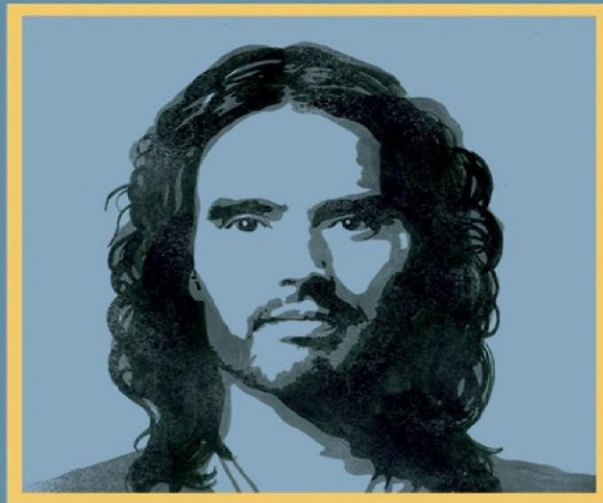


# RUSSELL BRAND



# MENTORS

HOW TO HELP AND BE HELPED

# RUSSELL BRAND

## MENTORS

HOW TO HELP AND BE HELPED



bluebird  
books for life

For my daughters

# CONTENTS

CONTENTS .....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	5
AMONG LOST BOYS: THE TIME BEFORE MENTORS .....	11
THE FIRST MENTOR: INITIATION WITH A DEVOTED ATHEIST .....	15
MENTOR TWO: ZEN NURTURE FROM THE WISE WOMAN.....	22
MENTOR THREE: THE GOODISON GURU .....	27
MENTOR FOUR: THE WARRIOR ON THE MAT .....	40
MENTOR FIVE: THE PARK BENCH MERLIN.....	53
MENTOR SIX: THE APHRODITE OF THE DAMNED .....	61
MENTOR SEVEN: THE DIVINE MOTHER.....	69
MISSED CHANCES: BEFORE THE STUDENT IS READY.....	79
MENTOR EIGHT: THE BROTHER SWAMI .....	85
FATHERHOOD: HOW TO PRACTISE .....	97
BECOMING A MENTOR .....	106
ANSWERING THE CALL.....	114
THE 12 STEPS.....	130

# INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard Brian Cox or any other particle physics genius (they're ten a penny after all!) describing the vastness of our universe? The likelihood that even beyond its fathomless reach are more and more, likely an infinity, of universes? When I, with my blunt intellect, fondle these imponderables I feel suspended between awe and despair. Within the infinite all forms of measurement become meaningless as they can only refer to parochial patterns; time and the laws of physics only local customs in our universal village.

When I hear Cox speaking of Carl Sagan, however, the giant star of astronomy who inspired the then adolescent scientist, I feel held between awe and hope. Sagan was a mentor to Cox. Although they never met, Sagan functioned as a mental symbol, a target, a role model that the younger man could emulate on his own journey to greatness.

A hero is an emblem that demonstrates the possibility of inner drives becoming manifest. It could be John Lennon, whose journey from ordinariness to greatness, from glamour to domesticity, from grandeur to humility provides coordinates to others who want to undertake a comparable journey. It might be Amma, the Indian teacher and mystic whose certainty of God's love has generated

profound social change across Asia. Her devotion has inspired others through philanthropic works to establish schools and build hospitals and homes. At first, of course though, she was dismissed as a mad teenage girl in a fishing village in Kerala going into trances and cuddling everyone. People thought she was nuts. Greatness looks like madness until it finds its context.

Mentorship is a thread that runs through my life, now in both directions. I have men and women that I turn to when the way ahead is not clear and younger people that look to me for guidance in their own crazy lives. Note that the mentor's role is not solely as a teacher, although teaching is of course a huge part of it. When Cox talks admiringly about Carl Sagan it is not just because of his academic expertise, it is because he felt personally guided by him. Watching Sagan's emotional take on science in *Cosmos*, was the trigger that made Cox, at twelve, decide to be a scientist.

We choose mentors throughout our lives, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, sometimes wisely, sometimes not. The point of this book is to understand this process and to improve it. When selecting a mentor we must be aware of what it is we want from them. When we are selected as a mentor we must know what the role entails. One of the unexpected advantages that my drug addiction granted me is that the 12 Step process of recovery that I practise includes a mentorship tradition.

When you enter a 12 Step program, you have to ask someone else to guide you through the steps, or ‘sponsor’ you. This typically induces an unwitting humility; few people would say ‘Hey, babe, it’s your lucky day – I want you to take me on a spiritual journey.’ Usually one feels a little shy on asking someone to sponsor them, a little meek, a bit like you’re asking them on a date. In undertaking this we accept that our previous methods have failed, that we need help, that our own opinions are inferior to the wisdom of the mentor and hopefully the creed that they belong to. In 12 Step custom the sponsor teaches the sponsee the method by which they practised the 12 Steps; they replace their own sponsor, and they give to another what they have been given. Whilst it may bear personal inflections, it is sufficiently faithful to the original program to inhere its power. The same, I note, is true in martial arts traditions, there’s a lineage and a system that is carried from teacher to student. Clearly there are parallels in academia, but anyone who’s been to school knows that mass education can be pretty inconsistent and the average harried educator has too many bureaucratic and financial burdens to mindfully endow more than a handful of pupils with the elixir of mentorship.

In this book I will talk to you about my mentors, how they have enhanced my life in practical and esoteric, obvious and unusual ways, by showing me that it is possible to become the person I want

to be in spite of the inner and outer obstacles I face. I will encourage you to find mentors of your own and explain how you may better use the ones you already have. Furthermore I will tell you about my experience mentoring others and how invaluable that has been on my ongoing journey to self-acceptance, and how it has helped me to transform from a bewildered and volatile vagabond to a (mostly) present and (usually) focused husband and father.

I have mentors in every area of my life: as a comic, a dad, a recovering drug addict, a spiritual being and as a man who believes that we, as individuals and the great globe itself, are works in progress and that through a chain of mentorship – and the collaborative evolution of systems – we can improve individually and globally, together.

Sometimes in my live shows I ask the audience if they belong to any groups: a football team, a religious group, a union, a book club, a housing committee, rowing club – I am surprised by how few people have a tribe. Whilst the impact of globalization on national identity cannot yet be fully understood, I can certainly appreciate the reductive appeal of statist myth. I become ultra English during a World Cup, the last one in particular was like a jolly revival of the ‘death of Diana’ in its ability to pull a nation together in collective hysteria. But soon enough the bunting comes down, the screens in public squares go black and we are atomized once more. The space



between us no longer filled with chants, ditties and ‘in jokes’, eyes back on the pavement, attention drawn within. I’m not suggesting the deep alienation that Late Capitalism engenders can be rinsed away by joining a bowling club, but it’s a start, and having a teacher within the group to which you belong provides intimacy and purpose. In the guru traditions of India the love between teacher and student surpasses all other forms, for here it is explicit that what is being transferred in this relationship is nothing short of God’s love and how an individual can embody the divine.

We live in lonely and polarized times, where many of us feel lost and fractured. It is evident in our politics but political events reflect deeper and more personal truths. I’ve been trying for a while now to explain what I feel is happening in the societies that I’m familiar with, by which I mean Europe, Australia, the United States – not that I’m claiming to be a sociologist, I don’t have a clue how to approach whatever the hell may be happening in Pakistan or China, but here, here in our post-secular edge lands where the old ideas are dying and the new ones not yet born, I feel a consistent and recognizable yearning for meaning beyond the dayglow ashes of burnt-out consumerism, lurching dumb zombie nationalism, starchy, corrupt religion and the CGI circus of modern mainstream media. I’ve been watching for a long time and I knew before Trump, Brexit, radicalism and the ‘new right’ that something serious was

up. You know it too. Sometimes we despair and sometimes we distract because it seems like too much for one person to tackle and we've forgotten how to collude. Yet alone I am nothing.

## CHAPTER ONE

# AMONG LOST BOYS: THE TIME BEFORE MENTORS

No one escapes childhood unscarred. The raw animalism is crudely sculpted by events and best intentions. Drives designed to survive and thrive in a world we have long concreted over thrash against screens and surge with sugar. And now in practice, as a dad, my tender sentimentalism is tested by the iron will of a toddler – ‘I’ll nurture that wild and perfect spirit’ at 3 a.m. becomes ‘Oh God. Oh dear Lord, make this fucking child go to sleep’. Does anyone cross as vast a terrain as the Rousseauian idealist turned parent? If a conservative is a mugged liberal, a dad is a knackered Jesus.

No child is awake enough to appoint a mentor, you take what you are given; it isn’t until adolescence that we grope beyond the boundaries of Mum & Dad, or whoever was doing that job. Some boys give that job to peers in gangs, some girls give it to ponies but, for all of us, beyond these narrow roles are scores of Ben Kenobis and Maya Angelous just dying to pass on a lifetime of twinkling wisdom. Worth noting that if the teen craving for an idol is soaked up by vapid consumerism, all that hormonal good intent could get splurged on a digital Kardashian or wrung out on a beatboxing

pipkin in a backward baseball cap. Yes, yes, the adolescent wants coitus but what does the wanting want?

Our glacial days of digital perennialism place us in a constant 'now' without ever really being present, and icons are torn apart. No sooner does a hero rise than she is exposed as a hypocrite. Malcolm X was a rent boy, Gandhi had some odd nocturnal habits and even Che, the obligatory teen portal into rebellious sentience, was a homophobic murderer. Too Much Information; the iconoclasm of our omniscient but omni-dumb days unweaves the carpets that we may have walked upon and leaves us in the wasteland of the 'only human'.

Before I was awake to such things as conscious mentorship, I adored my older cousins and they begat Morrissey, who shone the torch of adulation on Jimmy Dean and Oscar Wilde. Each retains a place in the 'constellation of self' as I blaze into my middle years. My cousins with their chip-toothed Essex cool, Moz's elevation of suffering, Dean's sexy damage, and Wilde is a little too complex to skip over with a handful of adjectives but, God, the tragedy, the wit, the ambiguity, the social conscience and the contradiction.

We make ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, building patterns in the infinite, holding on to strands amidst the limitless, sometimes grasping through fear, sometimes clutching with desire. Through proper mentorship, a transition of skills, a nurture of

energy can take place that instantiates an adult from the beautiful wreckage of childhood, a sober man from the drunk, a master from the student, a mother from the girl.

When I was sixteen I left home in search of my misfortune and quickly found it. It was in Bermondsey. There's enough misery in South London for everyone, it wasn't as cool then as it's meant to be now. There I holed up with some Lost Boys, two years older and a great deal wiser, and in my mind I made them legends. When I look back now at these eighteen-year-old lads I see that they were herberts but I needed them to be cool, so cool is what I saw. Question: is there an objective 'reality' or a series of interdependent mental projections? In other words, was Hitler a kind of nationally conjured totem to re-energize castrated and enraged Germany? Were The Beatles a quadrant of awakening shamans that carried a generation from plodding rock, to sexy pop, then psychedelia and ultimately consumerism? The events in the outer world are governed by subtler energies, many of which pass through our collective psyche. No doubt meteors and hurricanes shape environment but culture, by definition, is the manifestation of human drives.

There are patterns, shapes and archetypes that recur.

At nineteen when I first saw the already dead Bill Hicks I felt a bodily transference. I'm not claiming to be entitled to the mantle of

the great American stand-up, there's enough people doing that, but I felt empowered and inspired by him. Inspired – he put breath into me. And breath is life. It is curious to me that in early life my mentors were remote. Famous or dead or both. It wasn't until Chip Somers that I chose to emulate another man in order to move from one state to another.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE FIRST MENTOR: INITIATION WITH A DEVOTED ATHEIST

A recovering drug addict is a contradiction by definition and Chip is a fine example. A nerd bank robber. Middle-class scum. Pious atheist. I didn't make him a mentor when he diagnosed my addiction, at that point he was just the bloke who ran the treatment centre I was unwillingly being packed off to, someone I'd have to charm into letting me out at some point. For all I knew there would be a test and a certificate. In fact there was: drug tests and a kind of 'well done, you' certificate – like 'Sports Day Medals for Everyone' at a progressive school.

When I met Chip he had been clean for a little longer than I have now, sixteen years. He'd been trawling London with zealous dogoodery, interfering in the life of Davina McCall and was friends with Eric Clapton, so he had credentials. Of course I was not famous at this time but if you'd cut me open I was pure ambition. Well, not pure, I was significantly contaminated with crack and heroin – that was the problem.

Chip had been a far worse drug addict than I was. For one thing he was intravenous, for another he served real time for proper crime; in the warped ecology of junkies and inhabitants of the underworld that means he had status. More practically it meant I could trust him on the subject of addiction and the business of quitting drugs.

In this case there was the added advantage that I had been institutionalized and that there was a clear endpoint in mind – abstinence – and a method to achieve it: 12 Step recovery. Perhaps these are the perfect conditions for mentorship: a mentor, a mentee, a method and an institute. The Hindu guru–disciple relationship typically functions along these lines, as does martial arts training. Interestingly, neither of these paths have an obvious western counterpart; the most obvious comparison – trade apprenticeship – is contextualized by commerce and professional necessity. In my experience, mentorship is more successful when there is no financial component.

The most immediate and obvious thing that Chip taught me was that it is okay to talk about your feelings, more than okay, mandatory. In fact that's all we did, talked about feeling vulnerable, inadequate, fearful and angry. Honesty is non-negotiable in a relationship of this nature because you need to trust someone if you're going to allow them to help you, and they of course need to



be dealing with the truth of who you are, not the Facebook, press-release version of yourself you've been fobbing the world off with up till now. Through his honesty, Chip demonstrated that it was safe to be vulnerable; through his own abstinence and change he showed me that the task I had to undertake – to give up drugs and alcohol – was entirely achievable and he told me what I would have to do. What I brought to the relationship, I now know, was Honesty, Open-mindedness and Willingness – known as 'HOW' in 12 Step jargon. This is the attitude I deploy still in any relationship where I am the student. Whether in meditation, Jiu Jitsu or business affairs I approach my teacher, my 'mentor', in an honest, openminded and willing way. I recognize that they have something I want, that they have achieved something that I haven't, that as I am in the moment I sit before them, I am insufficient, and for the transfer of energy or education to take place I must be mentally and spiritually prepared. This is as true for a yoga class as it is for a Spanish lesson or therapy.

No wonder my high school education was a washout. On the days I showed up I sat detached, glum, angry and impenetrable. I did not want what the teachers had to offer, I wanted to go home. But to be fair to teenage me, because I've learned to love that little guy, while the schools I went to may have declared that they were there to educate, they were in fact, unconsciously or otherwise, there to indoctrinate their charges into a state of malleability and passivity.

Generally educational bodies do not exist to bring out your innate brilliance but to monger your wayward nature into a unit of manageable energy that will not be too disruptive to the social systems that benefit the powerful.

Chip was not about that at all. He was a kind and caring man, it was clear to me – even then – that he felt invested in my wellbeing. In the intervening years I have changed so much that it is hard to recall the vulnerability I felt then or how alien Chip’s kindness was.

In the three months that I was in treatment I was given written tasks to complete that were formulated around the first three of the 12 Steps:

1. Admit you have a problem.
2. Believe in the possibility of change.
3. Ask for help and follow suggestion.

In practice this meant providing accounts of when my drinking and drug use put me in danger or caused me to behave regrettably, examples of new habits I could adopt to support change, and ways in which I could get help that weren’t previously available.

Nearly sixteen years later I use this formula when dealing with less critical problems of my own, and when mentoring other people. It is a near universal template. Having Chip as a witness and a guide as I undertook this as a novice was invaluable. When I gave accounts of the consequences of my drug use he was non-

judgemental and offered stories of his own. He was able to validate ideas I had about how to change my habits and patterns and suggest better ones; and, importantly, he was a living demonstration of the success of the methods. He was also the first person that I was able to ask for help in a way that felt safe and free from hidden or unclear obligation. This is the first, and in a way most vivid, example of mentorship because the intention was so explicit, transition from drug user to abstinence; the method was established, the 12 Steps; and the environment supportive, a treatment centre for addiction. This meant that the relationship between Chip and myself had a good chance of succeeding as long as I was honest, open and willing, was able to accept my own flaws, believe I could change and give Chip the authority to steward that change. His obvious compassion, humour, honesty and experience meant that my decision to trust him felt safe. When I read my life story to him, a common therapeutic exercise which gives your mentor an idea of your version of events and forces you to commit yourself to a narrative, he said, and I remember this most vividly and it still elicits a little, inward shudder, 'Poor, lonely, little boy.'

Hearing him say that made me feel understood but humbled, like I no longer needed to inflict an impression of myself on others, that I was no longer required to dupe or trick people into accepting a version of me that I constructed as I went along. It kind of winded

me. It meant that I could accept that my shameful feeling about being that little boy could be addressed head on. It meant that I could tell Chip saw the truth in what I wrote. My mate Matt read the same life story the night before I handed it in, he'd come to visit me in treatment, rather sweetly. Let me tell you his assessment of the work was less sympathetic, he wrung it out for comedy in the most brutal fashion, cruelly pointing out my unconscious attempt to present my life as a kind of rock 'n' roll bio, scoffing at the bits where I 'lived above pubs', and coldly undermining the self-aggrandizing tone. Humbling in another way. For this reason I have peers, to remind me where the boundaries of my tribe lie. But if I want to get beyond these boundaries I will need a mentor. Chip didn't take the piss. It would've been pretty unforgivable if he had (!). He saw past all the posturing and grandeur to the deeper truth; I was an uninitiated man and I needed to be recognized and encouraged.

The mentorship Chip gave me was a success, and the goal of every student is to surpass the master. I may never have achieved this goal but I did become clean; once clean I could resume my all-consuming quest for glory and with that I was alone once more, untethered, fatherless. The encoded individualism runs so deep in me that once the obvious symptoms of addiction had been addressed, its power reasserted, and for a decade I was lost in