

Helping Students Succeed

A Four-Legged Stool



As our youth program passes the five-year mark, growing numbers of educators, youth group leaders, foundations, and businesses are joining in an effort to help young people reach for the best in themselves.



“If there’s one thing we can all agree upon... it’s that we need to do something to help kids in our communities reach their full potential.”

JIM OWEN

Founder

CENTER FOR COWBOY ETHICS & LEADERSHIP

These are challenging times. Even a college degree is no guarantee of career opportunities. And many are left wondering what it takes to succeed in a tough economic climate like this one. More fundamentally, schools, parents, and employers alike are asking: Can success be taught?

Our answer is a resounding yes — because we and our partners have already proved it in high schools and youth groups across the country.

For five years now, the Center for Cowboy Ethics and Leadership has been partnering with educators and youth group leaders to develop and test a model program — one designed to help young people build the character qualities they will need to be successful, not just in a career, but also in life.

Using the American cowboy and the Code of the West as inspirational themes, our program concepts have already helped thousands of students to set clear goals and reach for the best in themselves. The results can be seen in measurably improved GPAs, the transformations reported by teachers and youth group leaders, and how students themselves say they’ve changed.

Our program originated with a gifted educator, Ann Moore, now Dean of Students for Adaptive Programs at the Cherry Creek High School District in Denver, who remains a major contributor to its evolution. Since inception, it has operated continuously at Denver’s Cherry Creek High, giving us a “laboratory” for testing teaching approaches.

It has also been adopted by such groups as the Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, Future Farmers of America, Colorado Boys Ranch, and Boy Scouts of America. It has also been discovered and used independently by teachers and team coaches throughout the country.

At this point, we have the benefit of long experience, creative input from a variety of partnering organizations, and what we’ve learned from our mistakes. We have distilled it all into one model program any secondary school or youth group can use.

We call it ***Be Somebody!***

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

Educating Hearts As Well As Minds

A large and growing body of research has shown that life success depends less on I.Q. and native ability than on qualities of personal character. As social scientists have learned, it is these character qualities that enable someone to pursue a long-term goal, persevere in the face of obstacles, and bounce back from a stumble or fall. Our program focuses on four key traits:

- 1 ATTITUDE** > *Approaching life with a positive, can-do spirit that fuels — and is fueled by — self-confidence.* Students need to understand that “You, and only you, are the author of your own life story.”
- 2 INTEGRITY** > *Knowing what you stand for.* Young people need a solid belief system to anchor their lives and help them weather rocky passages. Rather than imposing values or harping on rules, we encourage them to reflect on their own beliefs, decide what true success means to them, and develop a code of their own. The simple, timeless principles of the Code of the West give them a starting point for this journey of self-discovery.
- 3 GRIT** > *Building the capacity for hard work, perseverance, and resilience.* We also help young people realize that success doesn’t always mean winning the prize. When you know you’ve given something your very best, you’re a winner already.
- 4 PURPOSE** > *Being determined to do or achieve something.* We help students think about having a sense of purpose that gives their life direction and meaning. It’s about how they want to make their mark on the world — a decision no one can make for them.

Designed to Inspire, Not Instruct

Unlike many character education programs, we don’t try to tell young people what to believe — that never works. We respect their ability to decide for themselves. Using Jim Owen’s three books — *Cowboy Ethics*, *Cowboy Values*, and *The Try* — and *The Try* documentary as jumping-off points, our program inspires students to “find the hero within.” As one student put it, “This class really isn’t about cowboys at all; it’s about being a better person inside yourself.”

A Partnership Model

Early on we realized that the only way to scale our program and have a meaningful impact was by partnering with others. The program has grown organically, expanding one student, one classroom, one school or group at a time. Organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs and 4-H have come up with creative activities and interpretations of their own. The program works with a bottom-up, grassroots model and a clear division of roles. The Center provides inspirational content, teaching concepts, and curriculum materials. Our partners structure their own versions and work with us to secure funding.

"It gives me something to live by... something I can apply every day."

Student

CHERRY CREEK HIGH

Adaptable to Any Setting

The *Be Somebody!* program isn't a standardized curriculum, but an adaptable set of ideas and resources that can be academically focused, or expressive and experiential, or both. Schools have structured it in a variety of ways: as an elective course, an after-school club, for schoolwide assemblies, or part of orientation for incoming freshmen. Youth groups have used equally varied approaches, sometimes bringing the program into local schools.

An Important Role For Business

Businesses have good reasons to play a part. They know that domain knowledge and technical skills can always be taught. What they need most are employees who will bring a strong work ethic, integrity, and loyalty to the job. We and our partnering schools and organizations will be asking local chambers of commerce and their members to get involved. For example, they could introduce the program to classrooms in their own communities, help to fund the costs of materials, and mentor kids by giving them a real-life workplace perspective.

We invite you to join us in this grassroots, community-based effort, and help more young people fulfill their true potential.



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