

**BY ORDER OF THE COMMANDER  
AIR FORCE SPACE COMMAND**



**AIR FORCE SPACE COMMAND  
HANDBOOK 36-3402**

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**Personnel**

**MENTORING HANDBOOK**

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This handbook, in conjunction with AFI 36-3401AFSPC1, *Air Force Mentoring Program*, establishes suggested guidance for mentoring AFSPC military and civilian personnel. Use this handbook as guidance for establishing a mentorship program for AFSPC units.

**1. General.** The purpose of our mentoring program is simple--to help our people reach their full potential through continued professional and personal development. Establishing a mentoring program is essential to supporting the mission. AFSPC's program is designed to provide each member with their own mentor, in or out of their chain of command. The program expands the role of the supervisor to encompass mentoring responsibilities for the benefit of the mission and the individual.

**2. Recommendations.** Information regarding this handbook can be forwarded to HQ AFSPC/ADPPE, 150 Vandenberg St., Ste 1105, Peterson AFB CO 80914-4450.

BOBBIE GERVAIS, Col, USAF  
Director of Personnel

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## Foreword

Of all the relationships possible during the lifetime of an individual, mentoring/protégé relationships are some of the most formative we'll ever experience. These can exist for a lifetime or be very short in duration, but whatever their length, they change our lives forever. Why? What makes them different? What characteristics do they have in common? Do they naturally occur, or can they be cultivated? These and many more questions will be addressed in the following pages.

By the time you finish reading this you should have a better understanding of:

1. What "to mentor" means, and examples of its application in history and in your own life.
2. Why mentoring/protégé relationships are being actively encouraged in AFSPC.
3. What being a mentor or protégé entails.
4. Some possible means of establishing this type of relationship with another person.
5. How to make the mentor/protégé relationship more meaningful and productive for both parties.
6. Various resources available for further study on this subject.

## Introduction

### Definitions

Both words, *mentor* and *protégé*, involve action on the part of the person to whom they refer. Passivity on the part of either is an impossibility. Both must be actively involved if the relationship is to exist at all, even if one party is not consciously aware of how the other views him/her.

But perhaps the best explanation of mentoring is offered by William A. Hensel, who said, “You can assign advisors, not mentors. A mentor and a student will come together because they sense it is right for both of them—not because a committee decides some abstract bureaucratic goals. An advisor can show you how to write a grant proposal, how to get a research project started, or how to get promoted. A mentor will show you how to live your life.”<sup>1</sup>

However you choose to define it, mentoring affects a positive change in the life, the goals, and the behavior of the protégé.

## Historical Precedents for Mentor/Protégé Relationships

### Precedents

Historically, mentoring goes back as far as recorded history.

Homer’s *Odyssey* noted the importance of this type of relationship when Odysseus, who went off to fight the Trojan War, left his young son, Telemachus, in the care of a trusted guardian whose name was Mentor. Our word for this type of relationship—*mentoring*—was derived from this man’s name.

Apprenticeship, a form of mentoring, was ***the only method*** of passing on a trade for thousands of years. During an apprenticeship, the supervisor would oversee the practical application of knowledge attained, such as in the case of a “medical intern” or a “student teacher.”

Questions for  
Personal  
Reflection

- Have you ever had a mentor/protégé relationship in your life?
- Who has made a lasting impression on you? How and why did that person have such an impact on you?
- Who has helped you become the person you are today? How?
- Have you ever recognized an unfulfilled potential in another person, and valued them enough to assist them in realizing their possibilities?

## The Value of Mentor/Protégé Relationships

As already established, this type of relationship is not new, so why the heightened interest now in developing mentoring relationships among AFSPC personnel? Answer--because of all the benefits mentoring brings.

Benefits of  
Mentoring

The most important benefit of mentoring relationships is the development of a much needed support system. The more we really *know* each other, the more often we will be there for each other—much like the members of a healthy *family*. Mentoring relationships will help ensure (1) that all personnel, regardless of rank/grade, can learn from the experience and knowledge of one another; and, (2) that all personnel contributions to AFSPC will become building blocks for a stronger, healthier, more productive *family*.

Mentor/protégé relationships can also be of assistance in facilitating personal and professional growth. The mentor, by encouraging, advising, coaching, and holding the protégé accountable, helps the protégé grow in skills, knowledge, wisdom, and experience.

A mentor/protégé relationship has a two-way payoff. The protégé gets assistance and support from “someone who has been there.” The mentor gets the satisfaction of helping to discover or develop latent talent in another person, plus much more!

BOTH gain:

- Mutual respect for one another’s talents, gifts, knowledge, and experiences.
- Memories of a relationship where there was cooperation and no compromise to the personal integrity of either party.

- Greater potential for career success as they learn from each other.
- Increased productivity as both parties grow in all aspects of their lives as a result of this special relationship.

The command benefits by:

- Increased support for personnel of all grades/ranks.
- Increased levels of genuine, and freely given, trust and respect.
- Increased appreciation for the abilities and gifts of others.
- Increased team spirit and less individual feelings of competition and mistrust.
- Do I have knowledge and wisdom gained from my experiences that might be beneficial to my subordinates or another member?
- Does my supervisor or someone else I know have knowledge and wisdom gained from years of experience? How can I tap this resource?
- What type of mentoring/protégé relationships am I open to?
  - Senior to Junior
  - Peer to Peer
  - Junior to Senior
- How would these relationships be beneficial to me? To my supervisor? To my subordinates? To others?
- What could I learn/teach?

Questions for  
Personal  
Reflection

## Being a Mentor

What does being a Mentor Mean?

According to the Random House College Dictionary, it means being “a wise and trusted counselor.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Gordon Shea, “Mentors are helpers. Their styles range from that of a persistent encourager who helps build our self-confidence to that of a stern taskmaster who teaches us to appreciate excellence in performance. Whatever their style, they care about us and what we are trying to do.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Tom Brown, a contributing editor for *Industry Week*, it means, “An extended, confidential relationship between two people who have mutual personal growth, and corporate success as common goals.”<sup>4</sup>

Howard and William Hendricks say this: “The simplest definition I know of a mentor is a person committed to two things: helping you grow and keeping you growing, and helping you realize your life goals.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton in their book, Connecting: Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life, see mentors as having these characteristics:

### Characteristics of a Mentor

Characteristics of a Mentor

1. The ability to see potential in a person.
2. Patience, knowing that time and experience are needed for development.
3. Tolerance with mistakes, brashness, abrasiveness, and the like in order to see that potential develop.
4. Flexibility in responding to people and circumstances.
5. Gifts and abilities which build up and encourage others.

6. Model various aspects of leadership.
7. Perspective, having vision and ability to see down the road and suggest the next steps a protégé needs.

Fred Smith, in an article in the Summer 1996 edition of *Leadership*, characterized mentors as people who:

1. Have wisdom from experience.
2. Do not feel competitive toward younger/less experienced people.
3. Can spot talent.
4. Understand the importance of “chemistry” in a relationship.
5. Take the responsibility of mentoring seriously.
6. Are willing and able to confront.
7. Ask questions.

Questions for  
Personal

- How would you evaluate your potential as a mentor?
- Are you genuinely interested in your subordinates or other individuals? Do you like to see others succeed?
- Are you willing to make yourself vulnerable in order to help another person?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to give and/or accept constructive criticism? If so, why?
- Are you goal-oriented? People-oriented? Do you enjoy being with others who have different goals?
- Would your associates feel that if they ever needed help, no matter when or where, they could call on you? Why or why not?
- What would be (or is) different about the mentor/protégé relationship and other relationships in which you are a part?

- Do you enjoy enabling others to reach their potential? Do you ever seek advice from someone who can provide such help to you?
- Does your own personal or professional pride get in the way of establishing and maintaining a mentor/protégé relationship? If so, what might you do to change this?
- Is your supervisor a good model and why? What characteristics does he or she demonstrate that you would like to emulate?

## What to Look for in a Protégé

How can you know when you have found someone you want to mentor (besides those you supervise); persons you want to help succeed in their chosen career?

The most important element cannot be forced—it is a chemistry, a pull of “like to like.” Still, there are some elements that move supervisors and subordinates beyond a normal working relationship to a mentor/protégé relationship.

This list, offered by Air Force leaders—enlisted, officer, and civilian—is only suggestive. Each mentor must personally decide which characteristics are crucial to them.

Qualities and characteristics desirable in a protégé:

Characteristics of  
a Good Protégé

1. Is a good listener.
2. Has a clear vision for themselves (personal and professional goals) and for the mentoring relationship.
3. Is eager—to learn, to grow, to achieve, to do what it takes to succeed or to do a task well, etc.
4. Is a risk taker.
5. Has a good sense of humor.
6. Is mature.

7. Respects authority and the mentor.
8. Takes constructive criticism well.
9. Is a good communicator--willing and able to tactfully give constructive feedback to the mentor.
10. Has a respect for and abides by military customs and courtesies.
11. Displays a good attitude.
12. Is willing to work hard.
13. Is a well-rounded person.
14. Exemplifies Air Force core values.

## Tips for Finding and Mentoring a Protégé

Once you've realized you have a lot to offer as a mentor, how do you find a protégé other than those you supervise?

### Tips for Finding a Protégé

1. Determine which qualities and characteristics you want in your protégé. (If you don't know what you are looking for, how do you know when you find it?)
2. Be intentional with your search.

John H. Sheridan in his article, "Mentors Build Morale," published in the 18 June 1995 edition of *Industry Week* includes this checklist of what makes a healthy mentoring relationship. He asserts that mentors:

### Tips for Mentoring a Protégé

1. Offer challenging ideas.
2. Help build self-confidence.
3. Encourage professional behavior.
4. Listen to personal problems.

5. Teach by example.
6. Provide growth experiences.
7. Explain how the organization works.
8. Encourage winning behavior.
9. Share critical knowledge.
10. Offer encouragement.
11. Assist with protégé's career.

In *How to Network and Select a Mentor*, Paul Stevens asserts that the mentor, in a good, productive mentoring relationship, always:

1. Supports the protégé by:
  - listening.
  - providing structure.
  - expressing positive expectations and promoting self-confidence.
  - serving as an advocate.
  - sharing information about themselves.
  - helping make the relationship one both the mentor and the protégé value.
2. Challenges the protégé by:
  - setting tasks so that the protégé gains insight by carrying them out.
  - engaging in discussion so that different ways of viewing a problem emerge.
  - setting high standards, helping construct positive aims and expectations.

3. Provides vision to the protégé by:

- modeling what the protégé is trying to become.
- helping the protégé form a comprehensive picture of life now, and to articulate and plan for accomplishment of reasonable and attainable life goals.
- provides a mirror; extending the self-awareness of the protégé so that self-awareness is more honest and enhanced.

The number of ways to find someone you truly have that special *chemistry* with is limitless. But what is ultimately necessary for you to find a protégé is for *someone else to see you as a mentor*, or for you to serve as a supervisor!

## Being a Protégé

What does Being a Protégé Mean?

According to the *Random House College Dictionary* protégé means, “A person under the patronage or care of someone influential who can further his/her career. To protect.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Howard and William Hendricks, protégé is one who is learning from “someone with a little more wisdom and experience than I have, who would be willing to help me as I navigate my way through life.”<sup>7</sup>

Lavon J. Welty, while not using the word, describes a protégé as “a younger person intentionally linked with an older or more experienced person who provides support and wise counsel as needed.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul Stevens defines a protégé as one who seeks the counsel of “a person you can trust—someone with whom you can be open and who is willing to be frank with you.”<sup>9</sup>

## Characteristics of a Protégé

This list, offered by Howard and William Hendricks and other professionals, is only suggestive. Each mentor must personally decide which characteristics are crucial in the individual(s) they are to mentor.

According to professionals, mentors look for a protégé who is:

1. Intelligent.
2. Goal oriented and/or people oriented.
3. Seeking challenging assignments and greater responsibility.
4. A risk taker.

What are some important Characteristics of a Protégé?

5. An initiator.
6. Eager to learn.
7. Willing to assume responsibility for personal growth and development.
8. Wanting and actively seeking help.
9. Respectful of the mentor for demonstrated professional and personal qualities.
10. Willing to apply what has been learned immediately.
11. Assertive.
12. Competent.
13. Ambitious.
14. Loyal.

Ultimately, a protégé is one who is willing to learn and grow from the words and example of another.

If you decide to choose someone--in addition to your supervisor--as a mentor, what should you look for?

## What to Look for in a Mentor

What should you  
Look for in a  
Mentor?

How can you know when you have found a good mentor? There are a number of books and articles presently in print discussing this very thing, and while they tend to have a number of characteristics in common, they all are just a little different. Ultimately, each protégé must decide which of these characteristics would be crucial in the person(s) chosen as a mentor. Howard and William Hendricks in their book, *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, offer this list as characteristics of a good mentor. They write, a good mentor:

1. *Seems to have what the protégé personally needs.*  
A protégé looks for a mentor who has knowledge, expertise, and experience in the desired area of growth.

2. *Cultivates relationships.* A mentor must be capable of maintaining a give and take relationship with another human being.
3. *Is willing to take a chance on another person.* The mentor will be investing time, energy, emotion, and trust in the protégé.
4. *Is respected by others.* Do others speak highly of this person? Do they have reservations about this person? How much do others trust and respect this individual?
5. *Has a network of resources.* Mentors help protégés reach their goals because of *what and who* the mentors know.
6. *Is consulted by others.* One of the best indicators of whether a person would make a good guide is if this person is already serving as a guide for others.
7. *Both talks and listens.* A good mentor is always a good listener. If the protégé brings a problem to the mentor, a true mentor is more likely to help *the protégé* figure out the solutions rather than give a polished presentation of what to do.
8. *Has a consistent lifestyle.* This individual's walk and talk are the same, a living example of what a person should be.
9. *Is able to diagnose a protégé's needs.* A mentor helps the protégé evaluate, identify, or clarify areas of life where growth would be to the protégé's benefit.
10. *Is concerned with the protégé's interests.* A mentor serves as the protégé's cheerleader.

Dennis Boyles in his article, "*Someone to Watch Over You*," which was published in the April 1995 edition of ***Men's Health***, believes that a mentor:

1. Walks your walk and talks your talk—articulating the protégé's concerns and ideas more clearly, perceptively, and on a higher level.
2. Knows and accepts the limits of the relationship.

3. Has great eyesight. They see through the shuck and jive of a cluttered, confused life to what is really important for the protégé.
4. Can decline the job (if not your supervisor). The mentor must believe in the protégé's potential to invest time and effort in another person.
5. Is not a bank (so don't seek a loan).
6. Has *gravitas*. This Latin word encompasses the complete ensemble of qualities essential to those who would successfully give advice to those who need it.

Mentors, as you can see, may demonstrate any number of positive characteristics. Only YOU can decide which, if any, of these you desire in your mentor.

## How to Find a Mentor

Once you decide the qualities and characteristics you desire in a mentor, how do you find one in addition to your supervisor?

How do You go  
About Finding a  
Mentor?

1. Listen to others and find out whom they speak of positively.
2. Think about what you are looking for in a mentor, and find someone who already has those qualities or knowledge.
3. Be intentional in your search.

Once you have a prospective mentor in mind, you need to see if you “click” with each other. To do this, you might:

1. Ask for assistance.
2. Acknowledge the individual's expertise, and ask questions.
3. Give a presentation in front of others, in which this individual is a part.
4. Seek and act on advice given, when appropriate.
5. Volunteer to help with one of the prospective mentor's projects.

These activities have the potential of moving you into a very rewarding mentor/protégé relationship. Remember, just because your supervisor is automatically your mentor doesn't preclude you from seeking out someone else to serve as an additional **unofficial** mentor.

## How to Have a Successful Mentoring Relationship

*What are the common characteristics of a productive mentoring relationship?* The following lists are, once again, not intended to be totally inclusive, but are provided to assist in the development of good, healthy, productive mentoring relationships.

What are the Characteristics of a Productive Mentoring Relationship?

In a recent chaplain's survey, two characteristics were invariably deemed as critical and necessary to a mentoring relationship—TRUST and RESPECT. Other characteristics included:

- Understanding
- Constructive-building up and encouraging
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Availability
- One-on-one
- Integrity

The following dynamics are deemed by Stanley and Clinton as vital to the mentoring relationship:

Vital Mentoring Relationship Dynamics

1. *Attraction.* This is the necessary starting point in the mentoring relationship. The protégé is drawn to the mentor for various reasons: perspective, certain skills, experience, values and commitments modeled, perceived wisdom, position, character, knowledge, and influence. The mentor is attracted to the protégé because of the protégé's attitude, potential, and opportunity for influence.

2. *Responsiveness.* The protégé must be willing and ready to learn from the mentor. Attitude is crucial for the protégé. A responsive, receiving spirit on the part of the protégé and attentiveness on the part of the mentor will directly speed and enhance the empowerment.
3. *Accountability.* Mutual responsibility for one another in the mentoring process ensures progress and closure. Sharing expectations and a periodic evaluation will give strength to application and facilitate empowerment. The mentor takes the responsibility for initiating and maintaining accountability.

A mentor, according to Stanley and Clinton, can be a Coach, a Counselor, a Teacher, a Model, or a Sponsor. But sometimes a mentor will be more than one of these to a protégé.

Other experts, however, have differing opinions. Joan Jeruchim and Pat Shapiro in their book, Women Mentors and Success, say, “We see mentoring as the pinnacle of relationships along a continuum of work relationships, starting with a peer and moving up to a coach, sponsor, and finally, a mentor.” What makes mentoring different, according to these writers, is the intensity of the emotional involvement. Trusting someone enough to reveal your true self—your strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, hopes and dreams always involves emotions.

The mentoring relationship requires effort from both the mentor and the protégé. It must be based on freely given TRUST AND RESPECT if it is to be meaningful and productive.

## Phases of a Mentoring Relationship

For this reason, building a true mentoring relationship takes time. *It must go through a number of phases.* Carol Austin Bridgewater, in *Psychology Today*, June 1984 edition, delineates them as:

Phases of a  
Mentoring  
Relationship

1. *The Initiation Phase:* when the would-be protégé begins to admire and even fantasize about the capabilities of the would-be mentor; and the would-be mentor notices the raw talents and abilities of the would-be protégé.
2. *The Cultivation Phase:* when the initial fantasies take on concrete meaning. The protégé enjoys the guidance and assistance of the mentor, and the mentor sees the protégé fine-tuning their God-

given talents and abilities. During this phase the relationship peaks and is mutually beneficial and satisfying.

3. *The Closing Phase*: When the protégé becomes more autonomous, and the relationship becomes redefined.

Howard and William Hendricks agree with this three-phase understanding, but they call them the **Definition Stage**, the **Development Stage**, and the **Departure Stage**. All the experts agree, however, that there is no standard timetable for how long it takes each cycle to be completed; but almost all mentoring relationships come to an end at some point.

To Make the  
Initiation or  
Definition Phase  
Successful

1. The protégé and the mentor must first reach an agreement on what they want to accomplish in the mentoring process. Howard Hendricks reminds us that “The clearer you are about where you are going and how you are going to get there, the faster you will tend to arrive at your goals and the fewer problems you will tend to encounter on the way.”
2. To make sure both are “playing from the same sheet of music,” and avoid misunderstandings, a ***learning or mentoring contract is a good idea***. This contract may be formal and written, or informal and verbal; but it should be a clear, concise, and definite statement of the proposed agenda and goals, and how you plan to achieve them. It might include such things as:
  - Time, place, and frequency of meetings.
  - Periodic reviews of the protégé’s professional and personal development.
  - Scheduling of discussion material, such as things that impact on the protégé’s life or military career (i.e., collateral duties, tensions within the work section, personal stressors, etc.).
  - Methods of accountability.
  - Specifics on what goals are to be attained.
  - Specifics on how, when, and where constructive criticism is given.

*What is included in this contract, however, is not as important as who drives the agenda.* It is critical that the **protégé be**

**the driver.** The mentor is responsible to suggest ways to improve the agenda and help the protégé build success into any plans made. If the protégé's goals are unachievable or unrealistic, it could cause the protégé to become so frustrated with the whole process that the protégé just bails out. The mentor is responsible to try to keep this from happening. This might be accomplished by:

1. Being a source of information.
2. Sharing wisdom from lessons learned.
3. Providing alternatives in an affirming manner.
4. Being a non-judgmental sounding board.
5. Providing perspective and timely advice on career paths and personal development.
6. Opening doors of insight to possibilities, opportunities, talents, etc.

*The main thing is for protégés to know that whatever is contained in the contract, the mentor is standing with them in their efforts.*

To Make the  
Cultivation or  
Development

The mentor, now knowing what the protégé wants to learn can begin to assign, in one of the following ways, manageable responsibilities which facilitate the learning process. These ways of learning are:

1. The *"hands-on" learning experience* where the mentor:
  - Briefs the protégé on a given task and explains what is expected and what is involved if it is to be done successfully.
  - Allows the protégé to practice the assignment, if possible.
  - Then steps back and lets the protégé execute the task.
  - Debriefs with the protégé on what happened, and lessons learned.

The mentor has two other very important responsibilities during this hands-on, experience-based learning phase. They are:

- Coming to the aid of the protégé if the protégé is in trouble.
- Protecting others if they would be severely affected by the protégé's failure.

2. The *“reflection or thinking” learning experience* where the mentor:
  - Uses case studies, allowing the protégé to propose various solutions and then examining the pros and cons of each.
  - Uses the examination of a critical moment in the protégé’s life or career.
  - Reads and discusses various articles and books with the protégé.
  - Arranges ways for the protégé to be exposed to experts in the fields of study the protégé is interested in.
  - Uses field trips or events that bring the area of study from the abstract to the concrete.

Mentors might use these learning methods to help their protégé improve professionally by providing experiences in the following areas:

1. The staff officer’s role.
2. Command structure and organization.
3. General military knowledge necessary to be successful.
4. Administrative procedures and correspondence.
5. Teamwork.
6. How to write enlisted, officer, and/or civilian evaluation reports.
7. Service records.
8. Future assignments and evaluation reports.
9. Adhering to military customs and courtesies.
10. Personal and professional time-management.

This list is only suggestive, and it is professionally oriented. Each protégé and mentor must determine together the areas in the protégé’s life where growth is sought and where the boundaries are to be set.

This second phase/stage is usually the longest, the most intense, and the most satisfying for both the mentor and the protégé. Stanley and Clinton in Connecting highlight ten factors which are necessary during this phase if the mentoring is to be meaningful. They call these *The Nine Commandments of Mentoring*:

The Nine  
Commandments of  
Mentoring

1. *Relationship*: All relationships require commitment to grow and flourish. Some mentoring relationships grow spontaneously; but all require time and deliberation.
2. *Purpose*: This is where the learning/mentoring contract comes in.
3. *Regularity*: The best mentoring occurs with regularity of meeting. At a minimum, meetings should occur monthly. The meetings should not take second place to other “pressing business of the day,” but be important enough that the mentor and the protégé stick to the agreed upon schedule.
4. *Accountability*: Effective mentoring involves the mentor giving the protégé quantifiable tasks to accomplish. The mentor can hold the protégé accountable through written reports, scheduled phone calls, probing questions during a scheduled meeting, etc.
5. *Communication Mechanisms*: Mentoring involves communicating to the protégé areas of concern that need correcting. This requires establishing early on the method preferred for the mature and honest transfer of critical information.
6. *Life Cycles of Mentoring*: It is wise to know and recognize the stage or phase of the mentoring relationship.
7. *Evaluating*: Three dynamic forces flow from the mentoring relationship: interaction, responsiveness, and accountability. These forces allow for mid-course measurement of growth.
8. *Expectations*: Evaluation and feedback can be helpful in modifying expectations. All expectations are seldom achieved because real-life situations have complexities not always anticipated.
9. *Closure*: Closure brings a satisfactory end to the mentoring event, which includes growth, empowerment, and the accomplishment of realistic and practical goals.

To Make the Closing or Departure Phase Successful

The mentor begins to recognize the protégé's increased maturity and accepts the protégé's growing autonomy. Both individuals recognize and discuss any feelings of anxiety about the changing nature of their relationship.

## How Learning Occurs in a Mentoring Relationship

Keep in mind the four guiding principles of how adults learn, put forth by Malcolm Knowles in Modern Practice of Adult Education, From Pedagogy to Andagogy. He asserts:

How Learning Takes Place within a Mentoring Relationship

1. "Adults have a deep need for self-directed learning, even if that need varies between adults.
2. Adults increasingly appreciate learning that takes place through experience.
3. The learning readiness of adults arises primarily from the need to accomplish tasks and solve problems.
4. Adults see learning as a process through which they can raise their competence in order to reach full potential in their lives. They want to apply tomorrow what they learn today."

In other words, *adults will learn what they perceive as beneficial to them or their life-situations, and they learn best through experience.*

## Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

This brings us to the area of PITFALLS. This list is in no way exhaustive, because the possibilities are as many and as varied as the personalities of the mentor and protégé. These are, however, some of the most obvious:

1. *Unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations* occur if:
  - The mentor expects more of the protégé than the protégé is capable of accomplishing.
  - The protégé expects more of the mentor than the mentor is capable of providing.
    - To avoid this, do not put your mentor upon a pedestal; your mentor is human and will inevitably fall off. Be very clear about what is expected by one another when establishing the mentoring contract.
2. *The mentor begins to exert an unhealthy control over the protégé.* This can best be avoided if the protégé decides at the onset that whatever authority/power is relinquished to the mentor is limited and temporary (within the constraints of a professional military relationship).
3. *The mentor does too much for the protégé.* To avoid this, the mentor should always keep in mind this critical rule of successful mentoring: **DO NOTHING FOR YOUR PROTÉGÉS THAT YOUR PROTÉGÉS CAN DO FOR THEMSELVES.** Otherwise, you cripple your protégés by creating an unhealthy dependence on you.
4. *Jealousy.* To avoid this the mentor must always keep in mind that the protégé's success is also the mentor's own success! The protégé must keep in mind that the mentor is willingly sharing wisdom and knowledge—willingly helping the protégé to become just as knowledgeable, skillful, and professional as the mentor.
5. *Cloning.* To avoid this, the mentor must always keep in mind that each protégé has a unique and personal style of functioning and doing business. This style should be cultivated and developed for the good of the protégé.
6. *Others view the mentoring relationship as favoritism or fraternization.* To avoid this the mentor and protégé might limit their meetings to working hours at the mentor's

or protégé's office. In any case, the mentor will set the tone of the relationship. Junior/less experienced personnel are often unsure of the "unwritten boundaries" existing between themselves and their supervisors. It is the responsibility of the mentor to clarify these boundaries, insuring there is no appearance of impropriety.

7. *Viewed as a Lack of Loyalty.* If you have an additional mentor, other than your supervisor, the relationship may be viewed as a lack of loyalty to your immediate supervisor. Honesty and "no surprises" communication is always best. Remember, sometimes it may be very appropriate to have more than one mentor.

Questions for  
Personal  
Reflection:

- If you are a senior officer, NCO, or civilian equivalent, are you involved in any mentoring relationships?
- Do you feel inadequate to be a mentor? Are your life-experiences and what they've taught you any less valuable than those of someone else? If so, what makes you feel that way? Is it appropriate?
- Are you no one's mentor because you haven't been asked by someone? Are you willing to start looking for a protégé now?
- Do you know that other people trust and respect you? How do you know? What might you do to increase the level of these positive feelings toward you?
- Are you concerned about revealing too much about your weaknesses to your mentor? If so, why not seek out someone else to listen to you?
- Do you really want to make a difference in another person's life? If not, why not? If yes, why not start NOW?

# Conclusion

It should be obvious by now that a good mentor is demanding, almost impossible to satisfy because a good mentor is determined to bring out the best in others. A mentor never loses sight of the need to reassure and encourage a protégé. A true mentor is someone who knows the job and has earned respect based on ABILITY and TRUST.

Trust is the foundation of leadership, and key to the mentoring relationship. According to the video, *Leadership: What's Trust Got To Do With It?*, distributed by The Excellence in Training Corporation, the three most important trust building behaviors are:

1. Openness
  - Honestly tell people what you know.
  - Listen and respond to all questions.
2. Credibility
  - Do what you say you will do.
  - If you can't, own up to it and work out a solution.
3. Trust Others
  - Acknowledge the skill and expertise of others.
  - Encourage others to contribute.

*Trust building behavior must be consistent and ongoing!*

Being mentored is a thrilling experience; being a mentor is a fulfilling responsibility. But it is up to **YOU** to establish a mentor/protégé relationship with another. Why not do it **NOW**?

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hensel, William A. "The Promotion," *JAMA*, March 9, 1994, v. 271, p. 730.

<sup>2</sup> Urdang, Lawrence, ed., *The Random House College Dictionary*, Random House, Inc., 1980, p. 835.

<sup>3</sup> Shea, Gordon, *Mentoring: A Practical Guide*, Crisp Publications, as quoted by John H. Sheridan in "Mentors Build Morale, *Industry Week*, June 19, 1995, v. 244, n. 12, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, Tom, "Match Up With a Mentor," *Industry Week*, October 1, 1990, v. 239, n. 19, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Hendricks, Howard & William, *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, Moody Press, 1995, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Urdang, p. 835.

<sup>7</sup> Hendricks, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Welty, Lavon J., *Side by Side: Mentoring guide for Congregational Youth Ministry*, Mennonite Publishing House, 1989, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Stevens, Paul, *How to Network and Select A Mentor*, Resource Publishing, Inc., 1995, p. 3

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