

Role models come from anywhere

Oct 13 , 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

Willie Nelson and his colleagues in the entertainment industry have sung songs about cowboys for many years. One of those songs I especially like contains the verse, "My heroes have always been cowboys." That line brings to mind some advice Willie offers in still another song: "Mamas, don't let your children grow up to be cowboys."

Those simple words drop a big fat hint about the importance of role models in life.

The China Post ran an article last week about health issues affecting the 300 or so generals that serve our country in the military. A recent report by the military's Medical Affairs Bureau (MAB) revealed that obesity lies at the base of many medical problems facing our most senior officers. The article threw all sorts of scary medical jargon at us. We got hit by terms like high Body Mass Index, hyperlipidemia, hyperuricemia, and gastroesophageal reflux disease (CP 10-8-13 p. 15). Boy, that last one sure sounds bad. "Thank heavens I'm not a general," I said to myself. "Otherwise, I might be a high risk candidate for a horrid disease I can't even spell."

Now, the article did eventually turn more positive in tone. It encouraged generals, and presumably all of us in our 50s and 60s, to stay active jogging, swimming and so on.

A legislator responded to this health-related news on our senior military by chastising the generals. The reporter behind the article paraphrased her remarks: "It is ironic that military generals, who are supposed to be the role models for soldiers . . . [have] failed to keep in good shape."

Well, I thought then, now we have more yet to ponder here. It isn't enough to take responsibility for our health, to stay as fit as we can, and all that jazz. It's important as well to consider our positions in life and how our actions may influence others.

Willie had his cowboys, but I am willing to bet we've all got someone of our own, someone we call heroes or, well, role models.

When I was a boy, cowboys were cool in my imagination, and I liked them well enough, but baseball stars were closer to home. The names of the Detroit Tigers were household names for me.

I'm probably the only guy in Taiwan whose hero as a kid was Tiger left-fielder Charlie Maxwell of Paw Paw, Michigan. I liked Charlie's Sunday homeruns, but I liked his sloppy smile, gentility, and his ordinariness more. Around that same time I came to know a Catholic priest ("shen-fu") who eclipsed Charlie Maxwell in my eyes. Father Mueller was his name. He couldn't hit a pop fly, let alone a homerun, but he had Charlie's sloppy smile and quiet, gentle way about him. I looked at him and saw a person didn't have to be flashy to be a success, or the center of attention to be happy. That man changed my life. He was and still is a huge role model for me.

Student leaders have been busy for months organizing "freshman camp" and related activities for university freshmen all over Taiwan. Many of the camps are happening right this minute. I wonder how many "older students" grasp the fact that in many ways they are role models for the newest of students in their departments and universities. Their words about professors, their attitudes about study, money, friends and sex all leave their mark on younger students. Students are role models for other students.

We were thinking about those generals at the top of this page. If generals are role models, are college instructors role models, too? I am no perfect person. Surely I need to be more aware of how my words and behavior impact on the people around me.

For years, I was keenly aware of the presence of student representatives at faculty meetings and sessions of the university senate. Some of those students, at least at certain moments, had their eyes fixed on us. Friends routinely yapping back and forth while administrators struggled to be heard at the front of the room, or absconding from their duties by plunging into laptops for 20 and 30 minutes at a time, or chatting nonchalantly on cell phones, often brought "role model" to my mind.

Whether we realize it or not, someone is learning something from us, someone is watching us, just about all the time. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points :

1. Do you have a hero in life, someone you especially admire? Are you comfortable with the word "role model" in English?
2. Is it fair to expect generals to be role models for the soldiers under their command? Is it fair to expect college teachers to be role models for their students?
3. Are you as a student in some way a role model for other students, especially younger ones?

**本文章僅供讀書會參考使用，非經原作者同意，請勿任意轉載。

師生互動與社會關懷
專欄讀書會