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Kelli doesn't shoot down your goals. She hears them and helps you make them a reality. If I could have a little pocket Kelli with me 24/7, it probably would be a big help. To this day I still hear her voice. I do a good deal of motivational speaking and I try to inspire kids to achieve their dreams. When I give my talks, everything I say comes from things Kelli tried to instill in me. I'm always listening for her voice. It's been a real constant for me, even away from gymnastics. When I had an opportunity to appear on Broadway in *Grease*, Kelli was one of the first people I called. It always had been a dream of mine to sing and dance on Broadway, but I worried that people would laugh at me. Obviously, I was never trained and I had no idea what people would think, so I went to Kelli and we talked about it and she said, "Oh, don't give up on that." So I went for it and got the part.

I still see Kelli as a mentor. If I need that extra little boost or a kick in the butt, I can go to Kelli and she'll give it to me. I don't see her as regularly as I used to, but I still hear her voice in my head. She's still telling me what to do.

Shinique Dawel

DENZEL WASHINGTON: A HAND TO GUIDE ME



setting goals

SOCRATES DE LA CRUZ
CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY,
FORMER YOUTH OF THE YEAR,
BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF AMERICA

God has been so good to me. He's placed so many influential people in my life, and I want to mention three who are dear to my heart: my grandmother, who's since passed; my mom, a single mother who raised me; and a very dear friend who was my basketball coach from first grade through eighth grade and who's been my mentor and friend ever since. I'll start with him.

His name is Steve Kelly and he's the closest thing I know to an angel. I met him when I was 7 years old. My mother and grandmother took me down to the Boys Club in Lawrence, Massachusetts. We were living in the housing projects right around the club, and to this day if you walk around

SOCRATES DE LA CRUZ: SETTING GOALS

those projects and mention Steve's name, everyone knows who you're talking about. He's helped a lot of people.

When I first met Steve, I was a product of the housing projects, a product of a single-parent home looking for guidance and attention. I was in and out of trouble. One day Steve took me aside and said, "Do you know what the word 'goal' means?" I knew what a goal was in hockey or soccer and I knew what a field goal was in basketball, but when he started talking about setting goals and trying to achieve goals, it was like he was speaking Chinese. He said this to me on the basketball court one day. I had missed school, and because I had missed school I couldn't practice. So he sat me down and this is what he said to me. It was my introduction to the way I live my life now, to setting goals and trying to achieve them.

He said, "Listen, Soc, if you're a leader, you can't keep running around in circles."

He told me I could be a positive influence in other people's lives, that I had potential, but that I wasn't steering myself in the right direction. He said that it was because I didn't know how to set goals. And he was right. I was only about 11 years old then, and of course I hadn't set any goals.

“ do you know what the word 'goal' means? ”

He asked me if I thought about high school or college. He asked me if I thought I could play basketball at the college level. I'd never really thought about that, but it sounded like something I wanted to try. So he said, "OK, if you think you can do that, that means you've set a goal. You've set out something in the future that you one day hope to achieve. And if you do that, then every day you have to wake up and do something, little by little, that will help you get to that point."

It was just one conversation, one afternoon on the basketball court, but it opened a door in my life. I didn't have a dad around, my mom only spoke Spanish, and until then I'd only had other street kids as models. We were all running around, going nowhere. But I realized, "Wow, this guy is right," and I instantly started setting other small goals, like getting to school early and doing my homework. From then on, I had structure and focus.

I always kept goal-setting in mind, playing high school basketball, and I won a scholarship to a boarding school, Kimball Union Academy

in New Hampshire, and I played basketball there. Then I won a basketball scholarship to Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts, and I owed it all to Steve.

I broke my leg during my sophomore year, but again Steve's advice came into play. I realized I wasn't going to be a professional basketball player and that I had to decide what I wanted to do. I set the goal of becoming an attorney. I did everything I could to get good grades and to get into a good law school, and that's what I did. It all started because Steve Kelly taught me how to set goals and structure myself and guide myself through life.

Have I thanked him? Every day. I still call him all the time, whenever I need advice, and he's always there for me. And the thing is, he does the same thing for thousands of other kids—thousands. He's unbelievable.

My mother walks on water. She raised me and my older brother, who played football at Boston College. She raised both of us alone from the time I was 6 and my brother was about 7. My dad skipped out, but my mom held two jobs, sometimes three—cleaning people's houses, doing factory work, doing physical, hard-core jobs. She's from the Dominican Republic and she didn't speak English. Now she speaks it some and understands it totally.

She worked hard. She struggled. I used to hear her in her room, when my brother and I were in our room supposedly sleeping. I'd hear her crying. I'd see her get emotionally and physically beaten up, but she kept going. She never gave up. She never complained. And she never took it out on us kids. That's something I have from my mom inside me. No matter what I go through, I pick myself up and keep going.

I remember the day we had to move out of our house. My dad had left and we'd gone into some serious hardship and couldn't make the rent. The owner of the house came and asked us to leave. We had no place to go, so the sheriff's office came and took our stuff out of the house. My mom didn't know where to go or what to do, so we went to my grandmother's apartment in the housing projects. There were about six of us staying there, and when we were settled my mother took me and my brother aside and said, "Things happen. Sometimes you can't make ends meet, but as long as you wake up the following day and keep going, things will get better."

She never complained. Ever. And I can't imagine anyone ever feeling any lower than she did that day. And do you know what? She was right. Things

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did get better, and she managed to see us to two college graduations and one law school graduation, so it wasn't so bad.

My grandmother is another star. Everyone she knew who wanted to come to this country from the Dominican Republic, she helped them get here—friend, cousin, third cousin, it didn't matter. She took anyone and everyone in and helped everyone out. When we were living in her apartment, one of my cousins also was living there and she set fire to her bed because she was upset about something. The entire apartment went up in flames.

The night that fire happened, my grandmother had just bought me and my brother some brand-new sneakers: Pro Keds. At the time there couldn't be anything better. And then the fire happened. Everything burned up, but in our minds the most important things we'd lost were those sneakers. The fire department showed up and put out the fire and shoveled our stuff through the windows. We stood outside and watched our stuff coming out the third-floor windows, falling to the ground. We just stood there looking.

I caught my grandmother looking too, but she didn't seem worried or upset. She was very much in control of the situation and her emotions. I remember going up to her and crying about my sneakers. I remember being mad at our cousin. But my grandmother just calmly sat everyone down and told us to gather everything that was salvageable and box it up and give it to our new cousins who were due to arrive from the Dominican Republic the next week. I think about that all the time, because she never came out and said this was the lesson she wanted us to take away from this experience. Even when she was in a time of need, she was thinking about other people.

We moved back in two weeks later. The place wasn't furnished for a while because she didn't want to take furniture from other people. Folks wanted to help her, but she wanted to fix it back up herself. That's how she was. She'd been a nurse in the Dominican Republic and she was a nurse here, and she was determined to make ends meet.

That's where my mom got it from, I think, because as soon as she could she moved us out of my grandmother's apartment into a place of our own in the same projects. I look back now, all these years later, and think of the role these three people played in my life. I have my own criminal defense practice. A lot of my clients are in seriously bad shape, and I listen to their stories and I think, "There but for the grace of God and Steve Kelly and my mother and grandmother go I."

DENZEL WASHINGTON: A HAND TO GUIDE ME



second banana

JAMIE FARR

ACTOR

I used to read *Theatre Arts Magazine* when I was a kid, and I saw an ad for the Pasadena Playhouse that somehow left me thinking I'd like to study acting. My parents couldn't afford to send me to acting school in California. My dad had a little corner grocery store and we lived in all these duplexes—always on the second floor. When my mother hung clothes out to dry, the soot from the factories would get them dirtier than they had been before she washed them.

This was back during World War II, and everywhere you looked they were selling war stamps. It cost 10 cents for a stamp. If you filled up a book it was worth \$18.75 and in 10 years you'd get \$25. Every Tuesday I had to buy a stamp, because I didn't want to be unpatriotic, and when I graduated high school I cashed in those stamps and that's how I got the money to go to the Pasadena Playhouse.

JAMIE FARR: SECOND BANANA