

Commissioners: Mentoring Source for Successful Unit Leadership

MAC-Husker Trails College of Commissioner Science

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to propose a mentoring program in which Commissioners would assume responsibility for mentoring the leaders of the Scouting Units assigned to them.

INTRODUCTION

In today's leadership environment, the word "mentor" has become a generalized term bantered about to seem up-to-date with the times, but meaning little or nothing. The term comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus, when leaving for the Trojan war, left his son, Telemachus, under the guidance of his friend MENTOR. MENTOR, and modern mentors, was a wise teacher, a guide, and a friend. But what does this word actually mean? What goes into being a good mentor and creating an effective mentoring program in your council or district? And how does it foster commissioner talent?

It is important for us to remember that Mentoring is a professional activity (even for volunteers), a trusted relationship, and a meaningful commitment. It is seen as relating to "work" or professional relationships. However, it is just as applicable to volunteer activities such as the BSA and other youth development programs. Carried to its logical conclusion, mentoring describes the relationship between Scoutmasters and scouts, unit committees and unit leaders, and district leaders with unit leaders. Each level of the Scouting program is perfect for mentoring of those in the level below.

The concept of mentoring Scout leaders is a relatively new idea and rare in actual implementation. Scouting's history has stressed the importance of the Scoutmaster from its very beginning. The Scoutmaster has been seen as the one who directs the troop and teaches the boys to become similar leaders. Today, the Unit leader should be working to lead or encourage other leaders and youth, both boys and girls, to develop their leadership abilities in our ever more complex world.

Unit Leaders are expected to learn their position "jobs" on their own. BSA leaders are expected to use web-based on-line training to learn the basics of their particular position. Just in the past ten years the on-line requirements have gone from two or three classes for each position to as many as fifteen or more. Many leaders are overwhelmed by the number of required classes. So the percentage of trained leaders remains low. BSA councils and districts often provide in-person classes for the different positions, in addition to the on-line classes. These classes are often limited to a few times per year due to logistics and time constraints. The result is a few more leaders are trained, but not a large percentage.

The BSA is a type of organization that can benefit from a strong foundation of mentoring to build and retain a healthy cadre of leaders who can react quickly to change and can develop, adapt, and regenerate their successes over time. Leaders who are mentored by quality mentors should in turn mentor other leaders and youth. The mentoring process will help move the focus from individual advancement, whether as a youth earning rank or an adult earning Square Knots. Too many times the focus seems to be obtaining a rank or all of the merit badges for youth or obtaining more Square Knots than others for adults. Quality mentoring can focus the entire program on developing tomorrow's leaders at each level.

Part 1: An Introduction to Mentoring: What is Mentoring

To understand how mentoring can serve a council or district's commissioner staff, let's begin by considering some simple definitions starting with teaching and coaching, terms sometimes used synonymously with mentoring. In addition to distinguishing these three words, we'll explore appropriate applications of these concepts to an in-house development program aimed at elevating the caliber and loyalty of the commissioner staff. By untangling these terms, you can better assess what is needed in your setting and leverage what you currently have to develop successful and sustainable leadership from within your council or district.

Teaching

Teaching refers to instructing and imparting information, knowledge, and wisdom. The teacher/student relationship implies that the teacher has the information, knowledge, or wisdom that needs to be transferred to the student. The challenge for a teacher is to impart relevant information in such a way as to ensure that the receiver absorbs it. This kind of information-sharing is enhanced by the ready availability of BSA developed training modules, podcasts, commissioner guides and manuals, and Internet searches.

Teaching Application: Consider what technical knowledge a potential commissioner would need to be proficient in the job: for example, a Unit Commissioner would need working knowledge of the Commissioner Tools, basic interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, BSA guidelines and systems particular to the units served, etc. Now consider who (or what) is best suited to deliver that information and gauge proficiency. In many ways, this aspect of development is the easiest. You are attempting to strengthen the technical knowledge a person would need to serve in a higher capacity. The metrics of competency are easy to observe.

Coaching

Coaching focuses on the repetitive practicing of skills until mastery is attained. Athletes, musicians, artists, and professionals of all kinds spend lots of time practicing the skills that will make them proficient. Good coaches know how to break down skill sets into distinct, learnable segments that can be practiced over and over until they become second nature. In a coaching relationship, the coach may be teaching some valuable information; however, the onus is upon the student to learn this new skill by doing it over and over, assessing her performance after each attempt. Potentially more complex than teaching, coaching requires the vigilance to observe from the sidelines while the student practices the skill, patience to revisit mistakes and successes to solidify skill development, and prudence to reevaluate strategy when progress stalls.

Coaching Application: Contemplate the skills and attributes you want in a manager that require practice and refinement to achieve mastery. Such skills might include handling a tricky personnel issue, managing project teams, creating and presenting reports for company brass, and running efficient meetings. These skill sets can be more complex than the technical skills referenced in the teaching section above. A proficient manager must be adept at a range of primary skills in order to be effective in any of these scenarios. For example, competency in communication (listening, oral, and written), negotiation, and conflict management as well as political acumen

are required to succeed in these tasks. In addition, the discipline to establish goals, work plans, and deadlines, and to hold oneself and others accountable, is equally important.

Before you glaze over at how to accomplish this coaching feat, consider these questions. Who on your staff already does some of these things, including yourself? Who is best suited to coach a promising commissioner on these sophisticated skills? What small actions can the commissioner take to acquire and enhance certain skills? What kinds of events and activities can he or she attend that showcase these skills in action? What mechanisms exist that allow for employees to evaluate and be evaluated on their performance of a given task? The opportunities for practice are likely part of everyday business — identifying coaches may be the challenge.

Mentoring

Mentoring enables a person to tap into his or her own internal resources in order to mature and virtuously develop as a human being. A mentor/protégé relationship is complex, generally containing elements of both teaching and coaching. More than knowledge transfer and skill acquisition, mentoring denotes cultivating the whole person — one's values, passions, and goals. A mentor commits to a protégé and vice versa because both are looking for a sustained professional relationship that serves a higher purpose. For the mentor, it is the opportunity to influence and support the potential in others: What does this person need to excel, here or anywhere? For the protégé, the relationship supports authentic personal development: With the support of another, am I willing to look within myself for the answers? A successful mentor/protégé relationship necessitates a shared connection and should never be imposed without joint agreement. The rigors of this progressive relationship require a foundation of mutual commitment, honesty, and respect.

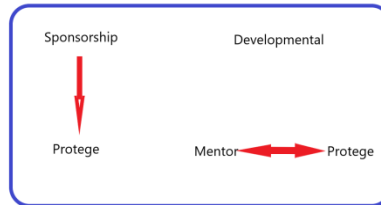
Mentoring Application: The human energy investment required for an effective mentoring program can be prohibitive in our 24/7 workplace of weighted quarterly reporting and short-term results. You may ask: How can a leader invest this time when there are so many other priorities? The answer lies in the fact that people are a leader's most important long-term resource. Turnover, incompetence, lost knowledge, and a lack of preparation are expensive and inefficient. The wrong person, poorly groomed, in a position of influence and responsibility can significantly damage any organization, requiring years of recovery. Successful mentoring is one of the best, time-tested methods for developing the skills, know-how, self-confidence, and critical thinking abilities that leaders need. Yes, it takes time, commitment, and intention (most worthy things do); however, it does not necessarily take a lot of money. You may already possess the resources in the form of experienced, seasoned staff.

A comparison of the three approaches listed above is shown below.

	Coaching	Teaching	Mentoring
Goals	To correct	To provide information	To Support/Train
Initiative	The Coach	The Teacher	The Mentee
Focus	Immediate Situation	Information	Long Term
Roles	Heavy on Telling	Heavy on Telling	Heavy on Listening

Too many times we overly utilized the Coaching and Teaching techniques because it is easier for the Coach or Teacher drive the program and accomplish pre-set goals. Mentoring however, is based on the protégé guiding the relationship to develop/support his or her areas of need.

Types of Mentorship: There are two types of mentorship, Sponsorship and Developmental.



These types of mentorship can be further delineated as follows:

Sponsorship	Developmental
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mentor is more influential and hierarchically senior 2. The mentor gives, the protégé receives, the organization benefits 3. The mentor actively champions and promotes the cause of the protégé 4. The mentor gives the protégé the benefit of their wisdom 5. The mentor steers the protégé through the acquisition of experience and resources 6. The primary objective is career success 7. Good advice is central to the success of the relationship 8. Social exchange emphasizes loyalty 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mentor is more experienced in issues relevant to mentee’s learning needs 2. A process of mutual growth 3. The mentor helps the mentee to things for themselves 4. The mentor helps the mentee develop their own wisdom 5. The mentor helps the mentee towards personal insights from which they can steer their own development 6. The primary objective is personal development 7. Good questions are central to the success of the relationship 8. The social exchange emphasis learning

Developmental Mentoring is the preferred method used in this paper. As such, the mentor and the protégé are equals, but differences in their experiences allows the mentor to help the protégé progress and grow in his or her skills.

Good mentors see their role as drawing forth the wisdom and inherent knowledge of the protégé. A mentor enhances this process by asking good questions, pushing protégés to look inside themselves for the answers and any personal biases or assumptions that may obfuscate their success, thus deepening capacity and broadening awareness. The mentor is not in the relationship to talk about his own successes, give unwarranted advice, or otherwise tell the protégé what to do. Instead, he prompts the protégé to go deeper for the greatest learning, adding insight where appropriate. The focus must always be on the protégé; a mentor who wants attention for his own accomplishments must find acknowledgement in other venues. A good mentor is prepared to relinquish the field to a new cadre of star players, content to sit back and be the coach who relishes in their success — which ultimately becomes his own.

Accomplished mentors become a self-sustaining development system for their departments and organizations, ultimately preparing new mentors by their efforts. You will find that some protégés leave for different organizations or vocations, while others stay to become future stars. Regardless, your department will reap the many benefits of added bench strength. And, instead of being the director who is trying to locate and recruit these high-caliber employees, you will be the one cultivating them.

Part 2: Preparation of the Mentee

The US Air Force defines Mentoring as “A relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another to a higher level of personal and professional excellence.” This definition is simple, but appropriate for the Mentoring of your commissioners. An experienced commissioner who has been successful with a variety of units and experiences can easily assist new or inexperienced commissioners develop the skills and wisdom necessary in helping maintain unit improvement.

STEP 1: The Focus of Professionalⁱ Growth and Development. The Gallup Organization has spent over 30 years of selection and survey research, seminars, and focus groups. Seventy-eight seminar discussions have been held over that time, in which over 800 persons identified as leaders who had mentors, were mentoring, or both, contributed ideas. The survey involved a national sample of 800 adults who were chosen because they were judged to be effective mentors and because they also claimed that their mentoring was successful. Focus groups were conducted with both mentors and mentees.ⁱⁱ Through this study of thousands of successful leaders, managers, and associates, the Gallup Organization has distilled a set of principles which promote success. These are important foundations to reflect upon in designing developmental initiatives in mentoring.

PRINCIPLE 1: Development is what happens to the person—not what the leader or trainer does to him or her. Unlike training efforts, which seek to convey information or teach a person to perform a set of behaviors, development efforts are only successful if the individual person grows. Clarity about both expectations and role is essential for establishing a productive mentoring relationship.ⁱⁱⁱ

PRINCIPLE 2: Every person has talents, and his or her opportunities for growth and success lies in those talents—not his or her limitations. As such, the focus of developmental efforts should be centered on strengths and talents, not weaknesses or limitations. Too often the focus is on strengthening or eliminating a person’s weaknesses, but a good developmental mentoring plan should focus on strengthening his or her talents.

PRINCIPLE 3: People do not grow in isolation—the best development occurs within the context of a relationship with another person or persons.

PRINCIPLE 4: People are uniquely different and require different levels of support, teaching methods, opportunities, and supporting partners to grow. No one system will be perfect for each individual, so any desirable system must have the flexibility to accommodate a range of interests, talents, limitations, and levels of development.

PRINCIPLE 5: Educational training programs can have positive effects on a person. But for lasting change and the greatest impact, a person needs continuity and consistency in the development efforts and a means to assess his or her forward progress. A term currently being thrown around the human resources world is On-boarding (initial orientation and training). The word evokes a practice that goes beyond the traditional orientation, yet precisely what it means has remained elusive.^{iv} The BSA has developed an effective orientation and training program for commissioners. Starting with initial orientation, continuing with training at commissioner meeting and conferences, and leading up to the College of Commissioner Service; commissioners have ample opportunity to learn the “book knowledge” of their position. Developmental Mentoring, on the other hand, allows the commissioner to link with an experienced commissioner who can help them with a personalized program.

PRINCIPLE 6: Measurement improves performance. What cannot be measured cannot be managed, so most developmental efforts must be related to outcomes—not to the process.

PRINCIPLE 7: The capacity to monitor success and the deliberate celebration of it leads to greater clarity, feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, and a willingness to take on additional challenges. As such, a developmental effort requires the attention of the organization to formally and at times informally acknowledge accomplishments and successes.

PRINCIPLE 8: People’s limits are most apparent when they must undertake tasks without the benefit of support from others, e.g., operating in isolation from the group. To maximize success, people must learn to ask for the help they need from those who have the greatest capacity to give

or contribute. A development plan must therefore facilitate the support from others if it is to guide a person in managing his or her limits.

PRINCIPLE 9: Mentors and protégés are never finished—no one is completely developed. So the best developmental mentoring programs are those which guide people in continuing to develop themselves, not in isolation but in mentorships or partnerships with others.

PRINCIPLE 10: Performance is a requisite for development. Everyone is entitled to mentoring, and everyone should be mentored. However, if a protégé’s performance doesn’t meet BSA expectations or acceptable standards, the mentoring provided must first focus on correcting the deficiencies. Thereafter, the mentoring focus can return to general (position focused) developmental support.

Step 2: The Basics of Professional Growth and Development.

Professional growth and development is simply the intentional advancement of an individual through formal learning; which includes intentional coursework, internships, or apprenticeships, and informal learning; such as attending conferences, seminars, or networking. Zig Ziglar once said, “The only thing worse than training employees and losing them is not training them and keeping them.”^v This oft repeated quote is as applicable to the BSA as to the business world where Ziglar directed it. Effective BSA programs require leaders who are trained. Many leaders are self motivated to receive that training, but most are not that motivated. The commissioner who focuses on the following principles will help motivate other leaders.

PRINCIPLE 1: Volunteers should set goals and create a plan to achieve them. Many times leaders need a little help jump starting their professional development. People who are the most satisfied and successful in their volunteer activities have proactively determined what they want from their efforts.

PRINCIPLE 2: Develop a timeline, including milestones. Leaders who work with more experienced volunteers in their units tend to move forward at a more steady pace than those who do not reach out to others.

PRINCIPLE 3: Utilize BSA programs. Some councils have detailed formal programs to help volunteers develop their professional careers. In others, the volunteer needs to informally pursue their professional development. Councils with programs generally focus energy on helping people develop and follow a path related to their current position. Instead the council or district should be seeking to develop leaders who will move on to other positions, including district and council positions.

PRINCIPLE 4: Own their professional career path. A career path can be discussed at several meetings with a potential mentor. Some units demonstrate a deep commitment to their leaders by assisting where possible with resources of time and dollars, such as paying the fees for a leader’s

attendance at a Wood Badge or Powder Horn course. However, each volunteer should remember that it is their career path.

PRINCIPLE 5: Write it down. Career paths are recommended for the same reason that goals are recommended. They are the written plan that can help each person take charge of what is most important to his or her fulfillment and success. Without a plan, they can feel rudderless and have no benchmark against which to measure progress.

PART 3: Focus on the Relationship

Mentoring is a rewarding and positive experience for all involved, but it is not without its challenges. A mentoring relationship is unlike many of the others in life—it may be formally created and have a purposefulness that your friendships and family relations may not. Because mentoring relationships are unique, you will need some perspective and some helpful tips as you move forward in your match. Unlike many forms of volunteering—such as attending a unit meeting or activity—the impact of mentoring is not seen immediately. As one prominent researcher put it, “mentoring may be more like the slow accumulation of pebbles that sets off an avalanche than the baseball bat that propels a ball from the stadium.”^{vi} Because mentoring relationships take time to gain momentum, it is critical that mentors have patience and the ability to work through any difficult stretches. Matches that last longer have a greater chance of achieving program outcomes, while those that cannot get past those initial bumps in the road have the potential to do harm to the unit.^{vii}

Maintaining Relationship Quality

The importance of quality relationships cuts across all barriers, real or perceived. In fact, the better the quality of the relationship, the fewer barriers there are with which to contend. Quality relationships are based upon seven principles.

PRINCIPLE 1, Goal clarity: Goal clarity is important in any relationship, but is critical in a mentoring relationship. The mentoring relationship should have a definite set of goals. These could be related to improvement in one or more areas of a unit’s success or to preparation of the mentee for involvement in a district or council position.

PRINCIPLE 2, The ability to create and manage rapport: Rapport is critical to any relationship. Rapport in the mentoring process eases the initial fears or downfalls of the process.

PRINCIPLE 3, Understanding of the role and its boundaries: The mentor and mentee should be aware of their roles and the boundaries necessary for a successful mentoring relationship. The boundaries should be established at the beginning of the relationship and clarified as time progresses.

PRINCIPLE 4, Voluntarism: Realization that the mentor and mentee are volunteers is very important. The mentoring process should be designed to ensure that the mentoring relationship

takes into account this fact. The mentor's and mentee's involvement in Scouting is in addition to the other areas of their lives.

PRINCIPLE 5, Basic competencies on the part of the mentor and mentee: The mentoring relationship should identify and seek to develop basic competencies in the mentee's Scouting activities.

PRINCIPLE 6, Proactive behaviors by mentee and developmental behaviors by the mentor: The relationship will be improved when the mentee becomes proactive in recognizing and improving their behaviors.

PRINCIPLE 7, Measurement and review: Periodically, the mentor and mentee should evaluate and review the status of their relationship. The goal of the evaluation and review should be on improvement and development of areas overlooked previously.

Evolution of the Relationship

Mentors have an easier time getting through trouble spots in their mentoring relationships if they understand the basics of the typical match "life cycle." All matches go through a similar set of ups and downs and a mentor will have an easier time working with the mentee and getting appropriate support from Scouting staff if he or she knows what to expect. The development of any relationship between two people depends on a complex mix of factors, including age, balance of power, roles and responsibilities, frequency of interactions, and natural bonds or level of commitment involved. Relationships go through a series of stages as they develop and evolve, from the first moments of sharing a common interest to the satisfaction of a fully developed friendship. Formal, one-to-one mentoring relationships also go through a series of stages. Each mentoring relationship begins, develops, changes, and evolves in unique ways. However, understanding the primary stages of mentoring relationships can help mentors nurture their new friendships and deal more effectively with challenges that may come up along the way. In this discussion we identify stages of mentoring relationships: *Preparation*, *Negotiation*, and *Enabling Growth*. A fourth stage is *Reaching Closure*. This discussion focuses on the common pitfalls encountered during the first three stages of the relationship. *Reaching Closure* mostly refers to what happens as the mentoring relationship ends, something we are obviously trying to avoid as the relationship gets started.

Phase 1: Preparation

Every mentoring relationship has a beginning phase—including that first meeting—that is often the source of much anticipation and sometimes a little anxiety. When you ask a mentor or mentee what makes him (or her) most nervous about this phase, you'll usually hear the same thing: "I hope he or she likes me."

What it feels like:

The beginning of any relationship is often awkward, and mentoring relationships are no exception. Your first few months will focus on getting to know each other, exploring similar interests, discussing expectations, and starting to form norms and bonds that will shape the rest of the first year together. It is during this phase that mentors should work with their mentees to

set parameters for the match, such as when to meet and for how long, what kinds of activities will take place, and how to contact each other.

Common pitfalls:

Mentors can **get off on the wrong foot** early on by making all the decisions rather than sharing that job with their mentee. If a mentor starts off by calling all the shots, the mentee is more likely to close up and be reluctant to share their thoughts. A good friendship is a partnership, and although it may feel harder to share decision making with your mentee, it's more likely to build a strong relationship down the road. Spending time at the first few meetings brainstorming a few activities to do in the future can help break the ice and make the mentee realize his opinions are valued. If you can't agree on activities, try taking turns picking within the established unit activities.

Missed meetings are one of the most common pitfalls for new relationships. Every missed meeting means less time you have to build your friendship. Many young people have not yet developed strong organizational skills, so the mentor may need to help them learn how to keep track of meetings. Families can also negatively affect scheduled meetings, especially if they have not bought into the program or do not understand the significance of consistent meetings. If possible, call the mentee the evening before a meeting, have him write down the next meeting in a notebook or planner, and establish a routine for your meetings so they are easier to remember. Make sure the mentee knows how to reach you if he must break a date, either by calling you directly or by sending a text or email message. Mentors should also be sure never to miss a meeting without notifying the mentee in advance. If you are unable to meet, contact your mentee immediately and reschedule the meeting time. Everyone knows things come up from time to time, but mentoring research tells us that consistency of meetings is a key to youth success.^{viii} Another common issue mentors report early in the match is that **the mentee will not "open up"** or talks very little. This can be frustrating for mentors, who may see their mentee's reserve as a sign of boredom, ambivalence, or even dislike for the mentor. In fact, it's much more likely that the mentee is simply not yet comfortable with the mentor and is guarded about expressing thoughts or sharing personal information during conversations. Many people have good reason not to trust every new person who enters their life, and any attempt to push them to open up can have the opposite effect. A few conversation techniques may help break the silence and help engage the mentee in productive, stress-free conversations. Start by finding an activity that you both enjoy doing. You will soon begin to develop common conversation threads that can be revived for future match meetings.

Try to frame your questions so that your mentee will have to provide more than a yes or no answer. For example: "How long have you been involved in Scouting?" is likely to get a yes or no response. In contrast, "How long have you been involved in Scouting?" will elicit a more in-depth answer. Beginning questions with phrases such as what, who, when, where, and why is a tried and true way to encourage conversation. Be patient—the mentee may never have had another person in his or her life who wants to sit and talk or who truly cares about what he or she has to say.

Mentoring program staff often report that a common early pitfall occurs when **mentors expect too much too soon in a mentoring relationship**. Mentors volunteer to work with others because they have a desire to see positive change in that person; however, research tells us that positive change is most likely to occur when a person feels supported by a friend rather than pushed to change a behavior. Instead of having high expectations for your ability to change the mentee, take the time to find out who he or she is. The mentee needs to know that the mentor appreciates

him for who he is, not who the mentor thinks he should be. By initially keeping things light in interactions with the mentee, the mentor will show him that the mentor is there to support him unconditionally and will seek to discover the many strengths he already has.

Phase 2: Negotiation

Now that the mentor has been matched with the mentee for a couple of months, the relationship is starting to build momentum and trust. The awkwardness of the first few months has passed and the friendship is really starting to develop. This phase of the relationship involves deepening the friendship and the experiences that are being shared.

What it feels like:

At this stage the mentor and the mentee are learning more about each other as they both open up, and are starting to understand what really makes the mentee “tick.” The mentor and mentee may both feel more comfortable disclosing the type of information that builds trust and understanding among friends. When the mentor and mentee have been meeting for a while they will have established routines and rituals for the match, and may have found shared interests that they really enjoy doing together. As a mentor, you may feel like you are ready to help your mentee set some goals and focus your activities on helping her achieve them.

Common pitfalls:

During this phase **the mentee may start to become dependent** on the mentor’s support and caring. While it’s great that the mentee trusts the mentor and seeks their advice and attention, the mentor needs to set or reinforce the boundaries that were laid out in the beginning of the match to avoid hurt feelings on the mentee’s part and resentment or discomfort on the mentor’s own. When setting boundaries with the mentee be honest with how the behavior affects you. Use “I” statements and your own feelings as the basis for the discussion. “I care about you and am happy you feel comfortable calling me when you want to talk. But I feel overwhelmed when you call me every day at work. It would be better for me if you can call me at home in evening or on weekends.” Give your mentee a chance to express his feelings, too, and use these conversations to remind him about when and how you can be part of his life, and to find out if there are any specific things that are concerning him. Once the mentee does open up to you, you may hear a lot about the problems and issues he faces in his life. It is not uncommon for mentors to feel overwhelmed by the problems or circumstances their mentee is facing.

You may feel that you have to try to “fix” your mentee’s life, that you need to be a counselor or social worker in order to really make a difference. In these situations, remember that as a friend and champion of your mentee, you can do a lot to make your mentee feel better about herself and her situation. But many of the people in the Scouting program are there because they come from tough situations, and your district and counsel commissioner staff can help locate professional help for mentees and families facing serious difficulties. If your mentee is unloading her problems on you on a regular basis, talk to your district commissioner about getting some extra help. And always alert the appropriate agencies immediately if you believe your mentee is in danger.

Mentors may also start to feel underappreciated by their mentee at this stage of the relationship. Often mentors feel that they are giving up a lot of their time and energy and are never thanked for their efforts. Don’t expect to be thanked for your dedication by your mentee. Sometimes it is a shyness issue; he may talk highly of you with program staff or other people but feel embarrassed to express his feelings directly. Your mentee may not tell you, but he appreciates you more than either of you know. Try modeling courteous behavior when you are with him and tell him how much you appreciate him.

Phase 3: Enabling Growth

Once the mentoring relationship is off the ground, it is normal for the mentee to start testing boundaries of the relationship. Though you've spent time affirming that you appreciate and enjoy your mentee, he may still want to see how far your commitment really goes. Because mentees often come from situations in which other people can't always be relied on, trusting another person is difficult for them, and they may even try to sabotage the relationship by "acting out."

What it feels like:

This can be a confusing time for mentors, especially if the testing occurs after a period of trust building and increasing rapport with the mentee. When your "perfect" mentee starts missing appointments, shows resentment, tries to get away with things, or has a hostile or sullen attitude, it's easy to take their behavior personally. You may feel that your mentee is avoiding you or does not like you anymore.

Common pitfalls:

It's natural for mentors to respond to this testing phase by feeling **less interested in continuing the relationship**. The mentee is making you feel less competent and you may begin to doubt your ability to make a difference in the mentee's life. This is a time when some matches fail, so it's important to recognize the testing behavior for what it is: a signal that your mentee wants you to "prove" that you are committed to the relationship. Rather than taking your mentee's behavior personally, remember that it has nothing to do with you, but rather is a manifestation of his fear of being rejected one more time by one more person. Stick by your mentee through this tough time and continue to reaffirm your commitment to the relationship. Reinforce the limits and boundaries you've established, if needed, but be sure to find new and ongoing ways to show your mentee that you think they are capable. Sometimes, testing can be a signal of other issues that are going on in your mentee's life, so be sure to keep the communication doors open.

Seek Out the Help When Needed

Any time that your mentee exhibits a period of challenging behavior, seek help from your district commissioner staff to get guidance and support. They may be aware of other issues in the mentee's life that could be contributing to the problem, and they can access resources to help. Talking with other mentors about your experiences can also be helpful—it's likely they have experienced similar issues and may have some helpful tips. Get the help and support you need to get through the rough spots and keep working toward your mentee's goals.

The Mentoring Conversation

Mentoring conversations should be rich, challenging and rewarding for both parties. They result in new insights, broader perspectives and food for thought. Yet that's not always the case. Sometimes they can be mediocre and lack impact. As a result, the mentoring relationship loses momentum and the negative spiral starts. So, what prevents mentoring conversations from delivering the potential development?

- Busy, stretched mentors with insufficient time to think about the meetings in advance.
- Mentees, struggling with The Awe Factor, don't take ownership for the success of mentoring conversations
- Lack of skills and/or confidence in initiating powerful mentoring conversations

- Mentoring that has fallen into a cozy, comfortable relationship
- Poor questions that don't develop into rich discussions
- Mentors get stuck – running out of ideas for mentoring meetings

There are so many ways that learning can be created for mentees through mentoring conversations. Here are just a few suggestions:

Reaffirmation: The mentor can stress the high points of how the mentee has progressed. The mentee can discuss the areas they have seen improvement or seen a need for improvement.

Identifying the issue: The mentor and mentee identify any issues affecting the mentee's growth and focus on a significant one.

Building mutual understanding: The mentor and mentee deliberately work to build a mutual understanding of the situation.

Exploring alternative solutions: The mentor and mentee brainstorm to discover alternatives to solutions that seem to be failing or having lack-luster success.

Final check: The mentor and mentee evaluate where the mentee is at concerning completion of the established goals. The mentee and mentor should decide the next steps, once the established goals have all been completed.

PART 4: Benefits of Mentoring

The benefits which research has reported are:

For mentees:

- Provides impartial advice and encouragement
- Develops a supportive relationship
- Assists with problem solving
- Improves self-confidence
- Offers professional development
- Encourages reflection on practice

For mentors:

- Opportunity to reflect on own practice
- Enhances job satisfaction
- Develops professional relationships
- Enhances peer recognition
- It uses your experience, making it available to a new person

- It widens your understanding of the organization and the way it works
- It enables you to practice interpersonal skills
- It provides personal satisfaction through supporting the development of others

For Scouting:

- Enables faster induction of new leaders
- It improves the entire Scouting community
- Enhances individual performance
- Encourages commitment to the organization
- It improves communication
- Improved morale, motivation, and relationships

PART 5: How Does Mentoring Relate to the Leading and Teaching EDGE

The Leading and Teaching EDGE is a system used at all levels of the BSA program to train scouts and Scouters on new material.

The Leading and Teaching EDGE is so important that it even appears in the *Boy Scout Handbook* (page 38 of the 13th/newest edition):

- The first step is **explain**. The teacher carefully explains the skill, showing all the steps and keeping in mind that the learner is probably seeing this for the first time. Go slowly, make your actions deliberate, and use descriptive language, but don't stop to show the intricacies in detail yet.
- After explaining the skill, you will **demonstrate** it. Break down each element, showing the step-by-step process and explaining the details of how each step is done and why. Here is where you allow the learner to ask questions, but not yet where he takes the reins for himself.
- Now, **guide** the learner as he makes his first few attempts at the skill. Be sure to let him be completely hands-on, and don't worry if he makes mistakes. Just tell him how to fix it, or start again from the beginning. Keep at it, and be careful not to lose patience. Remember how you were when you were learning!
- Lastly, the teacher **enables** the learner by allowing him to see that he can do it himself — and has! The Teaching EDGE method can be applied to teaching and learning any skill.

A coach directs, tells, facilitates performance, learning, and development of the team member. The coach directs and aligns the members of a team to achieve a goal and is responsible for their development. A good coach accepts the teams failure as a result of their inability to adequately prepare the team for the event or activity.

A mentor supports and guides the personal growth of the mentee. The mentee is in charge of his or her learning and learns how to learn for life. The mentor provides a role model while making suggestions and connections.

CONCLUSION

It is important for commissioners to remember that Mentoring is a professional activity, a trusted relationship, and a critical commitment. Carried to its logical conclusion, mentoring describes the relationship between leaders (at all levels, including commissioners) and those they are leading. Each level of the Scouting program is perfect for mentoring of those in the level below.

The concept of commissioners mentoring Scout leaders is a relatively new idea and rare in actual implementation. All current leaders should be focusing on developing the leadership capabilities of other leaders and youth. The commissioner's main focus is on unit leader development and improvement of unit operations. Unit leaders (Key 3) should be focused on developing their adult and youth coworkers.

Scouting Leaders are expected to learn their position "jobs" on their own. This "On-the-Job" training consists of web-based training and in-person classes taught by qualified instructors from the council and districts. The leader is expected to make the time to accomplish this training. It is easy for leaders to lose sight of the importance of this training due to the busy-ness of life. The commissioner can assist the leaders they are trying to serve by establishing a mentoring approach to their service.

The BSA is a type of organization that can benefit from a strong foundation of mentoring to build and retain a healthy cadre of leaders who can react quickly to change and can develop, adapt, and regenerate their successes over time. Leaders who are mentored by quality mentors should in turn mentor other leaders and youth. The mentoring process will help move the focus from individual advancement, whether as a youth earning rank or an adult earning Square Knots. Too many times the focus seems to be obtaining a rank or all of the merit badges for youth or obtaining more Square Knots than others for adults. Quality mentoring can focus the entire program on developing tomorrow's leaders at each level.

ENDNOTES

- i. Professional is used in this paper to refer to volunteer Scouters as well as professional BSA personnel.
- ii. Gallup
- iii. Zachery, pg 49
- iv. Astein, pg 51
- v. This quote can be found in many books and web pages without a direct reflection of the original source.
- vi. Darling, pg. 182
- vii. Rhodes
- viii. Sipe

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