

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Role Model: Should a TV Star Be One? Should You?

By Paul Asay

What Happened

Nickelodeon has cancelled its show “Sam & Cat” after one season on the air. The ratings weren’t bad, so some have guessed the cancellation had something to do with the risqué pictures Jennette McCurdy, who played Sam, posted of herself online.

For her part, McCurdy never wanted to be a role model. After Nick cancelled her show, she said she never had claimed to be perfect and that it was unfair of anyone to think she should be. “To remove myself from the role model battle, the falsified standard set by the bubblegum industry, is—in my eyes—to remove myself from the counterintuitive battle of attempting to be something perfect while being glaringly aware of my imperfections.”

She went on to say that people shouldn’t look for role models in a Nickelodeon comedy—or in the entertainment industry at all for that matter. “Calling a celebrity a role model is like calling a stranger a role model,” she wrote. “The knowledge you have of a celebrity is no more than a caricature drawn by media tastemakers specializing in selling you an image you’re dying to buy.”

“It’s good to have heroes, but you have to look for them in the right places,” she continued. “They say, ‘Don’t look for true love in a bar’; well I say, ‘Don’t look for role models on screens.’”

It’s not the first time we’ve heard a celebrity reject the notion of being a role model. Basketball great and current TNT analyst Charles Barkley is famous for once having said, “I’m not paid to be a role model. I’m paid to wreak havoc on a basketball court.”

A fellow Basketball Hall of Famer countered, telling Barkley, “I don’t think it’s your decision to make. We don’t choose to be role models; we are chosen. Our only choice is whether to be a good role model or a bad one.”

McCurdy’s more recent remarks struck a nerve with some, as well. Prachi Gupta wrote in Salon.com, “the most positive role models are often those who don’t ask to be; they just recognize the power of their celebrity and act accordingly...So, sorry, Jennette McCurdy, whether you embrace it...you’re still a role model. With a little practice, you probably could be a great one.”

Talk About It

Who are your role models? Why? Do you have different role models for different attributes? For example, would you have a different role model for how to compete in sports than for how to act around your family and friends?

McCurdy’s right in that a television show probably isn’t the best place to look for role models, but can you see how people would look up to her anyway? Do you think she still has a responsibility to her young fans to act a certain way? Where *should* people look for heroes?

Are you a role model? Do you think there are people who look up to you: younger siblings? Friends? If so, does that make you consciously try to be a better role model? Do you sometimes feel pressure to behave a certain way so as not to let people around you down? Why?

What the Bible Says

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Ps. 1:13).

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1-2).