

## **Mentoring: The Win-Win Relationship**

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### Abstract

Mentoring is a much discussed concept for the quick integration of new faculty into an institution's life. This paper will discuss the case study of the mentoring relationship that the two authors have formed, will stress the need for both the new faculty and established faculty to create mentoring relationships. It will relate the advantages and disadvantages found in this relationship, emphasizing both the new faculty's point of view and the mentor's point of view. The authors have found that there are many advantages, though different ones, for each individual faculty member. New faculty need to establish a mentoring relationship from the very start of the teaching experience. Many newcomers to the field of education believe they are capable of teaching, but are naive concerning the operative details of the teaching profession. A mentor can help chart the path that the new faculty member must follow, as well as help establish other professional relationships with other faculty. The mentor gains from the relationship by the insights, different background and outlooks, and skills and knowledge the new faculty possess. In addition, mentoring relationships can evolve into a continued working relationship that will enhance both careers. Some of the gains to both parties could only come about from this relationship. In our case, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages creating a win-win situation for all involved.

### Introduction

Mentoring of a new employee has been used in industry and education to assist the new employee to integrate into the new situation as easily as possible. The concept and practice of mentoring has been discussed in the literature<sup>1,2</sup> both from the theoretical and practical stand points. The academic world is unique in that success and long term employment is decided at a relatively early stage in the professor's academic life with the tenure decision. In addition, success is dependent on three different and sometimes conflicting types of activities; namely teaching, research and service. Many professors just entering higher education do not really understand the requirements for tenure, the balance of the professorial activities, the tenure system, and the institutional system. Lack of understanding of any of these can lead to wasted time, effort, and possibly a negative tenure decision. Mentoring of the new professor is important to advise and direct the new professor, not just to avoid potential problems but to help them become effective and productive as quickly as possible.

Starting in the academic year 1992-93, Professor Williams joined the Purdue University at Kokomo faculty after an early "retirement" from over thirty years in industry. Professor Pike had more extensive



academic experience but is younger and had been at Purdue longer. What developed between them was a mentoring relationship that both would agree had many benefits, helping both of them professionally and personally. The mentoring relationship was purposefully started by Professor Pike, based on his personal experience the pitfalls and problems that new faculty face. He also felt that, from an ethical stand point, the experienced faculty should assist the beginners to start them on a long and productive career. In addition, their department consists of three full time faculty. The quicker the new faculty become comfortable and productive, the better the students and school are served. Professor Williams was very eager to take advantage of any help he could get and was very willing to try the mentoring relationship. It should be noted that both individuals involved did not concentrate on the goal of attaining tenure. The initial goal was to assist Professor Williams to quickly and as easily as possible become fully productive in the three areas of activities. **Tenure** would be a by-product of a successful faculty member, and should not be a goal in itself

This paper is a case study of the mentoring relationship the authors formed. This paper will relate some of the experiences and observations the authors have found in the four year mentoring relationship they have developed. What the authors feel is necessary for a good relationship will be presented along with some of the results of the relationship.

### The Good Mentoring Relationship

There are a number of aspects that the authors found to be desirable for a successful mentoring relationship. The first requirement is that both of the faculty involved treat the relationship as totally confidential. Many professional and personal problems will come up that will need frank discussion. Things that relate to an individual's weaknesses are always difficult for people to admit and discuss. The authors feel that the commitment to confidentiality allows for freer exchange of ideas, more openness, and a better overall environment. Confidentiality is related to the second requirement, a commitment to the relationship that support will be there whatever and whenever the problem may be. This is a commitment to supporting one another (not just for the experienced supporting beginner) whenever the need is there. If one shirks the responsibility to the other at a critical moment, why was the relation started to begin with? This commitment is also a time and effort commitment from both parties. Time and effort is needed to discuss issues, help one another and implement solutions to difficulties.

Since both faculty will be working together closely at times and discussing potentially embarrassing issues, both faculty must have compatible personalities. The authors consider themselves fortunate to meet that requirement, and this helps the relationship work. For this reason the authors do not feel that mentors should be assigned by a third party. Instead, the two should seek each other to form a good relationship. Lastly, both faculty members must have a common set of goals for the relationship. Without common goals the two partners may work against each other. The authors' initially had three goals. These were to help Professor Williams become an excellent teacher as quickly as possible, and to start him in appropriate service and research activities.

### Advantages for New Faculty

Professor Williams has found that there are many advantages to a mentoring relationship. First, it is always helpful to have as a guide someone experienced with the institutional system. One example of this is that at Purdue University the tenured faculty annually evaluate the non-tenured faculty. This evaluation is mainly based on a document that will eventually become the support document for the tenure process. In the



School of Technology, we are blessed with a forty page guide dictating the content, form and style of the document. Even though this guide is very complete, questions still arise. In Professor Williams case, his mentor helped him decide what of his extensive industrial experience was relevant to the purpose of the document. His mentor also helped ease concerns regarding not only the process, but the intent and philosophy of the system. Related to the evaluation document, the mentor can serve as a guide for appropriate research, publishing and service activities that are desirable or required. In addition, the mentor can serve as a intermediary to help the new faculty get the contacts necessary to pursue appropriate activities. In the case of Professor Williams, his mentor strongly suggested that he attend the ASEE annual meeting even if he did not have a paper to present, with the goals of meeting colleagues and seeing the presentations of others to form ideas for his own research and publishing efforts. His mentor also offered to write a joint effort paper for presentation. Both of these suggestions were accepted and were good starting points for those aspects of his career. Also, Professor Williams has used his mentor as a proofreader of abstracts and papers in an effort to enhance their acceptance and quality.

For the teaching aspect of the professor's activities, the mentor has also been very helpful. Professor Williams has used his mentor as a resource for teaching techniques, determining reasonableness of assignments and exams, for creating new laboratory experiments, and, on occasion, as an advisor to help resolve difficult circumstances. In Professor William's first year teaching, the mentor did two things to lighten the load and assist Professor Williams, thereby increasing his chances of success. The first term the mentor and Professor Williams each taught one section of a common course. This allowed the two faculty to work together to develop the syllabus, schedule, lecture notes and assignments. They even had common exams to gauge the performance of the students and the instructors. The second term, the mentor had Professor Williams teach a course that, for the past few terms, the mentor taught. The mentor provided complete notes for the class as a guide and to lighten the work load of the course.

Finally, Professor Williams has used his mentor as a confidential source to discuss reappointment and tenure. He feels that the input and guidance that the mentor has provided have definitely increased his chances of attaining tenure and promotion.

#### Advantages for Established Faculty

The experienced faculty have many positive reasons to join in a mentoring relationship. Working with a new non-academic experienced person allows the established faculty to be exposed to new ideas and perspectives that would not normally be available. Professor Pike has found that the insights gained by working with someone who has had considerable industrial experience is a significant advantage. These insights are not just technical, but include insights into how the industrial world works in ways that Professor Pike did not see in his own industrial experience. Working closely with a colleague has also added new teaching methods in addition to technical knowledge. Being a mentor also allows for team teaching and research activities that are often greater than the sum of the two individuals. For example: the authors developed a laboratory manual for the course they initially both taught sections of. This manual would probably not have been produced without the team effort. The manual not only has helped with tenure and promotion for Professor Williams, it has also been a great benefit to the students taking the course. Lastly, Professor Pike has used his mentor as a confidential source to discuss new ideas and issues to get another opinion before making decisions.



## Disadvantage of Mentoring

There are some disadvantages to a mentoring relationship. To develop and maintain a good mentoring relationship takes time. The time aspect is more of a problem at the beginning of the relationship when the partners are learning about one another and dealing with many of the issues that come about at the beginning of an academic career. The authors feel that in many ways the time spent was an investment in ideas and time savings in the future. As with any relationship there is the risk that it will not work due to personality conflicts, a violation of trust, or lack of effort on the part of one members. One other danger that may present itself is one of politics. Both partners must take efforts to avoid playing politics in the relationship or outside that may damage the mentoring relationship. In spite of the potential problems, the authors feel that attempting a mentoring relationship has many positive aspects that out-weigh the risk of the potential problems.

## Long Term Benefits

A good mentoring relationship should evolve into a long term partnership. This has happened to the authors. The authors have developed a good personal and professional friendship that will benefit them both for the foreseeable future. They are planning a number of joint projects both for team teaching, course development, and research activities. One such activity is the revising of the laboratory manual the partners initially developed. They will continue to use each other as a confidential source of help and information. They continue to use each other as a second opinion on issues and as a critic for abstracts and papers. Seeing that the initial goals of the mentoring relationship have been met, they now have the goal of tenure to work towards.

## Conclusion

In our case mentoring has worked for both partners. Both the experienced faculty and the new faculty have gained from the relationship professionally and personally. The authors encourage new and experienced faculty to seek out one another to form a partnership based on trust and common goals. With work the relationship will attain the goals and lead to a lasting relationship that can benefit both partners.

## References

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