

# Excerpts from 10 Who Mentor: Inspiring Insights from Creative Leaders

By Denise Korn with Neal Kane



*IT'S EASY TO BE AVERAGE. IT'S HARDER TO BE EXCELLENT, BUT THAT'S THE GOAL.*

*MENTORS CAN'T HAVE HUGE EGOS.*

*IT'S NOT ABOUT "ME, ME, ME."*

*KNOW AND BELIEVE IN YOUR OWN WORTH AND VALUE BEFORE YOU CAN BEGIN TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON OTHERS.*

\*\* ISBN: 978-0-615-41890-2. This book may be purchased at <http://www.youthdesign.org>  
All proceeds will benefit Youth Design, Inc.

President and executive director of the Celebrity Series of Boston, Marty Jones wears many hats, overseeing the artistic and educational programming, senior staff, budget development, and major financial support generation for this internationally renowned arts presenting organization. She took a break from her busy schedule to meet with us in her Celebrity Series office where we discussed the power of art to instill self-confidence, the importance of listening, and the triumphs that result when we aspire toward excellence.

DENISE KORN: Was there one person or event that inspired you to pursue the creative life?

MARTY JONES: There was no particular person, but there were several whose advice, support, sense of adventure, strong character, and generosity of spirit infused me with a great sense of self-worth and optimism. Of course, my first true mentors were my mother and father, both of whom modeled values of love, honesty, integrity, hope, good manners, and kindness toward others, as well as a love of the arts.

DK: Your parents sound like amazing role models.

M.J: I grew up in a typical 1950s household in Louisville. My parents were both leaders in their own way: My father was the leader in his job and my mother was the leader of the house and the kids. From them, I learned both a sense of purpose and a sense of discipline. I call myself "a right-down-the-middle left-brain/right-brain person," and I've spent my career mastering which side of my brain I need to call on at different times. Sometimes, it's the combination of both that allows me to take the risks I need to take in my business.

DK: You definitely haven't followed the traditional path of your parents.

M.J: No, I haven't. I followed my instincts. I followed my dream. In the 1950s, you had a role to play and my mother played that role, but I always sensed that there was some other role awaiting me. I never paid attention to obstacles that might discourage me from moving in a different direction.

One example of this occurred 25 years ago, when I went through a major lifestyle change, including the loss of contact with a child I was parenting. At that time, I made the decision to leave a comfortable job as director of marketing and PR for the Huntington Theatre Company and pursue another direction in the arts while also beginning the process of adopting a child.

I knew I could be a great leader and an equally great parent, so why not begin?

M.J: It's not only about creative talent, but any talent, which is why I'm choosing to retire from running the Celebrity Series after 25 years to work full time with mentoring and helping arts organizations, including those who work with underserved populations, improve their behavioral infrastructure. So many children are born-into socioeconomically depressed situations; they have little control over their environment and they don't even know the possibilities that exist for them.

Technology also has its effect. Don't get me wrong: I love technology and what it's done for our society, but it has had consequences - in particular, the disappearance of a simple, innocent life. I don't think there's innocence now for children past about the age of 6. They see celebrity athletes and performers and hear about all the money they have - the bling, the gazilliondollar mansions - and it's a temptation for them. Too much exposure to that kind of thing becomes an obstacle and a distraction. They believe that this is what they want, but their parents also tell them that they're not going to be able to achieve that level of success. If you truly want to engage in mentoring, you have to understand that you can't look into people's eyes via the Internet; you can't see the soul or the spirit emerge. You need to work with kids directly to build their confidence and move them toward the realization of their dreams.

DK: SO for you, the task lies in helping kids identify their passion and move toward it. How do you approach that with them?

M.J: I talk to them about opportunities and how to look for possibilities. I come to it from the standpoint of being true about who I am and being honest and forthright with them, talking to them in a way that is nonjudgmental, asking about them. Listening is key.

DK: What sparked your own interest in the arts?

M.J: I was always interested in drama. I fell in love with the theater when I was 12 and I was allowed to stay up late and watch the Oscars. The following summer, I worked as the drama assistant in a day camp for kids between the ages of 5 and 8. Even then, I understood that the arts was a powerful form of communication- one that could lift children up and give them a sense of themselves that they didn't have five minutes earlier.

DK: You were a mini-mentor.

M.J: I was a mini-mentor at age 12. I've just always loved kids. I've always believed that many adults don't think children are capable of the things that they actually are capable of. I believe that if you give children the opportunity, they will excel. I certainly couldn't articulate that when I was 12, but I've always believed it.

DK: How do you integrate your mentoring activities with your other professional and personal responsibilities?

M.J: I weave mentoring into my whole life. I don't think of it as a separate function from who I am or what I do for a living. It's part of the whole package. I essentially try to give the best advice I can, model the best practices I know, and let go of the outcome. If you try to control the outcome, the mentoring becomes about you and not about the other person.

DK: What compels you to reach out to others in this way?

M.J: It sometimes comes out of frustration, especially when I see girls who need stronger female role models, but mostly it stems from a wish to see great leaders the arts as we go into the future. Careers in arts management were relatively new when I came into the business in the early '70s, and I'd like to leave things in better shape than when I entered. Helping others achieve their goals helps me, too. I learn just as much from my child and my young mentees as they do from me.

DK: What makes a good mentor? Does it require a certain temperament?

M.J: It's probably not a comfortable role for everyone. Basically, mentors can't have huge egos - you can't be thinking of me, me, me. I try to exude a great attitude at all times, even when I don't feel good or I'm having a bad day. I think smiling, laughing, and generally being upbeat makes people around you feel better about their work and about themselves.

OK: Who are your mentors?

M.J: One is the conductor and composer Rob Kapilow. He does a program called "What Makes it Great" where he takes a piece of classical music and demystifies it for you. He's so creative, so talented, and he has mentored me in many ways. He has always told me, "Listen for the possibilities, not only in music but in life. Don't look for them. Listen." He's been very inspirational. When I was first named the Celebrity Series executive director, he asked me if I was scared. I said, "Well, I wouldn't say scared, but I'm nervous." He said, "Good. You're supposed to be nervous. The biggest risk-takers of the world don't have nerves of steel. They just have guts."

DK: What one word sums up your professional and creative mission? What do you get out there and fight for every day?

M.J: Excellence. It's easy to be average. It's harder to be excellent, but excellence breeds excellence. The Celebrity Series' mission is to present the very best in the performing arts from around the world. We'll take a chance on performers we think are on a trajectory of excellence. We've been around more than 70 years because people trust us to deliver that caliber of experience.

DK: I think when you translate that to your mentoring, you open up even more possibilities for kids to achieve amazing things.

M.J: Exactly. When I talk to kids, I tell them about accountability and taking responsibility. I'm not going to walk the walk for them. They have to walk it themselves. But I'm going to give them tools they need to achieve their own excellence.

DK: Can you share a mentoring success story?

M.J: In the second year of AileyCamp, our community summer outreach program for middle school students that we created in partnership with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a young girl came to us from a very dysfunctional family and socioeconomic environment. She had done her own fundraising so she could come to the camp and study dance. The director took her under her wing and we all kept telling her, "Reach higher, reach higher! You can do this!" And she did. She eventually graduated from college, and she came back to be our ballet instructor at AileyCamp this year, nine years after attending herself. That's the power of reaching for excellence.

DK: What advice do you have for other creative leaders who would like to impact the next generation through mentoring?

M.J: Ask yourself what motivates you to go to work every day. Ask yourself if you think that you matter in the world, to the business you're working in, the child you're raising, or the partner you're in love with. You have to know your own worth and your own values before you can begin to have an impact on others. If you know the answers to these questions, then you're already on your way to being a mentor.

DK: What would you most like to be remembered for by those you've mentored?

M.J: I was helpful, fair, honest, humble, and accountable.

Marty Jones has worked in nearly every aspect of the performing arts as director, teacher, actress/singer, and arts administrator. In 1980, she participated in the founding of Boston University's Huntington Theatre Company, and since 1996, has been president and executive director of the performing arts presenter Celebrity Series of Boston. She was instrumental in the expansion of that organization's education and community service program, which serves Boston youth through activities including AileyCamp Boston, a summer program for middle school students. Upon retirement from the Celebrity Series in 2011, Jones will serve as an arts management consultant with an emphasis on leadership and coaching.