

LEADER'S GUIDE



LIFE STEPS
with Michael Pritchard



Program #12

Doing Your Best

Series Overview

LifeSteps is a 12-part series designed to help students build character and develop the social and emotional skills they need to become responsible, caring, and successful adults. With well-developed social and emotional skills, young people will be more aware of their feelings and more capable of managing them. They will be better able to set goals, make decisions, solve problems, and relate to other people effectively. In school, these skills can increase motivation, lessen anxiety, improve study skills and boost academic achievement.

LifeSteps uses lively, unrehearsed student-centered discussion, dramatized dilemmas that accurately reflect teen experience, and themed comic interludes that deliver their message through humor. Filmed with actual students in schools across the country, each program is culturally sensitive and multiethnic. The series covers a broad range of skills and attributes: self-knowledge, self-control, resiliency, empathy, problem solving, developing interpersonal relationships, building character, respect, responsibility, and working towards success. Each of these skills and attributes is an important component of social and emotional intelligence.

The underlying structure of the *LifeSteps* curriculum is an eight-step problem-solving strategy. Explored in depth in Program #6, *Creative Problem Solving*, this strategy is demonstrated in each program and provides students with a flexible, practical approach to managing the social and emotional challenges they face every day. The eight steps are:

- 1. Stop and calm down**
- 2. Name the problem**
- 3. Understand others**
- 4. Brainstorm solutions**
- 5. Evaluate and choose**
- 6. Make a plan**
- 7. Reflect and adjust**
- 8. Reward yourself**

Although each program has unique objectives, they all share the goal of providing students with the above important life skills. The *LifeSteps* approach can help teens think through difficult situations and make good choices, during a stage in their development when they are driven by strong emotions.

How to Use This Program

This program is designed for use in classrooms, community centers, youth organizations, camps, teen groups, libraries, or for children at home. Although teens are the target audience, parents, teachers, school administrators, school support staff, counselors, social workers, youth workers, peer counseling trainers, mentors, and anyone else who has regular contact with, and a commitment to, young people can benefit from the program. This Leader's Guide is aimed at teachers, but it can be used by any group leader who wants to get the most out of *Doing Your Best*.

As with the other programs in the *LifeSteps* series, *Doing Your Best* is intended for use as part of a learning experience that begins before viewing the program and ends beyond the classroom walls. The discussion questions and activities are intended to focus and enhance this learning experience.

Before showing *Doing Your Best* to your students, you may find these steps helpful:

- Screen the program at least once, noting areas where you may want to stop the tape to focus on a particular issue.
- Read this guide through to get a sense of how you can use the program, what discussion questions would work best, and what follow-up activities would be most productive.
- Ask the students questions to get them thinking about some of the key issues presented in this program. You might want to distribute copies of the discussion questions on page 6. Be sure to review the questions in advance to make sure they are clear to you and appropriate for your students. You can then use them to encourage discussion after the screening.

Peer education, rather than frontal teaching, is the technique that underlies the entire *LifeSteps* series. Because we believe that teen viewers will more easily learn the skills and attitudinal changes proposed if they are taught by their peers, the programs are structured around discussions where real teens grapple with tough situations and model positive solutions.

Objectives

- To gain an appreciation of excellence that will encourage the best possible performance
- To develop high personal standards and belief in oneself
- To gain emotional coping skills for dealing with anxiety
- To realize the benefits of an optimistic, hopeful outlook
- To understand the use of goal-setting as a tool for success

Synopsis

Michael opens onstage with a story which illustrates that you'll never be able to do your best, if you're not willing to meet a challenge. Talking to the group of teens, he asks them about the challenges teens face today. One boy talks about his activities and another mentions parental expectations. Saying that "everything counts now," a girl lists extracurricular activities, grades, SATs, and choosing a college as some of her challenges.

Taking an English test, being the first one on the dance floor, and giving a speech in front of a class—Michael asks the group whether they would find these activities challenging. The teens' responses vary; some would be perfectly comfortable and others would feel anxious in each of the activities.

Michael asks for examples of times when pressure was helpful. A boy describes an important football game against a rival team. Acknowledging the effort the team made, Michael says, "You lived for this moment, didn't you?" Sharing how important it was to him, the boy responds that he even saved a piece of grass from the field to help him mark the occasion.

A girl talks about family situations; she tries to be the best for her little sister, who looks up to her. She says she encourages her sister to look on the positive side, and Michael comments on the importance of believing in yourself and pushing on. Another girl shares that, in the past, she never tried hard at school. Now, she thinks about her future; even though she knows she may not be the top at something, she still tries to do her best. A third girl tells about her anxiety at band championships. She calmed herself down by remembering how far the band had already come; knowing how hard they had worked gave her a lot of self-confidence. "What does it do for you to have that moment?" Michael asks, and she answers, "Everything...you feel like you're floating on air."

Onstage, Michael talks about the idea of responding to challenges by finding resources within yourself and bringing your best to whatever you do. He introduces the first dramatization, featuring Carla, who describes herself as liking "to keep a low profile." She dreads speaking in public, and her speech teacher has asked her to give the first speech in class, comparing her to her outgoing, high-achieving older sister.

Michael asks about Carla's emotions. The teens say she has low self-esteem. She is frustrated and wants to break out as an individual, rather than being thought of as "her sister's sister." A girl then shares that she has the same problem with her sister, who is a harder worker. When Michael asks how she is able to maintain her identity, she replies that they are both still individuals.

He asks if Carla should give the speech. One teen says she shouldn't because she might not do as good a job as her sister, while another says she should still try. A third says she would give the speech, but notes that it's important to set your own goals, rather than letting someone else set them for you. In the past, she's set unrealistic goals for herself and has learned not to do that anymore. One girl thinks Carla may learn something new about herself by doing the speech, but should remind the teacher that she is not like her sister.

The group talks about practical ways Carla can help herself. Suggestions include using her own words, practicing in front of her mom or sister so that she'll be less nervous, and recognizing that others in the class will be nervous too and are not grading her. One girl says humor can help, because it makes things easier, and Michael adds that humor is a way to "break out of over worrying yourself."

Michael asks the group about the benefits of overcoming anxiety and pushing forward to do something that makes you nervous. One girl says doing that makes you stronger and gives you an experience you'll remember. She shares her experience at a competition where her class won an award. Knowing that she was doing a good job made her feel "pretty confident."

In the second dramatized segment, the semester is nearly over. Carla has relaxed about giving speeches—and even begun to enjoy doing it. Her grades have been excellent, and her teacher has invited her to join the school debate team. She's honored by the invitation, but concerned about the amount of work and the pressure.

Asked about Carla's feelings, a girl responds that she is in the same situation as before, only with a higher level of pressure. Michael comments that Carla's learned she is better than she thought, and members of the group offer similar examples from their own lives. These experiences taught them to trust, rather than doubt, themselves, the teens say. If succeeding in debate is a long-term goal for Carla, what does she have to consider, Michael asks. A girl says Carla needs to stay focused, and then talks about the sacrifices she's made for an activity she loves. If you have a passion for something, why should you be willing to sacrifice, Michael asks. The girl responds that Carla's opportunity to debate is a chance that may not come again; she might always wonder "what if..." if she doesn't join the team.

Onstage, Michael tells a story about the artist Claude Monet, whose work went unrecognized throughout a good part of his life. Nevertheless, Monet continued to follow his dream, finally achieving recognition in his sixties.

He introduces the third dramatization. Carla's team is at the state debate finals, and with one more win, will go to the nationals. Her family is there to see her speak. On the side, her sister gives her a note about a web address that has speeches on her topic and tells her "Do what you need to do to win."

Again, Michael asks about Carla's feelings. A girl notes that her sister has provided Carla with an easy option. Other teens add that Carla may feel that winning is better than losing, and that she won't want to let anyone down; pressure pushes you to do things, one girl says. Another girl raises the possibility that Carla may get caught, and a boy says he wouldn't be able to look at himself in the mirror if he cheated. Another girl says she's gotten good grades by cheating in the past, but the grades didn't make her feel successful because they weren't really hers. She'd actually be cheating herself, some teens say, because she'd never know if she could have succeeded on her own.

Michael asks the group what skills are needed to do your best. One boy says "Hard work," adding that at the end of the day, he asks himself whether he did what he had to do that day. A girl offers that she's accepted that her best may be a "C," but she's learned to set standards for herself.

What about hope and optimism, Michael asks. One girl says they make you stronger and another agrees, saying that positive thinking takes you farther. And why is it important to persevere, Michael asks. A boy talks about his dance group; they performed at the Apollo, a famous theater in New York. Over the course of three years, they progressed from fourth place to second place to winning the competition. Michael asks the boy what role hope played, and the boy responds that hope built his confidence. Michael notes that the boy "brought his best."

Concluding the program, Michael urges teens to make the most of their futures, free themselves from fear, and aim as high as they can.

Discussion Questions

1. What are three personal qualities that are important to success? Think of a person you know who has any or all of these qualities. How have these qualities helped that person succeed?
2. People differ in their perception of stress. Some teens in the program would find it hard to give a speech in class; others would not mind at all. What events do you find stressful? How do you react when you feel pressured?
3. In trying to do your best, does anxiety help you or hold you back? Give a specific example—positive or negative—of the effect anxiety has had on your performance.
4. Although Carla is initially concerned about her ability to do well in speech class, she is eventually very successful. Have you ever been in a similar situation? What did you do to help yourself overcome your concerns, and what was the outcome?
5. A girl in the group talks about a teacher who helped her to develop her writing abilities beyond what she thought she could do. Has anyone in your life ever encouraged you to try something you were hesitant about? What happened? How did it make you feel?
6. Why is it important to think positively? What do you think the phrase "self-fulfilling prophecy" means? Tell about a time when positive thinking helped you achieve a goal.
7. How do goals help people succeed? Which do you think are more motivating: goals you set yourself or goals others set for you? Explain your answer.
8. If Carla won the competition using one of the speeches from the website, what effect would it have on the value of her success?
9. What do you feel are the biggest obstacles to your future goals and plans? How can you overcome these obstacles?
10. Michael asks the group what optimism and hope do for people, and concludes that these qualities help people do their best. Do you agree? How can you develop an optimistic outlook?

Activities

1. In the children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*, the little engine tells himself "I think I can" and then succeeds by changing his message to "I know I can." Write a story or a poem for children, illustrating the power of positive self-talk.

2. Select two courses you are currently taking and set a long-term goal for each. Decide on the interim steps needed to help you reach those goals. Then design a chart that displays both your long-term goals and the interim steps. Display the chart where you will see it often as you progress toward your goals. In periodic class wide discussions, talk about how you and your classmates can support each other in reaching your goals.
3. Research a career that interests you, focusing on what preparation and personal qualities are important for success in that field. If possible, interview an adult who has been successful in the field you've chosen. Summarize your findings in a brief essay, or start a class website, posting what you have learned about different jobs and providing the opportunity for others to add to it.
4. Organize a "Top Ten" poster contest, inviting submissions on a variety of categories, such as "The Top Ten Ways to Prepare for Tests," "Motivate Yourself," "Do Service in Your Community," etc. Display the winning posters from each category in a public area of your school or community.
5. Select one of these questions and brainstorm in small groups: What techniques are effective in dealing with stress? How can you develop a positive attitude? What skills do you need to do your best? Agree on your five best responses and present them to the larger group. Then, as a group, develop a list of the ten best responses. Use the remaining questions for another brainstorming session.



About Michael Pritchard

Youth educator, humorist, actor, former probation officer, and PBS host, Michael Pritchard is known across the United States for his ability to help young people gain self-awareness. He has a unique ability to get teens to listen and open up, and uses his distinctive style of humor to share serious messages with his audience—messages about making good choices, personal responsibility, and respect for others.

Michael's award-winning series include: *SOS: Saving Our Schools*; *PeaceTalks*; *You Can Choose*; *The Power of Choice*; and *Big Changes, Big Choices*. A nationally acclaimed motivational speaker, Michael serves on the boards of directors for The Guardsmen, The Giants Community Fund, the Special Olympics, the California Association of Peer Programs, the Chinese-American Educational Institute, Ronald McDonald House, and the Salvation Army.



Program Titles

- Program #1 The ABCs of Emotional Intelligence
- Program #2 Knowing Who You Are
- Program #3 Taking Charge
- Program #4 Bouncing Back
- Program #5 Empathy, Caring and Compassion
- Program #6 Creative Problem Solving
- Program #7 Getting Along with Others
- Program #8 Building Character
- Program #9 Respect
- Program #10 Responsibility
- Program #11 Developing Healthy Relationships
- Program #12 Doing Your Best

Each program is approximately 30 minutes long.

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