

Annual Day of Responsibility

During an Annual Day of Responsibility, I was given the task of co-facilitating a workshop. I was caught by surprise when I was approached to take on such a role, but I accepted it because in order to reach your highest potential it is sometimes necessary to step out of what you're comfortable doing.

If you cannot think outside of the box, you'll find yourself stuck inside of it. Whether you're on the streets or in prison, negativity is like traffic, it's practically everywhere. It's all about how you choose to navigate through it.

The workshop that I co-facilitated was titled '*How we influence through influence. Teach me how to live, not how to lose.*' Our preferred topic was 'The negative influences of neighborhoods,' which we were certain that many people could relate to. In our group, we had in-depth conversations about how we were influenced in our communities. Our workshop wasn't about the multitude of problems that we all know exist, violence, drug addiction/selling, burglaries, vandalism, etc. It was about us, as a collective group of people who have lived through these experiences, coming up with solutions.

At the start of our workshop we all had a clear understanding that there was no easy way to unfasten the straps that had held our communities down for so long. In order to come up with some solutions we thought would be effective, we had to identify the core issues of our neighborhoods.

Our core issues are much deeper than the physical ones that the media broadcasts through television, they are also mental as well. I started off with a concise story of how I was influenced growing up, and how I idolized the people who had all of the material trappings, finances, and education.

On solving part of the problems through a culture of inclusiveness (making the youth feel like they're being spoken WITH and not AT), I presented this vital question: How do we include a generation of people that seem to do everything to show that they don't want to be included? How do we give advice to the younger generation when they aren't receptive to it?

Let's be honest, people act like they know what they want, but when you give it to them they don't know what to do with it. Addressing those questions above, many of the younger guys that I've spoken to carry themselves in an excluded way. Why? Because some of the elders approach them in authoritative ways and instinctively they become defensive. What'll happen over time is, they'll speak with other elders with similar

actions and begin to generalize. They'll begin to see them all as one in the same. So whenever they encounter elders they'll do one of two things: avoid them or be defensive when they can't. They'll maintain distance and from the outside looking in, they fit the criteria of the questions above.

It's one of those things where sensitive lines have to get crossed in order to afford the type of help they need. You also have to know the language of the person you're speaking to in order to make them feel included.

There is an assumed teaching role of an elder that must take place during a conversation with anyone who feels excluded, but it has to be done carefully. As a teacher the requirement of the job is to teach and as the student the requirement is to learn. Teaching and learning is somewhat like a marriage, the only difference is, with teaching it's more the teachers responsibility to teach than it is the student's to learn.

What we all must understand is, our youth of the present are the product of what we did yesterday. So we have to factor in that the foundation we lay down is the foundation they walk on.