you are, the more comments people will make, good or bad. There’s more at stake when you have a high-profile position.

No matter where you fall in your organization’s totem pole, don’t take negative comments personally. If George Bush hid under his bed every time someone complained about the Iraq war, he’d never come out. When your critics are offering out opinions, evaluate their merit. They may have some valid points you can use to fine-tune tasks and goals.

### **Give timely recognition**

When someone does something exemplary, recognize the effort right away. People like to know that their teammates appreciate their efforts. Rapid recognition for a job well done can be worth more to someone than material recognition. They will appreciate that you noticed and most people will return the favor when you deserve credit.

But don’t be patronizing. If someone thinks you’re giving out praise to make yourself feel like you have authority over them, the recognition won’t go over well.

### **Communicate as a team**

Hiding in a corner is the kiss of death for all relationships. Talk to people and share your ideas with all levels of the power infrastructure that you have access to. Just because you aren’t in charge doesn’t mean you don’t have influence over teamwork. The meaning of your message is always measured by how well your audience understood.

### **Work as a group**

When the boss or head of your organization isn’t effective at facilitating group effort, the staff or membership is left to facilitate the group themselves. Whether the team is a group of paid employees or volunteers, it’s best to know their preferences and motivators. Find out what motivates them to help out. What do they like most and least about what they do? What can the group do to help each other become more effective at what they do?

If people aren’t working well with each other, identify and focus discussions on the problem behavior, not the person. Discuss how behavior affects performance and goals and the consequences of not changing behavior. Analyze what changes are necessary to improve teamwork.

### **Set performance goals – set life goals**

Simply fulfilling one's job description is the epitome of mediocrity, whether it’s volunteer work, family life, or a paid job. Being a father doesn’t mean that you hand out money while someone else makes sure the kids are taken care of. Being a student doesn’t mean you show up for class every once in awhile.

When your purpose is to get by doing the minimum you can get away with, you’re not doing anybody any favors by being there. Lead by being more than just your job description and people will follow.

## ***I don’t feel like doing it: Motivation***

Most mornings, immediately upon waking, I don’t want to face the world. The challenges of the day ahead seem overwhelming. My brain is too groggy to deal with anything. When I think about what my life is, what my goals are, what I need to accomplish within the next week or month, my mind feels overloaded. I freeze and don’t know what to do first.

I forge ahead anyway, tackling the immediate tasks such as working out, taking a shower, and getting myself out of the house. I know those things need to be done before I go anywhere. As I walk to the metro or the library, I gain more clarity, thinking about one task at a time. Once I get to wherever I am going, then I deal with things as they come.

This doesn’t mean I don’t face things when they get tough or that I don’t plan ahead. I do my planning the night before, because I know I’ll be able to deal with things better if I deal at that stage. If I want to brand myself as a role model, I have to be motivated.

Motivation must be a problem for a whole lot of people. It’s become a whole industry. There are thousands of motivational speakers and motivational books. There are religious motivators such as Rick Warren and Joel Osteen, business motivators such as Brian Tracy, and lifestyle motivators such as Tony Robbins and Zig Ziglar.

Joel Osteen, the pastor of the largest church in the United States believes, “If Jesus were here today, he wouldn't be riding around on a donkey. He'd be taking a plane, he'd be using the media.” The title of Rick Warren’s popular book, *The Purpose-Driven Life,* says it all. “If you're alive, there's a purpose for your life.”

No matter what religion you belong to, when you have a specific goal, you will feel a sense of belonging in the world, that you have something important to do, a sense of purpose to do something for humanity. It’s about having goals. When you have a sense of purpose, your actions and thoughts relate everything to your focus. If you have trouble staying motivated, place motivational quotes around your house or office to remind yourself of something that keeps your mind focused on your goals. Here are a few from Zig Ziglar, Brian Tracy, and Tony Robbins.

Zig Ziglar, in his eighties, is still writing motivational books. His motivational style is also influenced by his Christian beliefs. “You are what you are and where you are because of what has gone into your mind. You can change what you are and where you are by changing what goes into your mind,” and “People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing. That's why we recommend it daily.”

Brian Tracy is known for motivation in the realm of salesmanship. “Resolve in advance to persist until you succeed, no matter what the difficulty.”

Tony Robbins calls himself the Why Guy. He wants us to ask ourselves why we want to do something or accomplish something. Because once we reach that goal, if it was an empty goal we are left unfulfilled, wondering what we’re supposed to do next. “Each of us has at our disposal the most incredible computer on the planet – our brains – but, unfortunately, no one gave us an owner's manual.”

Sometimes when you feel unmotivated, ask for help or spend time with a friend who is enthusiastic about your goals. If you are unsure whether your friend is enthusiastic, try to sell him or her on the idea. Do it with a smile. When trying to persuade someone else, you may persuade yourself to get motivated.

Other times you might just be having a bad day. Do something else for a few moments, then come back to your task. Pause to look around, don’t lose the forest for the trees. Give yourself some quiet and don’t try to take on everything.

It’s difficult to persist on a task when you can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. People often don’t meet the goals they set for themselves. A common mistake is to set overly ambitious goals. A big goal may seem like a good idea, but can feel unattainable and remote, resulting in procrastination. Break your goals into smaller goals, then into tasks.

Christine Carlsen-Jones, an organizational consultant, developed A-B-C's for Goal Setting. Goals must be:

**A***chievable* – Realistic timelines help keep you on track. Define short-term intermediate goals at logical points along the timeline. Sometimes people fail to reach their goals because they don't follow through.

**B***elievable* – Do you have the right education and background to meet your goal? If not, find mentors who have the right experience and are also willing to help or bring together a group with the right skill set to work toward the goal together.

**C***oncrete* – Quantify the goal and define the process toward reaching the goal. Make sure to analyze:

* Required results
* How results will be measured
* Required tasks
* Timeline for tasks
* How tasks will be accomplished
* Required resources to do tasks
* Assignment of tasks to the appropriate people
* Progress

Make a creative bulletin board that looks like a football field. Write each goal on a paper football. Move the ball closer to the goal line each time you accomplish a step.

**D***esirable* – Your goal needs to be something you really want to do instead of what you think you’re supposed to do. You need to be excited about the process as well as the result. The goal has to be worth the time and effort you expend.

**E***xplicit* – Put the goal in writing and post it somewhere visible. The more often people are reminded of their goals, the more likely they will work toward achieving them.

**F***lexible* – Before you embark on working toward your goal, make sure you have enough information to formulate a reasonable goal. Sometimes new information or unforeseen circumstances bring new opportunity. Be able to rethink your plan.

**G***rowth* – Does the goal help you grow and learn as a person, or is it makework? If you accomplish the goal, will it help you with future endeavors?

## ***Exercise: Daily reminders***

Sometimes overcoming obstacles is as simple as reminding ourselves of who we are.

#### *Short term (Today)*

Sometimes you will have a bad day. A cheery reminder of the goal you’re working toward just might help. Make or purchase a reminder as a conversation piece.

Fashion is how you present yourself to society. Wear a pin, tshirt, or other item of clothing with a small logo as a projection of yourself, to remind yourself and to tell the world who you are. If it’s small goes well with work attire, such as a pin, wear it every day. If it’s a T-shirt with a message, wear it whenever you go out jogging or to the gym.

A calendar or poster from your favorite professional or service organization can be posted in your office, kitchen, or bedroom. If you can’t find a calendar or poster from that organization, print out a slogan or logo from the organization’s web site and attach it to a mirror or bulletin board. Every time you see the calendar or slogan, you’ll be reminded of the good work the organization does, your goal, and your role in this world.

#### *Medium term (This week)*

Tell others about your goal. When you get buy-in from others, it’s harder to back down. Other people will want to ask about your progress. Post it in your blog or Facebook page.

## ***Learning & Communication: Video comments and editing***

Bring cheer to others when they feel challenged.

#### *Learning exercise*

Leave encouraging comments on other people’s videos on YouTube. This isn’t a forum for critique, so don’t offer criticism, no matter how constructive. Post a link to something relevant, such as http://RoleModelEnterprises.com/.

#### *For advanced learners*

Edit your footage. New computers come with a free simple editing software that can handle one video track (no text comments or titles can be laid over the video image) and one audio track (no voiceovers). More sophisticated editing software can be purchased online or at your local electronics store.

You may need to play around with it a little to figure out how to use the editing software and what capabilities it has. Basically, you have to import footage from a file or directly from your camera. (You may need to get a firewire – you can purchase one on the internet for about twenty dollars – so you can upload footage from your camera to your computer quickly.) The software loads the footage into one video track and one audio track, which can’t be separated in the cheap software, but you can remove audio from the video, and move it around or cut it out, in better software. In the software’s timeline, you can cut the footage at various locations and delete sections you don’t want.

Try to cut your video down to the shortest amount of time possible. Remove all extraneous footage and dialogue. When in doubt, leave it out.

# **CONCLUSION: SET UP YOUR ROLE MODEL CHALLENGES CALENDAR FOR THE NEXT YEAR**

## ***To sum it up***

We need to put positive role models in new media. If we don’t, who will? RoleModel Enterprises was formed to help you get together to do this. With new advances in media technology for individuals, the costs to create new media stories are affordable.

Pick the style of role model that most represents who you are. Think about what being a role model means to you. And strive to become a role model to someone else. You don’t have to be perfect to be a role model to someone else. Just be helpful.

Role models in the media have a powerful influence on society – life imitates art. Join a group interested in helping you brand themselves as role models. Create stories about yourselves or about your role models with them. Then put the stories out there.

You don’t have to create the best story. Start with something as a practice run. You’ll get better with each successive effort. It may not be easy, but keep motivating yourself and others.

## ***Keep learning***

I learned a lot while researching the ideas in this book and while forming RoleModel Enterprises. As RoleModel Enterprises grows and evolves, I expect to learn a lot more. I hope you learned something from this book and that it inspired you to keep learning and to help others to learn about the role models in your life.

## ***Exercise: Plan your calendar***

If you haven’t already gone through all the exercises in this book, it’s time for some project planning.

#### *Short term (Today)*

Now that you’ve gotten through this book, go back and skim through all the exercises at the end of each chapter. Make a list of each of the tasks you intend to tackle. Set a realistic goal completion date and work backward to set deadlines for each of the tasks. Mark the deadlines on a calendar.

#### *Long term*

Follow through! It’s great to make plans, but the best of plans mean nothing without follow-through. Monitor your progress compared to the tasks on your calendar and update task completion dates if needed.

## ***Learning & Communication: Party!***

Let’s celebrate!

#### *Throw a RoleModel party!*

Candle parties are so 1990’s. Start a new trend. Set up your computer and invite friends over to watch your video or to listen to a reading of your story. Post your video on YouTube or MySpace. Post your story on your blog. Videotape your party and post that on the internet.

Take your show on the road. Present your stories at meetings or conferences. Let people know you are passionate about putting positive role models in the media.

#### *Live life like a Role Model*

If not to be proud of your life, do it to avoid appearing as the antagonist in someone else’s role model video.