

Mentoring: Next to Ideal

By Elizabeth Senter, CI and CT

In his Greek tragedy *Antigone*, Sophocles probably best described the concept and need for developing persons in the profession through mentoring relationships in this passage:

*The ideal condition would be, I admit,
that men should be right by instinct.
But since we are likely to go astray,
the reasonable thing is to learn from
those who can teach.*

"Mentoring is a classic example of a form of human resources development," according to Matthew Mennecke (*Training*, July 1983, p. 36), which has come to be an integral part of most professional organizations. It becomes the novice's "initiation rite of passage" into the profession in which they have trained or otherwise honed skills.

Dr. Ola Welch, co-author of the book *Executive Mentoring: Myths, Issues, Strategies* (1990), identifies three purposes of mentoring to be personal development, career development, and career advancement. The senior level or seasoned professional (mentor) is successful when they "provide opportunities for [the protege] to develop skill; challenge them; give them critical performance feedback; and if ready, sponsor them into higher level positions." The mentor is described as one with influence who facilitates the upward mobility of professional prospects while assuming the roles of teacher, guide, exemplar, counselor, patron, and sponsor. In structuring the mentoring relationship, the following strategies are offered: 1) Identify and plan specific experiences for the protege 2) Challenge the protege

3) Legitimate the protege 4) Provide open, honest feedback to the protege 5) Act as a career counselor 6) Include the protege in the "business" of socializing. Help them to become a colleague 7) Don't get "involved" with the protege 8) Make referrals as needed 9) Do periodic check-ups and goal adjustments 10) Give it up if it doesn't work. Give it up when they "outgrow" you.

During the 1993 RID Convention in Evansville, Liz Oppenheimer offered the perception of mentorship as "two colleagues working together with different experiences rather than more or less experiences." The relationship is a dynamic, mutual growth which moves beyond definable structures as goals are achieved. Mentoring may be viewed as a "constellation of relationships" as several individuals

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may be involved in the protege's pursuit of excellence (Jan Nishimura). According to Nishimura, one individual may offer assistance with the protege's professional goals (i.e. certification) while others may work with the protege's program goals (observing interpreters in various settings) or in skill goals (diagnostic assessment).

Welch describes four critical factors in selecting proteges beyond competency or potential. FIT refers to how well the individual matches the goals, ideas, and professional philosophies of the mentor and the profession as a whole. RISK raises the issue of trust, assuming the protege can be entrusted with the responsibility of professional conduct. It also questions the potential harm to

the mentor for associating with the protege. PREDICTABILITY of success is determined largely on how well the protege and mentor match in personality and other areas of social comfort. Finally, the fourth critical factor of PAYOFF should be considered. The mentoring relationship should be worth the time spent including access to what the mentor has access to and vice versa. The payoff should be mutual as mentoring is a give and take relationship.

The ideal match has a high fit, low risk, high predictability, and high payoff. (Interesting to the profession of interpreting, female mentoring relationships were studied and found to have a tendency to be opposite in all categories.) Furthermore, Welch

advises when establishing a mentoring team, each individual should seek an individual with "personal power and a stable philosophy for their life and the world they live in; high energy in terms of depth of exchange among people; a vision; an ability to see something differently and the steps to make it become so; a willingness to sacrifice and take risks; and [one who has] a passion - a zeal for life and what they are doing." (Senter, Editor, *TRID ReView*, Vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 12-13). While it may be less than Sophocles' ideal, mentoring is the next best opportunity for development available to us all.

Elizabeth Senter, CI & CT; Lead Staff Interpreter, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, President, Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. □