

## *Thoughts on Mentoring....and an Invitation*

Two years ago, NeighborWorks® America convened a diverse group of young leaders from the NeighborWorks® Network to explore opportunities and strategies for identifying and developing emerging leaders in the community development field. On the first evening of the meeting, as participants described the journey that brought them to this work, a consistent and compelling theme emerged from their stories: each of these participants, at some stage in their development, had a valued mentor whose interest and encouragement were vital to their professional growth and direction. Some of these relationships were formal, many were not. Each of these relationships helped these young professionals to recognize and to enhance their skills, strengths and self-confidence. In the words of one participant, "My mentor saw potential and possibilities for me that I hadn't been able to see for myself".

This Symposium provides a providential context for considering this theme. Two real challenges are facing us in the community development field. A significant number of seasoned executives are planning their departure or retirement in the near or immediate future, taking with them a personal connection to the roots of the social justice and civic action movement along with the richness of being part of the incubation and growth of an industry. Without a conscious effort to ensure that the lessons of this history are carried forward, we are at risk of losing the insight, vision and focus that brought our work to this point so successfully.

Simultaneously and to some degree consequently, we are actively focused on the urgent need to identify and attract young leaders to our field – energetic and committed professionals who reflect the remarkable opportunities of new demographics. We are also challenged to provide encouragement, professional development and support to those emerging leaders who have already joined our ranks.

The thoughtful, intentional creation of a mentoring culture in the community development field has the potential to identify, build and retain new talent and to acknowledge and preserve important history while establishing a meaningful legacy and new learning for seasoned leaders. The for-profit sector has long since realized the benefits of mentoring. NBC, CBS and ABC have all created mentoring programs, as have Proctor and Gamble, IBM, Deloitte and Touche, Universal Studios and many others. After GE's Jack Welch hired a young assistant whom he mentored and who, in turn, exposed Welch to aspects of technology that were new to him, Welch instituted an organization-wide 'reverse' mentoring program which encouraged 600 top managers to learn about the Internet from younger workers in the organization. In fact some of the richest and most enduring mentoring relationships are characterized as partnerships in which both participants bear responsibility for teaching and learning. (I am currently mentoring a young, highly skilled software engineer who was asked to join the Board of a non-profit foundation that creates free access to software. While I have actively helped Eric to understand the nature, responsibilities and rewards of non-profit Board service, I have learned as much or more from him about technology that can be useful to me in my work).

We are dealing with an industry-wide challenge as we consider executive transition and succession and the need for attracting and retaining talented, mission-driven new leaders. While mentoring certainly occurs across these populations, it is most often informal and accidental. The potential benefits of more widespread, explicit and intentional mentoring relationships and the contribution such relationships can make to our field challenges are enormous and demand a more organized and conscious approach.

Today we invite you to consider being a mentor...seeking a mentor....or both. We also invite you to think about your own organization and how a mentoring program could contribute to new ways of learning and to enhancing the development, morale, engagement and job satisfaction of staff at all levels. What follows are brief thoughts on elements of a mentoring program and some resources to help you get started.

*Margo Kelly*  
*August 15, 2007*

# EFFECTIVE MENTORING

## *Roles, Characteristics, Contributions, Benefits and Questions*

### The Value of an Explicit Mentoring Relationship

*How important is it to “formalize” a mentoring relationship?*

While many valuable mentoring relationships are informal, there are distinct advantages to a structured mentoring agreement. Among other things, an explicit agreement outlines the goals of the relationship, which promotes more strategic and focused interaction than is likely to occur in an informal relationship. It also encourages the partners, especially the mentor, to reflect on the importance of their role. Florence Stone, in *The Mentoring Advantage*, identifies four distinct roles for a mentor: coach, role model, cheerleader and broker. Coaching is the most familiar element; however, serving as an effective and inspiring role model, brokering contacts that a mentee may not have access to on their own and acting as a cheerleader/advocate are also important ingredients in the most successful mentoring relationships. There is no doubt that informal mentoring relationships exert significant positive influence on both mentor and mentee. Nonetheless, an explicit agreement to enter into a mentoring relationship provides significant advantages to both partners, including:

- Clarifying boundaries and expectations including agreements regarding time commitments and specific skills, behaviors and/or attributes that each partner hopes to enhance as a result of this relationship
- Providing a framework for periodic evaluation of progress
- Creating mutual accountability and responsibility for the success of the relationship
- Ensuring an outcome-based focus on the part of both partners

### Types of Mentoring Relationships

*What is the range of mentoring possibilities? How should I think about places to look for a mentor?*

Each type of mentoring relationship represents challenge and opportunity. While Stone considers a mentoring relationship to contain four elements, Ensher and Murphy (*Power Mentoring*) identify eleven kinds of mentoring relationships that broaden the mentoring definition and can expand a mentee's vision when considering options and sources for mentoring:

- Barrier-Busting – These are mentoring relationships that occur across traditional boundaries such as competitive organizations or political lines
- Boss – A boss can provide career support to subordinates both within formal boundaries and informally
- E-Mentoring – Mentoring relationships that primarily use computer-mediated communication
- Family member – An immediate or extended family member who provides instrumental, psychosocial and role modeling support
- For Hire – a mentor or coach who primarily provides career or job-specific advice in exchange for financial remuneration
- Group – A senior level mentor who provides on-going coaching to junior level mentees
- Inspirational – A role model who is one's ideal; an important person to emulate even if there is no direct contact
- Moment – A situational, intense relationship that may be very brief but that has lasting impact by virtue of the advice given, the role modeled or by temporary affiliation
- Peer and step-ahead – A mentor who is at the same level or just a step ahead of the mentee but has a different and complementary set of skills and experience
- Reverse – A younger or less experienced person mentors an older or more experienced person
- Traditional – An older, more experienced person mentors a younger, less experienced person in a one-to-one relationship, usually within one organization.

## Characteristics of an Ideal Mentor

*Should I consider being a mentor? What does it take to be a successful mentor?*

Literature and experience document a host of desirable attributes of mentors. Florence Stone and Ensher and Murphy (*Power Mentoring*) suggest that a combination of the following is most predictive of success:

- A careful and active listener
- Sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others
- Respectful and supportive of colleagues
- A serious interest in the development of others in the field
- Patience, flexibility and respect for confidentiality
- A desire to share the enjoyment and excitement of work with others
- Confident and secure in professional accomplishments and skills
- The ability to simplify complexity
- A resource to others
- A sense of humor

## Characteristics of an Ideal Mentee

*Will I make a good mentee? What will a potential mentor expect from me?*

While current literature still places primary emphasis on the qualities of an effective mentor, attention is increasingly paid to qualities of mentees that lead to their success in a mentoring relationship:

- Clear goals for the relationship – a desire for results
- Significant initiative in seeking an appropriate mentor
- Ambition, intelligence and willingness to take risks
- A genuine desire for feedback and a willingness to act on it
- The ability to articulate the responsibility you will assume and the attributes you bring to the relationship

## Strategic Content in Mentoring Relationships

*What are the things I can teach and model – or learn – that can be most effectively conveyed as part of an explicit mentoring relationship?*

Traditional mentoring focuses on assisting a mentee to acquire or enhance technical, leadership and relationship-building skills. However, according to Stone, mentors have the unique ability to teach – and to model - seven critical skills that can have a huge impact on professional growth and success:

- Making and keeping commitments
- Demonstrating reliability, honesty and respect
- Demonstrating initiative and optimism
- Demonstrating sincere appreciation for colleagues
- Identifying opportunities to let people see that they are dedicated and productive
- Exhibiting professionalism in the workplace consistently
- Demonstrating the willingness to listen to others, to support them authentically and to share knowledge generously

## Benefits to Mentors

*How can I, as a mentor, expect to benefit from a mentoring relationship?*

Historically it was assumed that the primary benefit to a mentor is a sense of pride and achievement in contributing to the professional growth of a mentee. Recent studies have clearly documented a host of other valuable benefits to the mentor. Those most frequently cited include:

- Providing a fresh perspective on your own performance
- Shortening the learning curve for new employees
- Acquiring knowledge or skill you don't currently have
- Enhancing your own coaching and leadership skills
- Developing a reputation for grooming talent
- A larger network and increased influence
- Job-related feedback
- Challenge and motivation
- Insight into different cultures, different roles and different areas of your profession
- Rejuvenation and personal satisfaction
- Excitement and inspiration

## Benefits to Mentees

*How can I, as a mentee, benefit most?*

The following benefits are most commonly mentioned by mentees:

- Job and career-related feedback
- Enhanced technical, leadership and political skills
- Access to resources, information and people
- Increased organizational understanding and commitment
- Greater professional effectiveness
- Sponsorship and advocacy
- Encouragement, advice and counsel
- Interpersonal growth
- Support and confirmation
- Exposure to opportunities
- Increased chance for mobility, promotion and salary increases

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August 15, 2007*

## RESOURCES

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