



Introduction to mentoring for success and self-determination

*Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead.
Just walk beside me and be my friend.*

— Albert Camus —

A primary goal of the DO-IT electronic mentoring community is to support the participants in their transitions to successful, self-determined adult lives. In this context, being successful does not mean that you are successful in all that you do but rather that you are satisfied with your overall progress toward the goals you have established for yourself. Everyone experiences success; everyone experiences setbacks and even failure. In this chapter, mentors and protégés begin to explore the topics of success and self-determination.

The multifaceted topic of success can be approached in a variety of ways. Some professionals have looked at characteristics that successful adults have in common. For example, positive attitude has been found to be a common characteristic of successful adults. As shared by a college student who is blind:

I have a positive attitude about my future because I believe in myself. I lost my vision over one summer when I was entering the eighth grade. I had to adjust to doing everything without seeing. I overcame my fear and excelled socially and academically. I passed a specialized high school exam and was accepted to the Bronx H.S. of Science. However,

in the beginning of my sophomore year my parents decided to get a divorce. This threw me for a loop and I was depressed for a while. But then I realized that depression was not going to help me if I wanted to continue toward my goals. So I dealt with my anger and disappointment. Looking back, it still hurts but I have a better outlook on life because of it. Through my inner strength I overcame these hurdles and looked forward to college. People are stronger than we give them credit for. People with a disability are no different.

A sense of purpose has also been found to promote success (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The belief that your life is part of something larger and more enduring than daily struggles can provide the motivation to persevere when life presents challenges. It has also been found that people who do well in life have a clear sense of self-worth and a high tolerance for distress. Successful people tend to be optimistic; they have positive beliefs about the world and they think things will work out for the best, despite setbacks (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).



E-Mentoring

Successful people know they can control some aspects of their environment by their actions. They also tend to be expressive about the difficulties they face in everyday life. They are able to talk about their problems and place them in a perspective that is not overwhelming.

The overall sense of well-being was explored by Abraham Maslow (1950, 1968, 1970) in his work on *self-actualization*. His model rests on the belief that success in life is not a set of isolated characteristics but an integrated process. Maslow stressed that no one ever reaches perfection in all areas but that the process of working on key characteristics is the most important task people face on their road to a satisfying quality of life. These characteristics include

- becoming fully functional as a mature individual (self-identity, self-realization, self-direction);
- being responsible for one's own behaviors and attitudes;
- realizing one's own unique potential as a human being;
- having a strongly developed sense of integrity based on defined personal values;
- showing personal creativity;
- being challenged rather than defeated by new events or information in daily life;
- having a sense of humor; and
- having high levels of motivation and persistence.

By following the online activities found in this book, mentors can help teens explore how others have defined success and develop their own definitions of success. After completing these activities, participants will be able to

- describe what success and self-

determination mean to them;

- state how success can be found in personal, social, spiritual, academic, and employment areas of life;
- describe how successful people set goals and work toward them, take risks, and learn from both their successes and their failures;
- understand how learning to take responsibility for their lives is a gradual process;
- describe strategies that address challenges imposed by disabilities;
- describe how they can deal with awkward situations in a positive way;
- explain how a positive attitude can influence success; and
- explain how benefits can be derived from challenges they face.

Participants will be able to list some of the common characteristics of successful people, including

- a sense of purpose and self-worth,
- a desire to succeed,
- a positive attitude,
- self-confidence,
- ambition,
- determination,
- motivation,
- persistence,
- self-discipline,
- courage,
- a sense of humor, and
- a willingness to take risks.

In several of the *E-Community Activities* in this chapter, mentors and protégés are asked to view the video about Todd, Jessie, and Randy, *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* (http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/taking_charge.html). Randy, Jessie, and Todd have met and continue to meet the challenges in life that we all



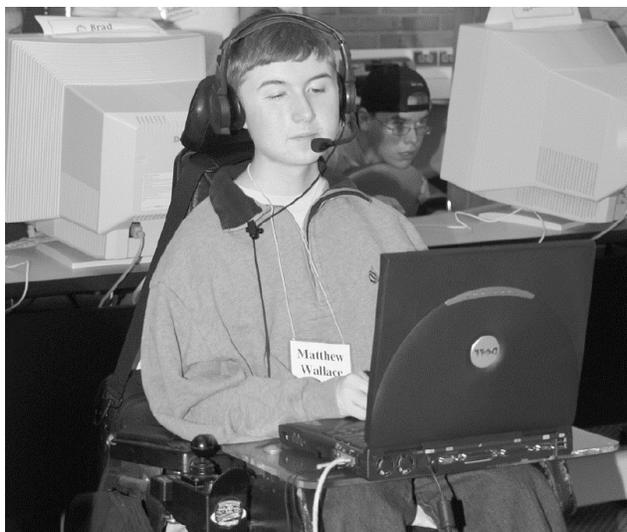
face—succeeding in school, making friends, finding and succeeding in a career. They have had to adjust their goals and strategies to address unique challenges related to their disabilities. Todd, Randy, and Jessie view their disabilities as part of who they are but not the characteristic that fully defines them any more than their gender, age, or height defines them. They do not see themselves as victims. When faced with a challenge, they ask questions such as the following:

- How can I tackle this problem in another way so that I can succeed?
- What do I need to do to see past these barriers and take control of my own future?
- What resources are available to me?
- What other strategies might I try?

Randy, Todd, and Jessie all lead successful lives, but their success does not come without hard work, setbacks, and adjustments. In addition to powerful role models of young people who are determined to overcome challenges, these stories can provide a framework for opening discussions between mentors and protégés on issues of disability, success, and self-determination. A second video in the *Taking Charge* series tells two

stories of teens moving down their paths toward self-determined lives. A third video, *Taking Charge 3*, combines all five stories into a one-half hour program suitable for public television. They can be purchased from DO-IT or freely viewed online at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/>.

The e-mentoring administrator can select appropriate messages from the following examples and send those titles labeled *Mentor Tips* to the mentors only and those labeled *E-Community Activity* to the entire online community of mentors and protégés. These messages introduce protégés and mentors to the mentoring community and present general topics regarding success and self-determination. Use these examples to stimulate other ideas for online discussions. It is desirable that, ultimately, most discussion topics come from the mentors and protégés themselves. Note that some of the content of these messages is published in *Taking Charge: Stories of Success and Self-Determination* (Burgstahler, 2006c).





E-Community Activity: Welcome to Online Mentoring

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Welcome to online mentoring

Welcome to the [program name] program. On the [list/forum address] participants in the [program name] and adult mentors will communicate on a wide range of topics—college, careers, recreation—in order to promote the success of participants (called “protégés”), share resources, and just have fun.

Our mentoring community is about taking charge of your life. Our goal is for you to have an internal sense of control, that is, for you to be active in determining aspects of your life. Rather than feeling dependent, you will learn strategies that will help you take charge. An important part of being self-determined is seeking and valuing help from others, including the peers and mentors in our online community.

I am the administrator of our electronic mentoring community. If you have any questions or concerns, contact me at [email address].

[name of e-mentoring administrator]



E-Community Activity: Guidelines for Protégés

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Guidelines for protégés

Here are a few guidelines to follow as you participate in our online mentoring community.

- Log on to your email account [or into the electronic forum] at least once each week, and read and respond to messages.
- Regularly communicate with mentors and other participants.
- Notify me of any changes to your email address or other personal information.
- Keep paragraphs in your messages short, and separate paragraphs with blank spaces.
- Avoid covering several topics in one message. It's better to send several messages so that recipients can respond to each topic separately.
- Use mixed upper and lower case letters, and capitalize letters in a word for emphasis. Using all capital letters is like SHOUTING.
- It's friendly to begin a message with the name of the person to whom you are corresponding and to end the message with your name.
- Do not use words others might find offensive. Avoid personal attacks. Don't engage in name-calling.
- Do not participate in conversations that would be unacceptable to your parents and/or program staff.
- Do not engage in conversations that you are not comfortable with. Immediately report offensive or troubling messages that you receive to me and a parent or guardian.
- Remember that electronic correspondence is easy for recipients to forward to others and, therefore, is not appropriate for very personal messages. Email is more like a postcard than a sealed letter.
- Spell check and carefully review a message BEFORE you send it.

[name of e-mentoring administrator]



E-Community Activity: Safety on the Internet

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Safety on the Internet

The Internet is a great place for learning and interaction. However, some content is not appropriate for you, and some Internet users are not safe for you to interact with. The following are a few rules for you and your parents or guardians to consider while you engage in email and other activities on the Internet.

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without the permission of a parent or guardian.
- I will tell you and a parent or guardian right away if I come across information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with a parent or guardian. If a parent or guardian agrees to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and arrange for a parent or guardian to come along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without the approval of a parent or guardian.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell you and a parent or guardian but NOT the person who sent the message.
- I will talk with a parent or guardian so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide on the time of day I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

[name of e-mentoring administrator]



E-Community Activity: Jessie and Learning Strategies

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Jessie and learning strategies

If your computer has the capability, view the video *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* at http://www.washington.edu/doiit/Video/taking_charge.html. You can also read the following story about Jessie, who is featured in the video. Then tell our group something about Jessie's story that is similar to your life experiences.

Jessie first became aware of her learning disability in the second grade. She said: "Everyone in my class was reading and I wasn't. When my mom approached the teacher, the teacher minimized the problem, saying I was just a 'late bloomer.' Even in third grade I still couldn't read. They kept telling my mom, 'Don't worry, don't worry.'"

Jessie struggled in every grade as she progressed through school. "When I was in the fourth grade, I was in a first grade reading level. And my writing skills were just nonexistent... Science reading is really dense and so I get completely and totally lost in it. Even in math classes I do dyslexic-like errors like dropping negative signs. It gets me all mixed up. There's no area in which I am free of it. It's a part of me."

But Jessie was determined to be "academically independent." With support from her mother and a tutor, Jessie figured out how to tap into her own resourcefulness to reach self-defined goals. "Ever since I was in third grade, whatever they were doing, I didn't get it. I got really frustrated. I was always behind. So my mom would help me by finding different ways to do the work. Now that I'm in high school, I'm finding my own way, developing my own methods. I learned how to study. Like, for example I would create whole tests of the subject material and just quiz myself, and quiz myself and quiz myself. And, you know, it works. I've gotten A's from doing that."

Jessie also listens to taped versions of her textbooks. She has a speech output system on her computer to read to her all text that appears on the screen. Another computer program allows her to talk into the computer rather than type on the keyboard. She dictates her work to the computer and then uses a standard word

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E-Community Activity: Jessie and Learning Strategies (continued)

processor to edit it into final form. Having note takers in class to alleviate her difficulties with both handwriting and processing teacher lecture material is another strategy that helps Jessie focus on her strengths instead of her deficits. Every day she better understands her learning style and as a result is able to figure out alternative strategies to tackle her assignments. Jessie also seeks out activities that don't require accommodations for her learning disability. These include ballet and running.

Jessie confesses that she fears failure. But she also admits, "I've learned that I'll fail if I don't even try." Jessie's tutor describes a learning disability as a "hill." It's as though Jessie is an avid skier but, instead of using a chairlift like everyone else, she must continually climb the hill in order to ski back down with her peers. Jessie reports, "She and my mom always reminded me of this example and told me, 'You're smart, Jessie, smarter than a lot of these kids. You just have to struggle and work hard sometimes, but you're finding a different way.' They would tell me about people who overcame their disabilities and were successful, so I never felt like I was dumb.... Finding new methods was part of the climb up the mountain. My mom would turn out the lights and quiz me orally on my spelling. It was weird. Sometimes I could do it and sometimes not—it was a mystery."

Jessie describes her relationship with her tutor as special. Unlike her friends, the tutor understands the immense effort it takes Jessie to achieve what seems to come easily to others. According to Jessie, "When I was younger, I didn't mention my disability, because I was ashamed of it. My mom and sister are exactly opposite from me. They never have to study; everything comes easy to them. I have friends like that too. They don't seem to have to work at all, so they can't understand what I have to go through."

On the other hand, Jessie acknowledges that because of her disability she has learned to be resourceful and adaptable. "I see things in a different way. I know how to work hard. I'm determined.... not being able to attack a problem one way has forced me to learn new skills.... If you do work hard, you will get a payoff. It will be worth it."

What about Jessie's experience can apply in your life?



E-Community Activity: Jessie and Disability Benefits

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Jessie and disability benefits

Jessie has found benefits in the struggles she has faced because of her learning disability. Specifically, she says, "I see things in a different way. I know how to work hard. I'm determined. Not being able to attack a problem one way has forced me to learn new skills that I may not have learned [if I didn't have a disability]."

Think of something that you consider to be primarily a disadvantage in your life—for example, where you live, your family dynamics, a disability, your appearance, your physical capabilities. How can you derive benefits from this situation?



E-Community Activity: Randy and Proving Yourself

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Randy and proving yourself

Read the following story about Randy, and/or view the video presentation *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* at http://www.washington.edu/doiit/Video/taking_charge.html. Then tell our group how Randy's experiences are similar to or different from yours.

Randy does not let the jolts of life get him down. He sees the positive in people and the potential in tough situations. Blind since birth, he views obstacles as healthy challenges that provide opportunities to be creative. He sees prejudice and stereotyping as opportunities to educate. Life may be a hassle at times—frustrating, annoying, even frightening—but to Randy it is nothing less than a grand experience.

Born in the Grand Coulee Dam area of Washington State and raised in Alaska and Seattle, Randy went to a public preschool, where, at age three, he began to learn Braille. He attended general education classes throughout his schooling.

In high school he gained access to a laptop computer with speech output software, a speech synthesizer, Braille translation software, a Braille embosser (to produce Braille output), a standard printer for producing printed output for teachers and other sighted people, and the Internet. Using this technology, he read a newspaper independently for the first time in his life. His computer system allowed him to access information and compose papers without the assistance of a sighted person. He attended The Evergreen State College and graduated in a computer field. Randy says his "biggest challenge today is dealing with the ever-growing amount of graphics presented on the World Wide Web and software applications." When software designers use text alternatives to information presented in graphics, he works independently; otherwise, he needs a sighted person to help him.

Though Randy struggled socially in school, his greatest challenges came from teachers, not peers: "You've got to prove that you can do the same stuff as the others, show the teachers that you are able to

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E-Community Activity: Randy and Proving Yourself (continued)

work in their class successfully. This was my biggest challenge, not from the students. To them, you're just another kid." Randy felt that he had to constantly "prove" his worth—not in relation to performing a specific task but simply because he couldn't see. Randy realized he was going to have to work very hard to find the right kind of job for himself and, even then, likely have to fight to get beyond the stereotypes: "I still have to prove to them that I can do the job."

After graduating with a degree in computer science and networking, Randy secured a job as a help-desk analyst, handling technical computer questions from customers around the United States. Randy credits his parents as the primary motivators in his life: "If I came home with a grade that was lower than expected, I would hear about it. I was expected to get that grade up. And if it didn't go up, well, there were consequences. I was treated like everybody else. That instilled in me a drive to succeed."

They also encouraged him to be independent, to make his own choices and then to learn from the consequences of his choices. "My parents' main goal was to make me as much like any other kid as possible. I did social things with other kids. When I was in high school, I had a lot of the same problems with my parents that a lot of kids have, like 'I want to go out.' 'Well, you can't go out.' Not we don't want you to go out because you have this disability, but because you're supposed to do this work. But at other times, they would say, 'Hey, go out with your friends. Do stuff socially.' They were very open to that. And because I was mainstreamed all through school, I was used to having social interaction with other people."



E-Community Activity: Randy and Taking On Challenges

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Randy and taking on challenges

Read the following story about Randy and/or view the video presentation *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* at http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/taking_charge.html. Then tell about a challenge that you have taken on.

Randy, who is blind, has an uncanny knack for not allowing the “unknowns” to get in his way. When he encounters a difficult situation, he asks questions. He uses creative thinking to circumvent challenges without allowing the challenges to become overwhelming or discouraging. He sees every challenge as an opportunity to be inventive. Randy tells how whenever he travels to a new location, he studies the layout of the community to figure out the best routes to the places where he needs to go.

Randy found courage in the pockets of his own positive spirit. When he was seventeen years old he ventured alone to California to get his guide dog, Mogul. “I had been away from my parents before, like any normal kid. I've gone to camp and stuff like that. But this was my first flight on my own, and I was going to meet people I had never met before. I would be staying at this place for a month and had no idea where it was or what it was. So it was fairly daunting. I had never done plane travel on my own. So, I had to say to myself, ‘Well, eventually things are going to work out.’ A lot of the time that's how I work. I say, ‘We may not be able to plan this out completely, but it'll work out somehow.’ There's always something that will come up. Some sort of gift of fortune that will make things work.”

Denise and Randy met in high school and were married at age 21. Both say that Randy's disability was not an issue in their dating or in their decision to get married. Denise relays that though they went to the same middle school too, they didn't meet until later. She said, “I was really shy and didn't talk much. If I don't talk, then Randy doesn't know I exist, because I'm not visible. My interactions with Randy were limited to going down crowded halls of the school and running into him and getting

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E-Community Activity: Randy and Taking On Challenges (continued)

knocked over. But during our junior year, half our classes were together. And we just started dating.”

Randy handles awkward situations with class. He describes an episode he had in a restaurant. Though he was a regular customer, there was a new employee at the counter who did not know him and told him he could not come in with his guide dog. “There were three ways I could have handled it. I could have walked out, which I didn’t want to do because I really like the food. I could have blown up at her and then maybe got kicked out for disturbing the peace. Or I could do what I did, which was to be calm and explain that Mogul is a guide dog and by law allowed to come in. I usually carry cards that have information and a phone number for people who want to know more. But I find staying calm works with most people.”

After describing his resilient nature, Randy is quick to tell others to never give up. What is an example of how you have been successful in doing something that was difficult or new for you?



E-Community Activity: Advice from Randy

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Advice from Randy

When asked if he had advice for young people with disabilities, Randy, who is blind, had plenty to offer. With a quick smile, he replied, "Quite a bit, actually." Here are some of his helpful hints.

- First of all, don't use the disability as a crutch. Don't walk through life and expect people to take care of you because of the disability. Don't make excuses for yourself because of the disability. I've done it before, and it's a one-man pity party. Go out; drive for what you want; don't let the disability get in the way. But if it does, then just jump the hurdle; find a way to get around it.
- I would also say, don't go into a shell. A lot of disabled people will kind of stand back and let life flow by them. They don't interact with people. A lot of them have fairly poor social skills because of it, and that's really sad to see. If these people could go out and interact with other people, that might make their life better.
- My biggest piece of advice is definitely to drive for what you want. And if it's strong enough in your mind and if you want it bad enough, then get it.
- If something happens and you fail, the only thing that you can do is say, "OK, fine, that's not going to work, try it a different way, or go at it again." There are always times that you're going to break down and say "Hey, I can't go on like this." But you go to sleep that night, you wake up the next morning, and you have a different outlook on life... Maybe it's hard, but you do it anyway, and you just keep going at life.
- Get help when you need it. There are a lot of disabled people out there [who] get fanatical about not letting anybody help them. I'm sorry, but I look at that as kind of stupid because people without disabilities need help sometimes, too... Go in and ask for that help.
- For parents, I would definitely say, "Let your kid with a disability be a kid. Don't shelter them, don't keep anything back. Let them live their life." Treat them like you would your nondisabled child. And don't let them look at the disability as a crutch. Don't let them do that. Trust me.

What advice for success would you add to Randy's list?



E-Community Activity: Todd and an Awkward Moment

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Todd and an awkward moment

Read the following story about Todd, and/or view the video *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* at http://www.washington.edu/doingit/Video/taking_charge.html. Then tell the group how you have handled an awkward situation.

As young Todd faced his prospective employer that chilly day in November, he thought about the events and circumstances that led to this moment. When he graduated with an A.A. degree in computer programming, Todd networked with family, friends, and school contacts to find leads to a job. When these attempts proved fruitless, he sent his resume to all the employers he could find who were advertising for Visual BASIC computer programmers. Eventually, he was called for an interview. Todd chose not to include in his cover letter the fact that he used a wheelchair.

Todd arrived for the interview at the appointed time and had his personal attendant knock on the office door. The large man who answered the door gazed at Todd and asked, "May I help you?" Todd replied, "I'm here for the job interview." The man paused a moment, and then he invited Todd into his office, awkwardly rearranging the furniture to accommodate Todd's wheelchair. The man's first question to Todd was "How did you become disabled?" Although Todd knew that this was not an appropriate question for an employer to ask, he chose to answer it. Eventually, he asked, "How do you use a computer?" By the end of the interview, they were discussing Todd's skills and credentials, not his disability. Todd was offered the position before he left. At eighteen years old, Todd had just landed his first job.

Now Todd lives in his own apartment across the street from his employer and 45 miles from his parents. He works full-time as a computer programmer. He has good friends and an active social life. Though this may seem standard for the average college graduate, these achievements take on a different dimension for a young man who is completely paralyzed below his shoulders.



E-Community Activity: Todd, Family, and Friends

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Todd, family and friends

Read the following story about Todd, and or view the video *Taking Charge 1: Three Stories of Success and Self-Determination* at http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/taking_charge.html. You'll see how Todd's family members and friends have encouraged him to set high goals, work hard, make decisions, and learn from experiences. Tell the group what expectations your family and/or friends have for you.

Todd has not let anyone inhibit his dreams. Nor has he let his disability dictate his goals. He is in charge of his life and is making his own decisions. His disability requires that he modify the way some things get done and allow more time for certain activities, but it hasn't required that he abandon his dreams or release control of his life.

Todd credits much of his success to the supportive yet demanding environment in which he was raised. Todd grew up in a small town where everyone knew him and his family. His father died in a motorcycle accident when he was four. Losing his father made him an angry and difficult boy. "I just went downhill after that. I was so mad and angry inside. I got into a lot of fights and I swore all the time. I was a real bad kid."

A gun accident left Todd with a spinal cord injury when he was eight. From that day he has felt nothing below his shoulders and has used a ventilator to help him breathe at night. On the day he came home after almost a year in the hospital, Todd recalls: "I wasn't even home 30 minutes when my mother and I got into a big fight, screaming and yelling at each other. My grandma came over and she got all upset that we were upset like a chain reaction. My sister came home and she got yelled at. Then we all just sat there and cried."

Life was difficult, but Todd's mother held the family together. She supported them on what she earned from running a beauty salon. Todd credits his mother with teaching him self-determination. He never questioned his mother's conviction that he would grow up, get a job, move out, and lead a typical American life. "My mother instilled in me from day one that there was no room for failure.

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E-Community Activity: Todd, Family, and Friends (continued)

There was no pity in our home. My mother always told me, 'When you're 18, you're out of here.' I never thought once that I'd have a problem finding a place to live or finding work. It never hit me once that I'd have a problem in society. I always knew I would work someday. I knew I had to make a lot of money, because it's expensive to be disabled."

Most people with severe disabilities are unemployed. Todd commends his mother, his faith in God, and the force of his own personality as factors in his successful transition to employment. Access to specialized technology has played a key role in his success as well. Since he cannot type on a standard keyboard, he uses special software to present a keyboard image on the screen. Then he selects letters with a pointing device operated with his mouth.

When Todd was asked why he has succeeded when many individuals with significant disabilities have not, Todd replied, "I keep thinking it's your attitude [and] personality. If it's in your mind that you're going to go for it, you will go for it. I just think it all has to come back to attitude. When you have [a good] attitude, doors open for you. Being disabled and using your disability for good, you have a lot more opportunities than other people—really good opportunities. If you take them, some really neat things can happen in your life."

Todd sees his career in programming as just the beginning for him—an early step in his ongoing journey."There are many, many things I would like to do, like public speaking, teaching. I'd really love to be in radio. I love music. Producing music would be nice. I always thought it would be fun to go to different buildings with contractors and see if their buildings are accessible. I don't know. I have no idea what my purpose here is. But it is something. I pray about it. It's been amazing so far. It's been one adventure after another. It's been a sweet ride. I have no doubt it will continue to be for the rest of my life."



E-Community Activity: Jessie, Randy, Todd, and Success Strategies

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Jessie, Randy, Todd, and success strategies

Jessie, Randy, and Todd, who have disabilities related to learning, sight, and mobility, respectively, try different strategies to achieve success. When one doesn't work, they try something else. Give an example of how trying different strategies has brought success in your life or in the life of someone you admire.



E-Community Activity: Jessie, Randy, Todd, and Awkward Situations

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Jessie, Randy, Todd, and awkward situations

Jessie, Randy, and Todd, who have learning, visual, and mobility disabilities, respectively, have learned to handle awkward situations at times. When Todd arrived for an interview, his future employer asked, "How did you become disabled?" A restaurant employee told Randy his service dog could not come into the establishment. Being able to handle these situations in a positive manner is critical to leading a self-determined life.

Describe an awkward situation you have been in and how you handled it. If you had to do it over, would you handle the situation in a different way? Why?



Mentor Tip: Success

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on success

You can play a significant role in encouraging young people to develop their own definitions of success. You can also help them achieve success. Consider the following suggestions from young people and adults with disabilities who participated in an online discussion about this topic.

- I think teachers and parents need to help their kids understand what it is they want out of life. I believe that happiness is the key factor to a lot of things. It's one of the key factors that goes into picking a school, a career, a spouse, and a home. I believe that success is accomplishing the goals that make you happy.
- Help young people accept their disabilities as a part of who they are yet not allow themselves to be defined by them.
- Provide young people with support that can lead to greater self-confidence, skills, and self-determination.
- Set reasonable boundaries and expectations.
- Help young people make constructive use of their time.
- Model positive values.
- Help kids develop positive friendships and good social skills.
- Understand that you will never be able to shelter kids from everything all of their lives. Let them experience things while they are developing problem-solving skills so that they will be able to decide on their own what they should do and not what they think others want them to do.
- Let them know that their contributions and friendships are valued.
- Teach young people how to use the resources necessary to become independent and achieve a high quality of life. Knowing what's available in the community, taking advantage of those resources, and using them effectively and efficiently are keys to success.



E-Community Activity: Emulating Characteristics of Successful People

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors. The content is from a research study on characteristics of successful people by Mann (1994).

Subject: Emulating characteristics of successful people

Common characteristics of successful individuals with disabilities include

- determination,
- motivation,
- perseverance,
- courage,
- independence,
- resourcefulness,
- ambition,
- positive attitude,
- religious beliefs, and
- family support.

Select one of the characteristics that you would like to make stronger in your life. What can you do to make this characteristic stronger?



E-Community Activity: Achieving Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Achieving success

Everyone has experiences where they are not successful. We can all learn from those experiences.

Describe a situation where you were not completely successful. What could you have done, if anything, to make the outcome more desirable? What could others have done, if anything, to help you?



Mentor Tip: Self-Determination

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tip on self-determination

One of the goals of our e-mentoring community is to help participants become self-determined. Self-determination is "a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults" (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2).

Gaining control of one's life involves learning and then successfully applying self-determination skills. Becoming more self-determined is a gradual, lifelong process. However, adolescence is a critical time to develop these skills. As you communicate with protégés in our electronic mentoring community, think about how your input can move them along the path of self-determination.



E-Community Activity: Defining Self-Determination

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Defining self-determination

"Self-determination" means you have control over your life, something we all strive for. It can be defined as a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in

- goal-directed,
- self-regulated, and
- autonomous behavior.

What does "goal-directed," "self-regulated," or "autonomous" mean to you? Give an example of when you exhibited this quality or when you did not.



E-Community Activity: Characteristics of Self-Determined People

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Characteristics of self-determined people

We know that we can lead more successful, satisfying lives if we are self-determined. But what are some of the characteristics of self-determined people? If you have a high level of self-determination, you are likely to

- know your needs, desires, interests, strengths, and limitations and use this information to make choices.
- be self-confident and have healthy self-esteem.
- be creative.
- have a clear vision of the future.
- feel in control of your life.
- be a good self advocate.
- be a good negotiator.
- have good problem solving skills.
- identify and choose from several options and anticipate consequences for each.
- take responsibility for your decisions.
- manage your behavior and take appropriate actions.
- make future plans based on outcomes of previous actions.
- be persistent.
- know where to find help when you need it.

Name one of these characteristics that you would like to make stronger for you and tell why.



E-Community Activity: Steps Toward Self-Determination

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Taking steps toward self-determination

When you were a baby, adults made all of your choices. As you grow older, you are gradually able to make more decisions for yourself. When you become an adult, you direct your own life.

If you are not yet an adult, tell about something you still need to learn before you are a self-directed adult. What is one thing you can do now to learn this?



Mentor Tip: Commitment to Learning

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on commitment to learning

In a positive relationship with our protégés, you can nurture internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. Forty developmental assets have been identified by the Search Institute as building blocks of healthy development of young people. Internal assets are grouped into four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. I will include some of them in this and three additional messages. Assets associated with a commitment to learning include the following.

Internal Asset	Evidence
Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.
School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.
Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework each school day.
Bonding to school	Young person cares about his or her school.
Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three hours or more per week.

Think about how you can encourage young people to value learning.

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Mentor Tip: Positive Values

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on positive values

Young people need to develop values that guide their choices. Developmental assets in this category identified by the Search Institute include the following.

Internal Asset

Evidence

Caring

Young person places high value on helping other people.

Equality and social justice

Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

Integrity

Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.

Honesty

Young person "tells the truth, even when it is not easy."

Responsibility

Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

Think about ways you can encourage young people to develop positive values.

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Mentor Tip: Social Competencies

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on social competencies

Young people need to develop skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life. Developmental assets in this category identified by the Search Institute include the following.

Internal Asset	Evidence
Planning and decision making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Think about how you can help young people develop social competencies.

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Mentor Tip: Positive Identity

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on positive values

Young people need to develop a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise. Developmental assets in this category identified by the Search Institute include the following.

Internal Asset

Evidence

Personal power

Young person feels he has control over "things that happen to me."

Self-esteem

Young person reports having high self-esteem.

Sense of purpose

Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

Positive view of personal future Young person is optimistic about her or his future.

Think about how you can help young people develop a positive identity.

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Mentor Tip: Self-Development

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on self-development

The types of online activities for teens that I will be sending out to the whole community include recognized strategies for self-development. Among them are role modeling, affirmations, self-assessment, self-reflection, and visualization. Their meaning and value are summarized below.

Role Modeling

On our life journey it helps to know or learn about people who have personal characteristics, life experiences, or interests similar to our own and who have reached goals of interest to us. We learn vicariously through their experiences and can better visualize ourselves as successful. We can also learn specific strategies for reaching our goals. Unfortunately, young people with disabilities rarely have opportunities to interact with successful adults who have disabilities similar to their own.

In many of the online activities for teens in our program, successful young people and adults with disabilities share their experiences, beliefs, and advice. Readers will find some statements they disagree with; others will reinforce their current beliefs; still others they will embrace for the future. Teens with disabilities can learn from these stories and choose to incorporate attitudes and strategies into their own plans for the future.

Affirmations

Everyone draws conclusions about their circumstances, abilities, and performance. But sometimes, perhaps too often, these statements are negative, such as these:

- That was a dumb thing to say.
- I'll never be able to understand math.
- If I didn't have this disability, I would be popular.

continued on next page



Mentor Tip: Self-Development (continued)

In contrast, affirmations are positive statements. Repeated to ourselves regularly, they can change negative beliefs about ourselves and, ultimately, create a more positive self-image. As we begin to repeat affirmations, we do not need to feel that the statements are completely true for us at the time. Rather, they can be considered goals. Examples include the following:

- I am not easily discouraged.
- I can deal with criticism in a positive way.
- Although Dyslexia makes it difficult for me to read, I am smart.

In some of the email messages in our electronic mentoring community, affirmations of successful people with disabilities are provided as examples. Young people should be encouraged to review the affirmations presented and then develop a few affirmations for themselves. You might encourage them to repeat their affirmations every day, maybe several times a day. They could write them on cards to carry as reminders. By repeating them to themselves, they can slowly replace negative beliefs and thoughts with positive ones.

Self-Assessment

Sometimes it is useful for us to assess our current strengths and challenges regarding learning styles, communication, conflict resolution, and other skills in order to gain insight into the best strategies for reaching our goals. In the online activities for teens you will find exercises that promote self-assessment, as well as interactive instruments that can be found on the Internet. These topics can provide a great starting point for a rich dialogue between teens and mentors.

Self-Reflection

We all question why we do things, why things happen to us, and why people treat us in a certain way. However, often these questions are negative and unproductive. Examples include the following:

- Why did I say that?
- Why am I always late?
- Why does the teacher always call on me when I don't know the answer?

continued on next page



Mentor Tip: Self-Development (continued)

- Why can't my parents be more supportive?

With practice, self-reflective questions can be more productive and lead to greater success in the future. Here are some examples:

- What can I learn from getting that poor grade that will help me get a better grade next time?
- How can I respond to a negative comment about my disability next time?
- What did I accomplish at school this week?
- What are my major strengths?
- What can I do now to prepare for college?

Many of the online activities in our electronic community encourage teens to answer questions that help them understand themselves and others more fully and develop success strategies for the future.

Visualization

Through visualization you can imagine your best self or an ideal situation. You can visualize yourself doing well when taking a test, talking to a teacher, making friends, handling a difficult situation, performing in a job interview. Visualizing a specific situation and practicing various responses can help you feel comfortable in that circumstance and increase the chances for a positive experience.

In some of the online activities in this electronic community, participants are asked to visualize themselves participating in a specific activity or acting in a specific, self-determined way. Sharing the experience with others and role-playing a situation can increase the value of the visualization experience.



Mentor Tip: Problem Solving

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on problem solving

The ability to solve problems is a crucial skill in leading a self-determined life. As a mentor you have the opportunity to model this important skill for our protégés. You can use the following process to help protégés learn to identify and solve problems.

1. Identify or clarify the problem. Be specific. Sometimes what seems like one problem is actually two or more separate problems. Focus on one at a time.
2. Outline several possible solutions to the problem. Consider positive and negative aspects of each.
3. Identify the best solution.
4. Identify steps to implement your solution.
5. Implement your solution, making adjustments as necessary.
6. Review the final outcome. Analyze why or why not your solution worked and what you learned from the experience.



E-Community Activity: Advice from Teens

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Advice from teens

Success means different things to different people, and people find it in different ways. Read the following advice from people with disabilities who have been successful personally, socially, academically, and/or professionally. Post a message with advice you would add to the list.

- Don't let others inhibit your dreams.
- Define success for yourself.
- Set goals. Keep your expectations high.
- Don't let your disability or other challenges dictate your goals.
- Look at obstacles as challenges that can be creatively avoided or overcome, in full or in part.
- Develop strategies to reach your goals.
- Plan to work harder than your peers to achieve some goals.
- Become an expert on your abilities and disabilities, how they impact your life, and what accommodations work for you.
- Play to your strengths.
- Use technology as an empowering tool.
- Don't be afraid to fail; you need to take risks to succeed.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Don't use life challenges, such as a disability or family background, as an excuse for failure.
- Find the humor in life's experiences.



E-Community Activity: Success Stories on the Web

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Success stories on the web

There are many people with disabilities who have achieved high levels of success. In this activity you will use the Internet to learn their stories and reflect on your own life.

Read about famous individuals with disabilities on at least one of the websites with the following addresses:

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/cedir/kidsweb/fpwdinfo.html>

<http://www.disabilityhistory.org/people.html>

<http://www.independenceinc.org/trivia.htm>

Choose a person and read about their life in depth. Send a short message to our electronic community, including an answer to at least one of the following questions.

1. What attitudes does this person have that contribute to his/her success?
2. What actions has this person taken to improve his/her life and/or the lives of others?
3. What have you learned from this person's story that you can apply to your own life?



E-Community Activity: Affirming Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Affirming success

Read each of the following statements and think about whether it applies to you now.

- Life is good.
- I don't let others inhibit my dreams.
- I'm an expert on my disability and/or learning challenges, how they impact my life, and what accommodations work for me.
- My disability is only one aspect of who I am.
- My disability does not dictate my goals.
- I have control over the most important aspects of my life.
- I make independent decisions for myself.
- Just because I fail at one thing does not mean I am a failure.
- I use technology to maximize my success.
- I know what I need and when to ask for help.
- I value my friendships.
- I see the humor in life experiences.

Give one example of what you can do to make one of these statements stronger in your life. Tell how a parent, a guardian, a teacher, or another person you know could help you make this statement stronger in your life and how you can obtain their assistance.

