

## **Intro**

Good morning. I am Michel Debolt. I want to spend a few moments speaking to you about growth, possibility, and the future of today's youth. I want to discuss an opportunity that will allow you to reach out as mentors to students from your own high school. I have developed a web interface, Imamentor.com, that allows you, in less than ten minutes, to enter information about yourself that you would like to share with today's students. Students will peruse that information finding the experiences, achievements, accreditations, hobbies that they themselves are interested in and then contact you asking for guidance. I want to convince you of the worthiness of this effort, the value of your own experiences to today's students, and the extent to which YOU can make a difference.

Who was it that put you on the track you where find yourself now? Perhaps, it was a number of people at different times. Strip away all of the advice and encouragement you received to seek new opportunities, to further your growth. Ask yourself, where would you be today without those people? That is exactly where a lot of current high school students will find themselves tomorrow without a mentor to guide them in making practical choices that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

## **WHO AM I**

But before I go in to too much detail, I will share a bit about myself. Growing up in rural Illinois, my parents took a family vacation every summer. This entailed our family of 5 driving across the United States in the hatchback du jour – be it a Chevy Vega or a Ford Pinto. We always stopped to see ALL of the cultural and historical sites that we passed along the way. These trips instilled in me a basic awareness that the world is large and filled with lots of places to go. But beyond the backseat of my parents car, I didn't really know how to get there. Nevertheless, I made do as best I could and went to college, got a job in Chicago that eventually provided the opportunity to work in Eastern Europe and have now returned to school seek additional skills. This trip included lots of wrong turns that have made me a better person today. Over time, two things have struck me: how much easier a trip is when you have a guide and how all of us is that guide with respect to some aspect of our own lives.

## **WHO ARE WE**

You all have something valuable to contribute. You are the mechanic who works late every night. You understand the importance of making difficult decisions. You are the office worker juggling countless tasks who appreciates that greater responsibility leads to greater reward. You are the executive with barely enough time for your own family. Yet, you recognize the need to network with those around you. Farmers, mothers, soldiers – we ALL have a wealth of experience accumulated across YEARS of time.

You ARE an expert in something, even if it is just in respect of the steps that led you from high school to the seat you find yourself in right now. Imagine someone taking many of those same steps today. Imagine yourself reaching back to help that person along. Imagine them avoiding whatever mistakes you may have made while learning the lessons that you have found to be so important.

But you don't have to imagine. That person exists. Today, they are a student in your very own high school. They will face the same choices you faced. They will make those same mistakes you made. But you can make a difference as a mentor.

## **WHERE ARE WE GOING**

Youth is like a room with hundreds of doors. Each of us comes into this world with some of those doors open and some closed. By sharing our accumulated experience, we as adults are opening doors for today's youth.

There have been different people at different times in my own life who have shared their experiences with me. An uncle encouraged me to go to a more prestigious university. A supervisor pushed me to follow-up on the opportunity to transfer abroad. A trusted friend validated my decision to return to school. Several teachers along the way said that they KNEW that I would achieve great things. I don't know if they actually believed this. But I did. It was the advice of all of these people as mentors that put me here before you today. I just want to ensure that everyone understands the value that mentoring provides to both mentor and mentee.

Of course, there is no shortage of opportunities to take on mentoring roles. What has been missing, however, is a mechanism that connects people in meaningful mentoring relationships. What we have needed is a process that ensures that you are able to pass on information that you know will be relevant to the person receiving it. I see this connection between graduates and current students of the same high school.

## **HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE**

Imamentor.com focuses on this high school connection in placing people such as yourselves in mentoring roles. Imamentor.com has only two objectives, to make the mentoring relationship as meaningful and efficient as possible. With high school age mentees, we are focusing on youth who are at a point early enough in their lives to make a difference yet late enough to take initiative in implementing the advice that they receive. Seeing your advice put into action will re-inforce the reality that you are in fact making a difference. At the same time, Imamentor.com's interface and searchable database minimizes the time you spend entering and administering a mentoring relationship while maximizing the value that you derive from it – the knowledge that you are helping someone else. In less than ten minutes, you enter whatever information you think others will find useful. With these resources at their fingertips, students search that information and seek you out. Imamentor.com allows you to empower students to help themselves.

## **IS IT WORTH THE TRIP**

We all know that time is in short supply. God knows you already have numerous responsibilities. You might ask whether a commitment to mentoring is worth the effort.

To this, I can only share my own experiences. After having worked in Russia for a year and a half, I visited a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in my old elementary school and brought along a Russian colleague. We spoke for about 40 minutes about life in Russia and how things differ between our two countries. I was

pretty impressed at the inquisitiveness of the students. However, what really impacted me was running into one of the student's parents several months later on another trip home. They mentioned that their daughter had enjoyed the visit and had talked about Russia for DAYS. It struck me how powerful can be the simple act of opening a child's eyes to the possibilities that lie unseen before them.

I have spoken to a number of current high school students and school counselors. They have all agreed that the Imamentor.com will be invaluable in preparing high school students for the transitions they face after graduation. Certainly, empirical evidence shows that mentored students do better in school, their careers, and life.

My own experiences, the people I speak to, the empirical evidence – they all confirm that this idea has legs. They confirm that mentoring helps students, that you have value to contribute, and that Imamentor.com facilitates the mentoring process by connecting you with mentees who are interested in what you have achieved.

## **Conclusion**

To my mind, Emerson was wrong. It is not sufficient that we go to our grave knowing that even one life has breathed easier because we have lived. I want to know that a lot of lives have breathed easier because we all have lived.

Imamentor.com allows you to open doors for today's youth. It connects you with students in your own high school in meaningful mentoring relationships, IF you register. Allow today's students to reach out to you. Allow them to ask the critical questions that you wish someone could have answered for you.

Register at [www.Imamentor.com](http://www.Imamentor.com) and know you that will make a difference.