

The legacy of Mentor

The protégés of today are the mentors of tomorrow.” ~ Marilynne Miles Gray

PART 2 - THE NEXT BEND IN THE ROAD

The old saying goes: Nothing’s constant but change. The Greek version of mentoring was subsequently overlaid by and intertwined with the Judeo-Christian culture that placed great emphasis on learning. The word, “rabbi” has been associated with mentoring. Any number of people hear the word, “rabbi” associated with mentoring and accept it without giving it much thought.

The word “rabbi” means “my master” as a title of respect and authority. It was the custom of rabbis to meet regularly with their students not only for study and instruction but also to provide guidelines, communication, and fellowship. This then is **LESSON #2**: some of today’s activities labeled “mentoring” appear to be narrow and constricting. Mentoring is multi-faceted.

Examples of famous Hebrew mentor-protégé relationships include Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Samuel with his disciples. The key qualities here are: respect, authority, regular meetings for a variety of purposes, strong collaborative interactions. Jesus served as a model mentor in his relationship with his disciples. His years of interaction with his followers involved more than just a teaching/ instruction role. He seems to have balanced three primary functions of a mentor: giving support, challenge and vision.

Jesus is unique not only as a model mentor but also as an exemplary protégé as evidenced by the report that He “... grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”.



One guideline for collaboration is that both mentor and protégé gain by the relationship or there will be little or no reason to forge an alliance. Ideally, both are mutually empowered. This is reflected in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Not only are disciples expected to further the master’s work but, in this instance, they are exhorted to “do greater things than I do”. In the Judeo-Christian setting, the disciple is not a “clone” of the master. This pattern can be seen in the interactions of the apostle Paul with his disciples, Timothy and Titus. Somewhat similar master-disciple relationships in other cultures are those between Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha and their followers or the Zen master and his student.

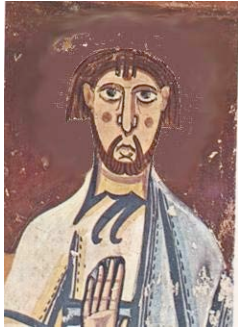
Another facet of mentoring appears in the book of Genesis. There the Creator regularly walks with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, enjoying fellowship. Some have read into this activity another purpose— that of teaching stewardship of the earth. Simply commanding people to be good stewards is limiting so with the injunction must go supportive teaching. People are not expected to intuit what good stewardship (in this instance) means. Thus, God spends time with his people teaching, role-modeling, supporting, in short, mentoring them into this role.

In contemporary society, we can see examples of “teaching” that hasn’t been very good, thoughtful or loving. In consequence, some of the less experienced in society have an I’ll-invent-the-wheel-myself-attitude, not knowing or caring that a better wheel already exists. Or that there is a wiser, more experienced mentor to help learners along some very challenging paths such as caring for the planet we inhabit.

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A FURTHER TWIST IN THE ROAD

In time, Christianity overlaid the Greek concept of mentoring primarily for leadership development and continuity by stressing the role of sharing with and service to others. For instance, in the book of Acts, the early Christians are described as living with all things owned in common. Rank is of no consequence nor is wealth. In fact, wealth is viewed as a hindrance to being “*a follower of the way*”. Education and sharing of knowledge (a form of wealth) would be part of this ethic. The process of educating would be to create "leaders" who could spread the message of this new religion. Thus, the great shift in the western world from the mentoring of kings to the conscious mentoring of commoners as leaders occurred through the influence of the Christian church.



Largely through the efforts of leaders such as Charlemagne, Alcuin, and Alfred the Great, education was fostered through the monasteries. This first effort to centralize and educate drew mentoring efforts in several directions. In one direction, university founders depended on their followers to continue the work. Alcuin mentored his pupils who then in turn ran the university he started. Universities became hotbeds for mentoring. In the other old direction, for those without the luxury of formal education, decentralized mentoring continued as before patterned on generations of passing along essential skills.

The great artists who built and decorated the cathedrals of Europe were, in the main, anonymous. A cathedral was a joint, communal, long-term effort. Time was not measured in relation to the life span of any one artisan. You were mentored and mentored in turn, to carve, chisel, and design towards some greater end that you were unlikely to see but that you believed would come to pass in future centuries.

The worth and dignity of you, the individual, would be expressed in a way that we contemporaries have difficulty understanding. Mentoring's reason for being was primarily to carry on a way of life, not to foster individuality. We see it differently today for the most part and it has to be asked: how did individuality take on such a focus in later times? It would be due primarily to the gradually accelerating pace of new discoveries and learning (such as in mathematics, medicine) that anyone who could master the new learning would be valued for what that person, as an individual, could do.

It's likely people began to ask themselves as the pace of change accelerated: “Why preserve only the past when there are so many new skills to understand, learn and use?” Indeed.

We have to ask ourselves why would any prince stick with the bow and arrow when guns were now available? Why would any king stick to the knitting in his own little kingdom when he saw his rivals sending out explorers to bring back the new fabrics, new spices and new ideas from abroad? So, with many more new things to do, the concept of the Renaissance Man -- the multi-talented person -- emerged. The more you could do, the more you were admired. You dabbled in writing poetry, you "did" a voyage to a New World, and you tried a scientific experiment. You fought the prevailing wisdom of sticking to things as they had always been and, in time, your view of the world won. And, in the process, the cult of the individual also won out.

But, this is to get ahead of ourselves.

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THE GUILD SYSTEM, APPRENTICESHIPS AND KNIGHTHOOD

The concept of the university solidified. Universities for seven or more centuries and the mentoring therein will be only for those who can afford it, meaning the nobility and eventually the emerging middle classes.

Commoners had the guild system which had come out of ancient Rome . There were Guilds for bakers, plasterers, stonemasons, and the like. Ranks of apprentice, journeyman, and finally master suggest the hierarchy towards expertise. The guilds were strongest in Italy but eventually flourished throughout Europe and England reaching a high point in the Middle Ages.

The guild system parallels the concept of mentoring in that it involved the education of young people who were being trained often without regard for their station in life. There is a prevailing myth that during this period, people were born to and remained in their stations. Yet this is not entirely true for history details examples of poor but promising boys who were taken into the ranks and who then progressed upward to become masters and leaders both in the profession and in the community. There is a rise and ebb of individuals and families. This suggests that the Medieval world was far less static than is commonly supposed due, in part, to the prevalence of mentoring.



Not only were guild masters responsible for the professional skills of their protégés, they also dealt with social, religious, and personal areas. For seven years, indentured apprentices were taken into the homes of the masters, living with them “to eat at table”, a sign of high regard. History tells us that knowing the names of actual artists and craftsmen was highly unusual in this period. Here then is **LESSON #3**: mentoring guards against the expectation novices must figure out the important (often unwritten) rules, the key principles, the necessary how-tos.

Though the medieval apprenticeship system was formalized so that it did not rely on a mentor appearing at the judicious moment, the impact of some of the masters on their pupils was sufficient to allow the young man to dream his dream and then to try to live it out.

Medieval Articles of Indenture formally specified rights and duties of both the master and his apprentice that went beyond our current notions of a typical, employer-employee or teacher-student relationship. That is to say, the master not only passed on the wisdom and skill of his craft for seven years but also sponsored and cared for the apprentice. The apprentice was “an empty vessel” ready to have wisdom and know-how poured in and topped-up until it was time to take the test. The test could have been a painting, a carving, a chain mail suit of armor. In addition to doing his work and learning his trade, the apprentice was responsible for guarding the master’s interests. Historical trends and technological developments both eventually brought to an end the guild system but not an apprenticeship system that continues to this day as an extension of what was.

On the down side, the medieval guild and apprenticeship system, for many, was but a forerunner of the factory system. The less scrupulous master gathered a collection of young men who could be trained to turn out replicas (of whatever) as quickly and as cheaply as possible. As the Renaissance blossomed, the road to becoming a master, for those who were not masters’ sons, gradually closed as a way for a commoner to be mentored and better his station in society likely because some trades died and new skills outside the guild system developed. Like any good father-mentor, you probably looked to your own immediate family needs and ensured that your own sons were drawn into the craft before any outsider was.

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MENTORING DINOSAURS

During the late fifteenth century, young men who dedicated themselves to knighthood, in all likelihood chose the downward path in contrast to the sons of the burgeoning middle class who chose to go to universities and study law or to become merchants.

Put simply, at age seven if you were of good birth, you began as a page. Starting off in the household, often the women schooled you in manners, customs, and literature. This was the first of two seven-year periods of service. The second period was in the manly arts of fighting, weaponry, and horsemanship. Culminating at age 21, some rite of passage included battle and/or a crusade in which you could economically benefit from the spoils of war and thus advance.

Success, above all, meant social acceptance by the “right” people – the aristocracy. Much as they might disdain such pursuits, the knightly class could not understand that the control of law and wealth rather than the castle was the way of the future. In this sense, one entire class of mentors assisted their protégés to become human “dinosaurs” while another class (usually called “tutors” at the university) maneuvered their protégés on to ultimate social control.



IN PART 3 OF THE LEGACY,
WE REVEAL THE NEXT BEND IN THE ROAD