

# AAPL Newsletter

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## Musing about Mentoring

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I have been thinking about why AAPL has been such a satisfying professional home for me. What I have found within AAPL is a most generous collegiality, an unusual quality in an organization grown to our size. Musing about that collegiality, I hope that such a spirit will continue to pervade our membership. This musing has led me to take a conscious look at an activity and relationship that we all know about and which many of us practice - mentoring.

Although members of the AAPL Early Career Development Committee have on a number of occasions expressed an interest in the availability of mentoring, the practice has not been defined succinctly or explored extensively as it applies to our group. Though one hopes that mentoring relationships would take place in forensic fellowship programs, there are many AAPL members who, without the collegial opportunities of a fellowship, would like something more than reading, going to lectures, workshops, seminars, or peer supervision groups. Mentoring, an informal process that should be available through AAPL, might answer that need. In hopes of shedding some light on the meaning of mentoring, I would like briefly to explore and delineate some of the subtleties of that relationship.

What defines a mentor?

The word comes from the Indo-European root *men*, meaning to think, to counsel, to remember. It refers to qualities and states of mind, hence mentation. In Latin it became also *mon*, as in monitor.

Mentor with a capital M, was an Ithacan noble and Odysseus's trusted counselor and friend who, in his absence, became the guardian and teacher of his son, Telemachus. It was Mentor's wise counsel that roused Telemachus to go in search of his father and enabled him to resist the distractions of Calypso. That Mentor and Telemachus in escaping from Calypso's isle leaped together off a cliff suggests the sense of partnership, the dedication of a mentor, and the strong influence of the advisor encouraging a youth to pursue his search. The term now has wide use in business, industry and academe. Mentor's name has become proverbial for a faithful and wise advisor.

According to Daniel Levinson (*The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Ballantine Books, New York 1978) having a mentor is one of the most complex and developmentally important relationships a person can have in early adulthood. These relationships have a profound effect on personal and professional development. While not a quasi parent, the mentor developmentally supports and facilitates the realization of the Dream, according to Levinson. Though the relationship may be a

hierarchical one, it is mutually benevolent. Personhood is enriched as the protege makes the mentor a more intrinsic part of himself. The internalization of such significant figures is a major source of development in adulthood.

Research on female CEOs indicates that mentors for women are particularly important in traditionally male environments. In traditionally female environments, mentoring is often built in to women's complex family and neighbor relations. In the past, female mentors have been scarce, but this has been changing as more and more women enter business and the professions.

Many words approximate a description of mentorship, but primarily the role of mentor is defined by its functions: teacher, sponsor, guide, and exemplar. There are many similarities between the roles of teacher and mentor. Mentors, like teachers, act to enhance a young person's knowledge and skills. However, a teacher deals with an externally determined body of knowledge or has a particular set of techniques to impart. A mentorship is less curriculum-driven. Mentorship roles are less explicitly defined than teacher-student relationships. Unlike teacher-student relationships, mentorship is not bound by semesters. It can actively stretch over years.

As sponsor, the mentor facilitates a young person's

development and eases their path into the professional world. Welcoming the initiate, the mentor inculcates the values of the world he or she is entering, and identifies the resources and cast of characters.

As guide, the mentor is an experienced trusted person who has “been there” before and knows the ropes. On a trek, a good guide is never a taskmaster, letting one go at one’s own rate. Providing safety and often direction, the guide helps one go farther than she or he could on their own. In foreign territory, he is the one familiar with the local terrain and customs.

The mentor can also serve as a model for emulation, an exemplar. Though this is often implied, it is rarely explicit. There is a resonance between mentor and mentee, a shared sense of promise. The younger person has a sense she is getting from her mentor something that she cannot get elsewhere. It is a “special” relationship.

Other attributes of mentoring are also pertinent, such as coaching, collegiality and friendship. As coach, mentoring can take on a theatrical or athletic connotation. The coach encourages others to do well, to play at the top of their game. The mentor-coach may critique plays, help in the development of strategy, or convey fine points of the rules. Mentoring differs from coaching because mentoring suggests wisdom and advice broader than coaching, beyond a mere focus on winning the game at hand. Often what a younger person needs is to see a larger context for the immediate situation; thus mentoring involves a philosophical sharing. Mentoring is both a longer term and wider reaching process.

Collegiality is similar to, but not the same as, mentoring. The mentor can be an intellectual companion, but collegiality or friendship implies a longer and more unstructured relationship (though one, like mentoring, in which trust and respect

are integral and reciprocal). Mentoring is more intimate and more private than collegiality. Often no one else knows about a mentoring relationship – sometimes even the mentor.

### **Professional permutations**

Mentor, supervisor, consultant and therapist all are roles that share a commonality. Each has similar yet different connotations. Though there may be a difference in ages, mentorships are more collegial and less hierarchical than teacher-student relationships. The mentee’s progress does not depend on the mentor’s approval. A mentor ruminates, considers, advises but does not rule or dictate. There is no third party reporting. Since mentorship is a mutually chosen voluntary relationship, the protege usually will value what the mentor has said, yet in professional situations the mentee has to be ready to look critically at what the mentor says rather than swallow ideas whole.

Supervision has some of the qualities of mentorship, but it is often tied to or implies a responsibility to an institution. Mentorship is often outside the boundaries of an institution, freeing the relationship from some constraints. Supervisory time can be purchased; mentorship cannot. Likewise for consultation, which involves even fewer third party issues than supervision. Consultation is time bound, and the relationship does not partake of the “special” quality of mentorship, that subtle mutuality in which each gets something from the mentoring relationship.

Both mentorship and psychotherapy are “enabling” relationships, but differ in perspective. Unlike the protege, the patient is primarily oriented inwardly. The mentor generally stays out of the private life of the mentee unless specifically invited in. The mentor retains a lovely detachment

from whatever the entanglements are for the individual - reminiscent of Athena, goddess of wisdom taking the mortal form of Mentor to help Odysseus. While the mentor maintains a detachment from the fray, he is an advocate who frankly fosters and does not try to maintain neutrality with the protege. The mentor is free with advice and suggestion, support and feedback. Though not generally supplying opportunity, the mentor readies the protege to take advantage of it.

At its core mentoring is a delicate bond - one that cannot be forced. At best it develops over time in an informal fashion through a shared interest in personal development, a coming together of interest, not required or assigned. Because being a mentor implies older wisdom gained from experience, there is a power differential that the mentor has a duty not to exploit. The protege must feel that the mentor has his best interests at heart. There must not be self-interest in the mentor’s advice. There must be a mutual deference and a commitment on both parts to grow and change. Non-threatening and non-competitive involvement, interest, trust and empathy are essential characteristics of good mentoring.

Diane Coudu provides a view of a mentorship gone awry. (Too Old to Learn?, Harvard Business Review 78: 37-52, 2000) Here the mentorship was thrust on the mentee in a mechanistic way, required by his institution. He was both defensive himself and devalued by his mentor who was disrespectful of his experience. Neither party was open to the complexities of the other’s experience. Mentor and mentee were disparate in personal style and had few shared values, a poor fit. There was no friendship and less caring on the part of the mentor. The mentor exploited the power differential by subtle ridicule of his mentee. This, though it may have been termed so, was not mentoring.

What becomes of mentor-mentee relationships? As the relationship evolves, the protege gains a fuller sense of his own authority and capability for autonomous responsible action. The relationship becomes more mutual, a crucial shift in the development of the protege. Friendship may evolve from mentorship, gratifying but inevitable. Levinson says that mentorships last two to three years on the average, eight to ten at most. Even the best mentor-protege relationships have their limits.

### **Mutuality**

#### *The Old Man and the Sea,*

Hemingway's last and perhaps wisest book, can be read as a story of mentoring. It meant a great deal to the old man to teach the boy his gifts and secrets and knowledge, his distinctive way of fishing. "I know many tricks," he says. The old man teaches techniques, but in the broader context he teaches optimism and faith, faith in the Yankees, faith that their lottery number will come up, faith that he will be successful fishing. The old man kept to stricter standards than the other fishermen

and there was pleasure for him that he could pass on to the boy knowledge that other fishermen did not have. On the surface it appears that this is the story of an older person giving to a younger person, but in point of fact each gives to the other. There is real mutuality at the core when they comfort one another. The boy receives the accretion of the old man's knowledge, preserving it from being lost, and the old man is respectful of the boy and grateful for all he does for him. At the end of the book when the old man does not want to go on, the boy insists that "we will still fish together because I have much to learn. You must get well fast for I have much to learn and you can teach me." His eagerness to learn is a salute to the old man and an endorsement of what they had accomplished together, acknowledging his dedication to craft.

Hemingway's book depicts the idea that in mentoring there is an

important piece beyond generosity. There is real satisfaction that knowledge is not being lost, that understandings are valued and techniques are carried forward into the next generation. In addition, what the old man teaches is attitudinal. "I keep my lines with precision," the old man says, and the message to the boy is clear.

How does one find a mentor? Though the relationship cannot be forced it can be pursued. Sometimes it just happens, a matter of luck combined with the courage to ask, yet most mentoring would not occur without mutual positive regard. Some people have a purely symbolic mentor whom they have never met. There is a Sufi proverb that "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." I think that AAPL's spirit fosters that readiness and facilitates the likelihood that the teacher will appear. Idealistic? Perhaps. Worthwhile? I think so.