

The legacy of Mentor

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

THREE SNAPSHOTS

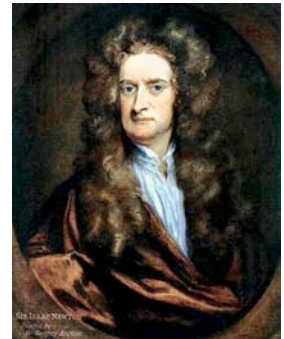
To this point, this paper has given a cursory overview of the history of mentoring and collaboration. To gain a more personal sense of the many varieties of mentoring relationships, the focus will now shift to several brief snapshots of famous mentoring relationships. This then is **Lesson #5**: Mentoring hasn't always been about individuals learning on their own behalf. The prevailing ideas of society for the era determine the focus. Let's see how this plays out in the lives of three highly influential people.

ISAAC NEWTON

Like Winston Churchill and Thomas Edison, Isaac Newton's potential was not reflected in either his school grades or early life. Professor Isaac Barrow, a mathematics professor at Cambridge University, noticed Newton's latent genius and began to mentor him.

If there hadn't been an outbreak of the Black Plague, history might have turned out differently for the world of science.

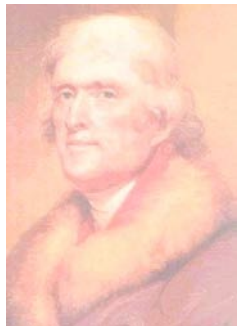
Newton moved from Cambridge to the country. Within 18 months, he had worked out the essentials of the differential calculus, the Law of the Composition of Light and the Law of Universal Gravitation. The Plague abated so Newton returned to Cambridge and earned his Master's degree under Barrow's tutelage. Professor Barrow provided the encouragement that Newton needed in order to develop his potential. Following his graduation, Newton became a Fellow of Trinity College and at 27 years of age, assumed the Mathematics Chair, which his mentor vacated in Newton's favor. Newton remained in this position for almost 30 years.



Newton's masterpiece, *Principia Mathematica*, probably would not have been written apart from the persuasion of Edmund Halley. Newton was an odd, quirky man but Halley saw beyond this. Halley even went so far as to obtain funding for publication of the work from the Royal Society and then, when the Society reneged on their funding of the project, Halley paid for the publication.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Thomas Jefferson is an example of one who benefited from being mentored at the Law School of William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia by Professor George Wythe, first law professor in the American colonies. By all accounts, many of the democratic ideals that Jefferson included in the Declaration of Independence, his presidency of the United States, and his concept of the University of Virginia as America's first state-supported liberal arts university were inspired by Wythe.



Wythe's influence can also be seen in Jefferson's conviction that in order for American democracy to survive, the citizens needed to be educated so that they would be able to vote intelligently for wise representatives. Thus, the concept of American public education was radically changed. Publicly-funded schools and state universities in the mid-west were established, patterned after those Jefferson had established when he was governor of Virginia. To underwrite the concept, state taxes were utilized to educate sons of poor families.

In this, two opposing movements were set in operation. Publicly-funded education made it possible for the poor to

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be socially and economically mobile. As these same people entered the professions and went to college, it was more likely that they would be mentored. At the same time, self-made men were the models of the period. Indeed, it can be argued that these two counter movements still exist side by side in North America.

Mentor to both James Madison and James Monroe, Jefferson's concepts influenced James Monroe's writing of the Monroe Doctrine as a justification for protecting America's form of government against aggression from other world powers.

The collaboration between Jefferson and Madison can be seen in the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, which Madison helped write. Madison's inclusion of the concept of freedom of religion in the Bill of Rights was influenced by Jefferson's Bill for Religious Freedom in the State of Virginia. The quality of extended, congenial collaboration between Jefferson and Madison was such that Jefferson wrote to Madison,

"The friendship which has subsisted between us, now half a century, and the harmony of our political principles and pursuits, have been sources of constant happiness to me through that long period... Take care of me when dead, and be assured that I shall leave with you my last affections."

HELEN KELLER

Anne Sullivan, in her mentoring of Helen Keller, serves as a role model of one who uses the natural interests of the protégé to unlock hidden potential.

Sullivan had the faith to believe that this hidden potential could be developed, and persistently and creatively worked against huge odds of the sort that most people cannot imagine. Helen Keller overcame her blindness and deafness to graduate from Radcliffe near the top of her class, write books, and embark upon a worldwide speaking tour. This serves as an inspiring example of the possibilities mentoring has for developing an individual if the protégé is given appropriate types of help by someone who has persistent faith in commitment to unlocking it.



Anne Sullivan was that kind of mentor who offered excitement, commitment, and involvement with what became her protégé's life's work. In a tribute to her mentor, Helen writes,

"The most important day I remember in all my life is the one in which my teacher...came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects. It was the 3rd of March 1887, three months before I was 7 years old...Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible darkness shut you in...? I was like that before my education began, only I was without compass... Light! Give me light! was the wordless cry of my soul, the light of love shone on me in that very hour."



IN PART 6 OF THE LEGACY,
WE REVEAL THE FINAL BEND IN THE ROAD