



Discovering what kids need to succeed

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 4, 2014

Best-selling authors offer new guide to using a strength-based approach in classrooms and youth programs

Minneapolis, Minnesota—Bestselling authors Susan Ragsdale and Ann Saylor know from decades of experience that employing a strength-based approach in a youth program or classroom requires intentionality and know how. Ragsdale and Saylor have blended their experience into a motivational yet thoroughly practical new book, *Groups, Troops, Clubs, and Classrooms: The Essential Handbook for Working with Youth*. This engaging handbook will inspire teachers, volunteers, group leaders, youth counselors, coaches, and anyone who works with young people.

A strength-based approach is all about providing young people with opportunities to be active co-creators of their learning and lives. The authors say their jobs as youth workers are to help young people develop and practice skills, find and pursue interests, and become engaged in community life in meaningful ways.

They write, “A strength-based approach represents the idea of *at-promise* rather than *at-risk*. It honors the strengths and giftedness innate to youth and strives to emphasize, tease out, and build on their internal and external strengths.”

The idea of viewing a child as at-promise doesn’t mean painting an unrealistic, pretty picture. Rather, the authors coach adults to include truths about a child that are left out by the dominant language of being at-risk. Ragsdale and Saylor write, “At-promise broadens the perspective, fills in some of the details, and reminds us that all children have natural gifts, positive qualities, and potential for goodness. The act of focusing on strengths is different than the cultural norm of zoning in on what needs ‘fixing.’ The danger of a ‘fixing’ mentality is that adults can unknowingly create a gap between themselves and young people.”

Readers will discover

- How to use games and activities to connect learning strategies to program and classroom outcomes
- How to make a program space or classroom welcoming while encouraging learning and leadership
- How to help young people get in touch with their “sparks,” those activities and interests that most inspire them
- How to forge strong relationships with young people where they feel both challenged and supported

A whole chapter of the book is called “Know Them.” The authors share numerous strategies and tips for getting to know the personalities and cultural backgrounds of young people—which is essential in creating bonds of understanding and trust. All humans are hardwired to connect with others and find meaning and purpose. The secret is to find out what is meaningful for each young person, so they can become positive forces for self-realization and community betterment.

Ragsdale and Saylor write that youth leaders and teachers constantly say “yes” to the hurries of the day and unending errands, because they say “yes” to the best job in the world: working with youth. But busy adults often say “no” to the very things that will recharge their energy. The authors devote an entire chapter to self-care and what they call Power Truths. These Power Truths include how to appropriately let go and focus on the now. The authors remind readers, “Our goal is to interact with youth in a strength-based way. In order for us to keep it up, we have to live from a strength-based place ourselves. That center of power only comes when we take time to tend to ourselves and recharge.”

About the Authors: Susan Ragsdale and Ann Saylor are nationally-known trainers and the co-authors of *Great Group Games: 175 Boredom-Busting, Zero-Prep Team Builders for All Ages* and four other books. Between them they have more than 40 years of experience in connecting youth with adults and opportunities to grow and develop purpose. Cofounders of the YMCA Center for Asset Development, they have worked face-to-face with more than 12,000 youth and adults since the center’s inception, empowering them to live authentic lives of character, service, and leadership. They have reached thousands more people through their six books, their blog, and their free newsletter. Their mantra “play, live, lead with purpose” is evident in all they do.

About Search Institute: For the past 25 years Search Institute, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has worked to define the positive youth development movement. Search Institute’s emphasis on research to practice has always informed the organization’s publishing efforts.

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Title: Groups, Troops, Clubs, and Classrooms: The Essential Handbook for Working with Youth

Authors: Susan Ragsdale and Ann Saylor

Publication Date: September 2014

Trim Size: 7.25 x 9.25

Estimated page count: 280

Format: Trade Paper

ISBN: 9781574824889

Price: \$15.95 (US \$15.95) (CA \$17.95)