



Mentoring Future Leaders

By Pat K. Patterson

Leading by serving may sound like a contradiction in terms. In reality, highly motivated, service-oriented, creative, effective, and ethical leaders graduate from The Servant Leadership Program at Columbus State University. Through study, experiential learning, self-awareness, modeling, and mentoring, students learn management skills. They develop relationships with AFLAC role models and get first-hand experience of corporate level leadership.

Each year AFLAC mentors the program's junior class of participants. Two other corporations mentor freshmen and sophomores.

During their senior year, students are matched with individual mentors

in their study field from various corporations.

Servant leadership is so successful at AFLAC that many mentors ask to participate for more than one year. That's what happened to **Bob Ottman**, second vice president AFLAC Administrative Services.

Bob liked what he read about servant leadership in the *AFLAC Family Album* and decided to get involved.

As a single dad and father of three sons, ages, 15, 18, and 20, Bob realizes the importance of mentoring tomorrow's leaders today.

During the 2001–2002 year, Bob began mentoring Chris Wiggins, then a junior business major at Columbus State University (CSU).

"Chris and I connected right away at all levels," says Bob. "We met for lunch at least once a month and talked about everything from daily life to

college to servanthood."

Servant leadership students must maintain a high GPA, devote a minimum number of hours to community work, and mentor an elementary student.

So, between educational, corporate, personal, and community responsibilities, getting together wasn't always easy.

"We developed a great relationship over the years," shares Bob. "We have faithfully met no matter how hectic our lives were." Bob and Chris really enjoy each other and have both benefited from the mentoring experience.

Bob's kids aren't much younger than Chris. By mentoring Chris, Bob began to view his relationships with his sons differently.

"As a single parent, you have full responsibility for everything," Bob says.

Through the mentoring program, he realized "sometimes you have to step out of the role of parent, and step into the role of mentor, even with your own children."

This experience changed his relationship with his children in a very positive and rewarding way, Bob says. He is very thankful AFLAC makes these programs available for employees.

Chris asked to continue his mentoring relationship with Bob into his senior year. In May 2003, their formal mentor relationship ended when Chris graduated from the Servant Leadership Program and CSU to begin his career.

Serving the Future

By Lauren Leach

"The time you spend in Servant Leadership," says **Brian Abeyta**, second vice president, Project Management Office, "pays dividends in your life and the life of someone else."

This is Brian's second year mentoring Columbus State University juniors in the Servant Leadership program.

"They are really sharp students who are very mature and energetic," he says.

Last year, he mentored a biology major; this year, a computer science major. They meet frequently over lunch or at the college campus.

His connection with the program began when his first AFLAC supervisor asked if he would like to participate. When she described the program, Brian knew it was for him.

He looks forward to time with the students.

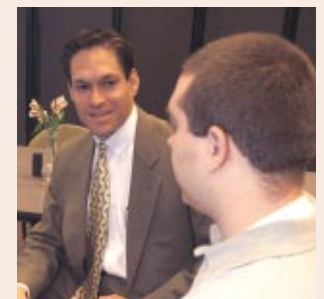
"I'll miss our time together," reflects Bob. "It's been a good time to refocus on the real priorities of life. Many times it was my lunch with Chris that would give me the perspective I needed to address some very challenging issues at work and at home. It has also been a refreshing experience. I know our future is in good hands—these students are talented and focused." Bob is sure he will follow the young man's career.

Bob is committed to passing the baton of servanthood to others. He is excited to see the Servant Leadership Program growing and nurturing both AFLAC and the community. He wants to continue with a new student this fall.

"At AFLAC, my role is to lead by serving employees," Bob says with conviction. "I am honored to have the opportunity to mentor and work with each of my employees."

In fact, since participating in the Servant Leadership Program, Bob has helped his division launch the Right Start Program, encouraging mentoring at all levels. It uses a pass-the-baton approach in helping employee development. Right Start has a big impact on morale.

"Mentoring has to happen continuously," shares Bob. "To reach our full potential, we learn from each other. We will learn best by serving each other first. Mentoring produces a beautiful relationship—guaranteed to make people want to be a part of your team and your company."



"They teach me a lot about enthusiasm," he says. "If I can leave a mark on them in a positive way, it will be worth it."

He remembers and appreciates the examples in his life of extraordinary servant leaders: his parents, teachers, Air Force officers, and a supervisor in Atlanta.

In his two years at AFLAC, Brian has looked up to the AFLAC executives as role models by which to fashion his own leadership style.

"I see this mentoring quality in them," he says. "I'm still learning how to lead. This is an opportunity for me to practice that. It's effective. It's appropriate. It's really valued."