

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE MENTOR?

For some, mentoring is an add-on job. The role in some programs is not always clear. If then, for instance, the mentor is given no money, little release time, and must assume new responsibilities for the effective induction of a new member into the profession, why would an already overburdened experienced professional say “yes” to such an additional role? The following research was designed to probe that question.



Levinson and his colleagues in 1978 relate: “*The mentor relationship is one of the most complex and developmentally important a man can have in early adulthood.*” Keele and DeLaMare-Schaefer conclude their study by relating that whether or not a person has had a mentor, there are career benefits that can come from being a mentor. Many of these benefits are the same as those of being a protégé in a mentor-protégé relationship.

Adult development theory also suggests there are benefits to the mentor. Some benefits are career development, emotional satisfaction, rejuvenation and creativity, increased self-awareness and personal growth, realization of the significance of the mentor’s life and professional contributions, and fulfillment of generativity needs. Further, it is reported by Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike, and Newman that mentoring is a behavioral phenomenon not dependent on personal traits. Mentoring relationships can be established or deepened by encouraging mentor-like behaviors rather than selecting certain types of people.

### THE STUDY

Sophocles states, “*I benefit myself in aiding him.*” Although it’s too late to ask more of Sophocles, it was not too late to collect qualitative and quantitative data from mentors from a program. The focus of this mentoring program is to provide assistance and support for the new hire throughout the initial year. Program administrators screen and select the experienced staff members to serve as mentors. Monthly seminars intended to meet the needs of participants are also scheduled. When mentorship is clearly understood and patterns of influence are identified, this important role can be more effectively encouraged and utilized. With such needs in mind, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1) • What are the benefits that accrue to a mentor in a formal induction program?
- 2) • How are mentoring roles played out?
- 3) • Which mentor roles take place?
- 4) • Is there increased effectiveness in the workplace of the mentor due to mentoring?

This is referred to hereafter as mentor outcomes.

The sample included 37 mentors enrolled in a mentoring program in the USA. Mentors did not play evaluative roles. The sample can be described as

- primarily female (75.7%), with 56.8% holding a Bachelor’s degree
- the mean age was 37; there were six (16.2%) mentors over fifty years old
- most (62.2%) did not receive release time
- over half (56.7%) attended five or six of the monthly seminars.

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After an extensive review of the literature concerning the mentor benefits cited in other studies, those benefits were categorized into four Dimensions:

- Relationship
- Professional
- Skill
- Personal Esteem.

These were content-validated by several experts. The same procedure was followed for role-functions that mentors have been known to fill. These role-functions were defined for a new hire context. Once again, content validation took place.

The increased effectiveness of the mentor in his/her own workplace was measured in terms of mentor workplace outcomes. These mentor outcomes were reported in open-ended questions asking for specific examples of outcomes on three content areas mentors most extensively worked on with their protégés. Mentor outcomes were also studied from the perspective of the four Dimensions in the in-depth interview portion of the study. Respondents used a Likert-type rating scale indicating how much they felt there were tangible workplace benefits as they worked on six content areas with their protégés. Later, these data were studied from the perspective of age, gender, education, satisfaction level, and release time. Triangulation (360 degree feedback) was achieved through the use of several data sources. The interviews took place at twenty-three locations, took nearly two months to complete, and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

*1. What are the benefits that accrue to the mentor in a formal program? (See Table 1 for details.)*

Generally, the benefits on the Relationship Dimension were highest, followed respectively by the Professional, Skill, and Personal Self-Esteem Dimensions.

On the Relationship Dimension, mentors benefited by seeing protégés get started and grow in the profession, become more independent, and avail themselves of new opportunities. Mentoring established a trusted friendship in which the mentor could be affirmed and supported because the protégé found the mentor's past experience useful. Overall, the mentors felt a sense of pride in passing the skills of the profession on to the next generation. This research verifies what has been said: "Mentorship is one way in which older workers may realize the significance of their lives and professional contribution." As the mentor takes responsibility for another by fostering growth, s/he does indeed grow and develop further in the profession.

On the Professional Dimension, mentors felt they were helping the organization. They reported being challenged, rejuvenated and reinforced in their own professional identity. Mentoring gave them an opportunity to show their own talents while becoming more aware of the importance of communicating in a professional manner. In this way becoming a mentor benefits not only the mentor and protégé, but serves the profession as well.

On the Skill Dimension, mentors reported they analyzed their own skills more, received stimulating ideas for use in the workplace and acquired a sharpened ability to effectively help another.

On the Personal Esteem Dimension, mentors were reaffirmed that they could work with other people, were honored to be selected and felt important when asked by their protégé for advice.

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**Table 1. Twenty mentor benefits cited by mentors to be “substantial” (rated on a 5-point scale)**

Variable	Mean
•Happy to see my protégé become more independent	4.219
•Established a trusted friendship	4.135
•Felt good to see my protégé avail him/herself of new opportunities in the workplace	4.086
•Fostered a sense of pride in helping another get started in the profession	4.081
•Provided a sense of accomplishment in seeing professional growth in the protégé	3.944
•Felt it could help my organization in the long term	3.917
•Pleased me to know that my protégé found my past experiences useful	3.892
•Received affirmation and support from my protégé	3.865
•Helped reinforce my own professional identity	3.865
•Gave me a sense of pride in passing skills of the profession to the next generation	3.861
•Challenged me professionally	3.838
•Caused me to analyze my own work more	3.833
•Reaffirmed my perception that I could work with other people	3.697
•Gave me an opportunity to show my own talents	3.676
•Became more aware of the importance of communicating in a professional manner	3.649
•Rejuvenated me professionally	3.568
•Stimulated ideas for me to use in the workplace	3.556
•Felt honored to be selected as mentor	3.541
•Felt important when my protégé asked for advice	3.541
•Sharpened my ability to effectively help another	3.541

### *2. How are mentoring roles played out? Which roles cited in the general literature take place in a mentoring program?*

In this particular program, the roles played most frequently were that of advisor, and supporter. [Editor's note: Readers are strongly cautioned not to expect similar patterns in other programs. Each program is unique.] These roles took the form of giving specific recommendations to the protégé, providing support for successes as well as failures and offering options from which the inductee could choose a course of action. The roles used moderately were teacher/coach and developer of talents. The emergent pattern was that the role of teacher was used only under three conditions: the protégé was weak and needed excessive direction; the protégé was in an area of high technology involving many procedural complexities; or the mentor categorized his personality as the “take charge” type.

Mentors do **not** prefer the role of teacher-evaluator in a new hires program of this type. Many who chose to talk about it said it caused them serious conflict when they had to assume that role at great length. The role of developer of talents became associated with protégés categorized as “strong.”

The roles that were used **slightly** were protector, role model, and sponsor. The role of protector was used distinctly when the mentor felt the protégé was not being treated fairly or was excessively criticized by other staff. Most mentors felt there was not sufficient time to role model through observation. Very few mentors chose the sponsor

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role probably because new hires generally are not in a position to be reaching out beyond the workplace to search for more career development opportunities.

The role that caused the **most role conflict** for mentors was that of teacher-evaluator. Mentors rely heavily on advising, and supporting. This research also sheds light on why mentors answer as they do when asked to identify their own former mentors. None chose their bosses (who must evaluate).

## THE ROLE OF TIME, AGE AND JOB SATISFACTION

These findings indicate that mentors with release time felt it stimulated their own ideas for workplace use. In the interview, many mentors commented on the **need for release time** if they did not have it, because so many things they wanted to do just could not get done. Also, the release time variable seemed to affect the advisor and supporter roles.



### AGE

Being older was positively correlated with four mentor **benefits**. The four benefits for older mentors were:

- rejuvenated me professionally
- became more aware of the importance of communicating in a professional manner
- kept me on the cutting edge in my own field and
- prompted me to experiment with new ideas/techniques in my workplace.

These quantitative findings confirm previous qualitative findings that being a mentor sparked aging staff. The only role that positively correlated with age was the role of sponsor ( $r=.32, p<.02$ ). This correlation certainly confirms the findings from business that a sponsor is a well established person who is in a position to use his/her influence for the benefit of the protégé. A sponsor is one who encourages the protégé to be on committees to give him/her needed exposure to progress in the field. It is not surprising that this role correlated with age.

### JOB SATISFACTION DUE TO MENTORING

No significant correlations were found for gender, or overall job satisfaction.

However, when job satisfaction due to the mentoring relationship was correlated with mentor benefits, ten such benefits were found to be **significant**. Positive correlations were found for the following: Mentors felt rejuvenated ( $r=.41, p<.006$ ) and reinforced in their own identity ( $r=.30, p<.03$ ). Mentors felt mentoring sharpened their ability to work effectively with others, improved their own skills in the workplace, stimulated ideas for use in the workplace, and kept them on the cutting edge in their own fields. From the Personal Esteem Dimension, the benefits that positively correlated with job satisfaction due to the mentoring relationship were: mentors felt honored to be selected; being a mentor built self-confidence; was an “ego booster”; and gave them an opportunity to show their talents. From these findings it is clear that the mentoring relationship satisfied certain ego needs which may have, in turn, helped to make the mentoring relationship more satisfying.

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### 3. *Is there increased effectiveness in the workplace of the mentor because of mentoring?*

Quantitatively, mentors report improving slightly in the areas of planning, instructional organization, presenting subject matter, communication and testing. This “slight” effect may reflect the fact that mentors were the best staff and were carefully selected for their expertise. One would not expect more than “slight” improvement when the quantitative perspective is used. However, in the open-ended questions, when mentors were asked to pick three content areas they worked on most with their protégés and relate if any of those translated into improvement, most mentors gave positive responses citing at least two or three such examples.

In trying to explain the emergent patterns of interaction that took place, the researcher proposed the “Mentor Mirroring Model.” This model describes the process that makes the relationship so beneficial for the mentor. Theoretically based on Charles Cooley’s (1922) “Looking Glass Self,” it was validated by both the qualitative and the quantitative perspectives. The image created is that a person takes a view of him/herself by observing the way others respond. Other people’s responses are the “mirror” by which the individual sees her/himself. There are five aspects of the model that emerged: self image, re-evaluation, experimentation, mutual feedback and reinforcement.

#### MIRRORING OF POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE:

In this model, the protégé was the “mirror” through which the mentor saw his/her own self-worth and abilities in a new perspective. The protégé **saw desirable** accomplishments and mirrored to the mentor a sense of worth that **affirmed** and **encouraged** the mentor. Indicative comments were:

- *she [protégé] is very complimentary to me...*
- *when my protégé would thank me for something you [sic] would never think someone would thank you for ...*
- *when someone gives you a compliment like that you think, oh, I can do that even better.*



Only five of the 37 mentors felt mentoring was a burden. Most felt honored to be selected. It is not unusual, then, that the mentor would be affirmed and encouraged by the image s/he sees when seeing self-worth through the protégé’s eyes.

#### OPEN TO RE-EVALUATION:

The protégé’s youth, enthusiasm and new energy fostered a freedom for mentors to re-evaluate old patterns of working within a safe environment.

- *The fact that she’s excited, raring to go...how can that not rub off on a someone that [sic] has been in the field for a while...it gets you out of your mold...*
- *Do I do this...I know I should, but do I? ...and I’ve gone back and done things differently. Just thinking about how to encourage someone else opened my eyes to what I was doing and ways I was acting...*
- *It forces me to look at what I do...e.g. when my protégé asked me, “How do you deal with ---?” It forced me to look at my tools and techniques once again. It made me rethink things I have done for years...*
- *I was able to look at new ways of working and really start to re-evaluate my own work.*

#### EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW IDEAS:

Mentors received ideas from protégés and the open atmosphere allowed mentors to feel relaxed about trying such ideas.

- *My protégé has good ideas. I use them and consider them stolen...*

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- *I [mentor] used many of her [protégé] ideas that she shared with me...*

Most mentors spoke in terms of specific ideas that were implemented:

- *We've gone through radical change. My protégé was very well versed in technical things...*
- *I've learned a lot of good points in marketing strategies...*
- *I wanted to try out more ideas...*
- *It helped revitalize my own work.*



### MUTUAL FEEDBACK:

The pattern of giving mutual reinforcement through feedback became an apparent characteristic of the mentor-protégé relationship.

- *Sometimes we'd share a new idea and then get back together and say, "Hey, did it work for you?"*

One mentor related that, at the beginning of the year, her protégé's expectations were too high and this resulted in extreme frustration:

- *After discussion...we realized we had to back off and look at what was more realistic...However, mid-year we realized the expectations had to be bumped-up for her ...we weren't asking enough. [Then the mentor reported going into her own workplace reflecting] Perhaps I should be expecting more too? Then I'd bump up my expectations to see what could happen.*

### REINFORCED POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE:

Due to the level and amount of discussion between mentors and protégés, the mentor's positive self-image was reinforced. Indicative comments are as follows:

- *I [mentor] think I've gained as much as she has – maybe more...*
- *It felt good to help a new hire avoid some of the mistakes I made.*

One mentor related several new collaborative ideas that came out of his positive feelings during the relationship. He related how several others visited to see their innovation: Our attitude was, "Look at what we've done here; you might want to consider them in your building."

- *affirmation that I'm a good employee...and do have something to share with someone else...*
- *There's somebody out there listening and learning from me...just the strokes I received on a personal basis.*

In summary, the feeling of self-worth was communicated verbally and non-verbally by the protégé to the mentor. The mentor, often taken for granted by peers, was now in a position of being an advisor, counselor, and supporter. The roles that mentors played became the means whereby the mentor was affirmed in self-worth. This affirmed positive self-image led to re-evaluation, and re-analysis of mentor habits. As many reported, after many years there is a tendency to do things by rote. Mentoring removed many veterans from that mold. And because the atmosphere was one of freedom to experiment, mentors felt free not only to share ideas, but to be the recipient of new ideas with the challenge of trying them out. When the mentor and protégé were involved in mutual feedback, both seemed at ease to comment on the success or failure of the particular idea or technique. Having such a dynamic in place, it is no surprise that the mentor would be reinforced in the original positive image that the inductee "mirrored."

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## SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Several theoretical bases presented themselves as possibly being linked with mentoring.

Those that I considered were: Herzberg's motivational theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Erikson's "generativity vs. stagnation" stage of his adult development theory. Although the first two theories mentioned do help to explain some of the mentor behaviors this study focused on, clearly the theory that explains the most, I believe, is Erikson's (1950).

As has been suggested, in choosing generativity over stagnation, the mentor assumes responsibility by caring for other adults and fostering their growth and development: While the mentor relationship may be crucial in triggering and working through this stage, successful resolution in generativity may also increase the probability of a positive outcome in Erikson's last stage: "integrity versus despair." (Schmidt & Wolfe 1980, 50)



This responsibility for another was the major pattern that was the **basis for most mentor comments**.

### MENTOR TRAINING:

Mentor role-functions for a specific type of program became clarified in this study, the components for mentor training can also be further refined. The roles that presented more incidents of role conflict need special attention by those involved in mentor training.

### JOB SATISFACTION:

The many **positive** correlations between job satisfaction because of mentoring and certain mentor benefits indicate that rather than viewing mentoring as another burden or "add-on job" for the veteran, it should be viewed as a medium to enhance personal and professional development.

### BRIDGING GAPS:

Organizational leaders interested in bridging the gap that exists between organizational needs and individual needs, might consider the benefits that mentor programs play in potentially satisfying the respective needs at both levels.

### FINANCIAL:

Those concerned with the financial aspects of mentoring programs need to be cognizant of the significant differences reported for those with release time. The financial investment of several hundred dollars per protégé seems minimal in exchange for such significant benefits.

### NETWORKING:

For staff who refer to the isolation and loneliness so characteristic of a given profession or position, mentoring fostered reflective thinking for those mentors and created an atmosphere of less isolation and loneliness. Adults grow by sharing and reflecting on their experiences. Mentors demonstrated in this research that they do both very effectively.

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### SOME PARTING COMMENTS

Taking this closer look at mentor benefits, roles and outcomes, demonstrated that the effects of these programs can go far beyond the scope of its original designers. Truly, the intended purpose of support and assistance to the new hire is as valuable an outcome as its unintended purpose of rejuvenating veterans personally and professionally.

Perhaps Sophocles was quite correct, "*I benefit myself in aiding him.*" With the specific benefits now defined, perhaps anyone selected to be a mentor will know first hand "What's in it for me?" ~

This article has been adapted from an article by Georgiann McKenna published in *Mentoring International*, 1990.

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