

FACES IN THE CROWD

Motivational messages are his thing

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R. Clayton McKee For The Chronicle
WORDS OF WISDOM: Pete Hinojosa's book is called "Influencer Incorporated - Living a Life of Influence in a World of Control."

PETE HINOJOSA

- **Age:** 41
- **Occupation:** Speaker, author, teacher.
- **Community Connection:** Lives with his wife and three children in Kingwood, TX.
- **Quick Quote:** "I come from a really long line of educators, so the only thing I ever wanted to do was be a teacher. It's in my blood."

Hinojosa's experience with the young student not only initiated him as a teacher, but it set him on a new path, as well.

"I thought if this is happening in Kingwood where everything looks right, then something is up," he said. "So I went to my dad to learn about his motivational techniques, thinking maybe I could add something to my classroom. That girl was the catalyst for bringing positive things into my classroom."

A few weeks into Pete Hinojosa's first teaching position at Kingwood High School, a young student approached him after class and told him she was contemplating suicide. His first thought was, "I didn't take a class on that in college."

After the initial shock, the rookie teacher gathered his wits and realized he could help this student, not with formal training, but with lessons learned from his father and from his own experiences.

"I had a bunch of tough times in college, a bunch of tough moments," he said. "But I learned to overcome them."

Hinojosa drew from the lectures of his father to create something special. He no longer teaches high school. He is now an author, speaker and developer of a leadership curriculum for the Spring Branch Independent School District.

"My dad taught high school and then went on to a job training salesmen," he said. "That's where I learned everything. He talked to us about goal-setting, being a leader and having a positive attitude. It was always something about how to be a better person. Those things shaped my thought process, my attitude."

Changing his ways

Soon Hinojosa began incorporating different activities into his curriculum, including the “Life Warm-Up.”

Each student who walked into Hinojosa’s class banged their hand on a sign as they entered the classroom, which reminded them how important their attitudes were to their success. Then they took the first five minutes of class to look over an “Attitude is Everything” board dedicated to positive quotes or individual student successes.

Hinojosa also handed out “Attitude is Everything” pencils to those students who exemplified the class motto.

Inevitably, Hinojosa’s efforts were noticed by parents, one of whom encouraged him to develop a camp for kids. Not one to turn his back on a challenge, he started Quest Leadership Retreat.

“In 1997, I told my wife I was going to do a camp for kids. Nobody said it would work but something in my mind told me it would,” he said. “We had 27 kids come the very first time.”

Finding something new

Hinojosa continued teaching at Kingwood High School and began expanding his camp. He said he also took on speaking engagements, even though it was never interesting to him.

But it was that part-time speaking schedule that led Hinojosa to Spring Branch ISD, where he met a local community leader who, after hearing him speak, offered him a job as director of the district’s community network.

“He wasn’t going to take no for an answer,” Hinojosa said, “and I soon realized this was exactly the opportunity I had been praying for.”

So in 2000, Hinojosa accepted the position at Spring Branch ISD as director of the Community Network.

“It was a leadership class for high schoolers, and they would work with middle schoolers,” he said. “I also taught a ninth-grade transition program and did parent education to prepare them to be a parent with influence.”

Linda Buchman, Spring Branch ISD’s community relations officer, said Hinojosa has a knack for working with kids and helping them tackle tough issues.

“Pete has charisma and an innate way that he relates to kids,” she said. “He knows how to help different personalities interact, and he doesn’t try to force kids into a mold that

they're not.”

The leadership program, which had initial funding for only three years, was expanded to five years and Hinojosa stayed on until 2008. At that time, he worked to develop the curriculum and to train teachers to take up where he left off. He has since turned his attention full time to speaking and working with Spring Branch ISD as a consultant.