

Are You a Role Model?

Category General Series

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Are you a role model? — Think of this question for a moment. Without knowing who you are or what your circumstance is, I would guess the answer to the question to be yes. If you disagree because you are not a celebrity, I would suggest that you think again! I asked my teenage (early teen) niece this question and she responded, “Yes”, without hesitation.

If any of the following circumstances applies to you, then you are a role model, whether you realize it or not: you are a parent, you have a younger sibling, you are a responsible single adult and occasionally interact with younger children, you are the first generation in your family line to attend a college or university, you are a manager to a group of people in a workplace, you are a business owner, you are an executive for a company, you are the chairperson on a board, you are the head of a committee at a non-profit organization or a social group, you are a teacher, you serve in a public service role, you are a celebrity, or you hold any form of position of authority. These roles all have one thing in common—a measure of relative status. By the way, my niece has a younger brother who adores her!

In very simple terms, a role model is a person who serves as a reference (individual), voluntarily or involuntarily, by virtue of an assumed role or position of status. Such a person serves as a reference for dressing style, speaking style, language and other forms of expression, mannerism, behavior and other forms of social interaction. Also, such a person serves as a reference to other people of lower status within a social or formal network. But the basis of reference can go further and can include personal character, work ethic, and other much deeper aspects of a person. The mechanism that explains how (and why) a person would look to another person as a role model deals with the concept of respect.

A Role Model

A person who serves as a reference individual, voluntarily or involuntarily, by virtue of an assumed role or position of status.

Within a family (social) structure, a parent (the higher status) is a role model to a child; similarly, an older brother or sister is a role model to a younger sibling. Young boys look up to their older teenage brothers just as young girls look up to their older teenage sisters. In a home, a child would look to the actions and behavior of mom and dad, and learn from them. Even if that child identifies with a celebrity role model, the parents still maintain dominance as role models whether the parents realize this or not.

Within a work environment, a manager (the higher status) is a role model to each member of the group (being managed). A manager sets the tone for many things in a workplace—behavior standards, communication standards, quality of work, and much more. The nature and tone of a workplace culture is largely impacted by the actions of a manager. If a manager uses profanity and other forms of abusive or offensive language, then subordinates will take their cue accordingly. If a manager habitually arrives late for

meetings, then subordinates will gradually fall into a similar pattern. I cover this concept in the [6th law](#) of *The Top Ten Laws of Respect in the Workplace*.

Within a social environment such as a place of worship, a young, responsible single guy is a role model to many younger children. The children would look up to this individual and emulate many aspects of his behavior and style—especially if any of the children come from broken homes or unstable family households.

There are good role models and there are bad role models. Referring to any one of the three scenarios described previously, the role model may influence those around them positively or negatively. An alcoholic parent would turn out to be a bad role model, while an abusive older sibling would do too. An unskilled, or worse, abusive, manager would serve as a terrible role model in any work environment. A young single adult (in a public social setting) who makes poor choices, with negative consequences, would represent a bad role model to young children looking for a responsible older sibling-figure in their lives. Are you a good or bad role model? Are you aware of the level of influence that you have on those around you who look to you regularly?

Quite often we think of role models as people such as celebrities and public figures. We often lose sight of the role model status that we hold with people close to us. In my book series—specifically *The Top Ten Laws of Respect – A Personal Guide* and *The Top Ten Laws of Respect at Home – A Family Guide*—I cover this concept and differentiate the celebrity/public figure role model from the more intimate role model as discussed above.

Whether you realize it or not, you are a role model to someone around you. This implies that you exert some level of influence on such an individual. You are therefore indirectly (or directly) accountable for your actions. If you understand this social and life concept, then you are on your way toward cultivating a lifestyle of respect and improved status. Even if you choose not to serve as a role model, it is important to realize that life has a funny way of assigning tasks to us—quite often against our will!

About the Author



Niyi Taiwo is the founder of EKTIMIS and the lead editor for the EKTIMIS eLibrary articles. He is the author of several books, including the EKTIMIS Top Ten Laws series. He is a continuous improvement expert with over 21 years of industry experience – operational, management and consulting. He has been studying the topic of respect since 2004. He holds an undergraduate degree from WPI and a master's degree from RPI. He is a certified Lean Expert and an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt.