

*Mentoring activities and programs have gained increasing attention and endorsement in a variety of business and academic areas. This paper proceeded with the premise that mentoring may possess untapped potential for the forensic community. Starting with a survey of experienced and novice coaches to assess the existence of and attitudes toward mentoring activities, the paper then moves to conclusions and recommendations for the expanded use of mentoring as a method to advance or promote our forensics coaches and judges.*

## Mentoring Relationships and Programs: Applications to the Forensics Community

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### ***Introduction***

In the last fifteen years, mentoring has emerged as a topic of interest in a variety of areas ranging from academics to business to groups at risk. While interest in mentoring is a fairly recent development, the concept itself is really quite old. Noonan (1980) suggests that Greek mythology was probably the first to introduce the term. "Mentor" was a faithful friend of Odysseus who was entrusted to care for Odysseus' son. When Odysseus set off on his ten-year odyssey, Mentor was the one who educated, counselled and sponsored his son, Telemachus. It is from Greek mythology that a mentor came to be known as a trusted counselor or guide. History contains many other examples of famous mentoring relationships. Merriam (1983) suggests such examples as: Socrates and Plato, Freud and Jung, Lorenzo de Medici and Michelangelo, Haydn and Beethoven, Boas and Mead, and Sartre and De Beauvoir. This historical framework also, in the words of Merriam

(1983), leads us to regard a mentor as "one who is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger. The mentor helps shape the growth and development of the protege" (p. 162).

The recent interest in mentoring can be traced in part to a survey published by Roche in the Harvard Business Review in 1979. Over 4,000 top executives in the United States were interviewed concerning their experiences with mentoring relationships. Over two-thirds of those interviewed reported involvement in mentoring relationships. Additionally, those executives who had mentors were found to: (1) earn more money at a younger age; (2) were better educated; (3) were more likely to follow a "career plan"; (4) sponsor more proteges; and (5) they reported being happier with their careers and deriving greater pleasure from their work. Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike, and Newnan (1984) report that documented benefits of mentoring for individuals and organizations include: faster promotion, higher pay, greater technical and organizational knowledge, and higher levels of productivity and performance for both mentor and protege. It is probably not surprising that such findings have encouraged not only research work in the area of mentoring, but also the establishment of a variety of formal and informal mentoring programs in business and academic areas.

This paper is interested in addressing two questions. First, to what extent do mentoring relationships exist in the forensics community? Second, would it be desirable for the forensics community to formally or informally encourage mentoring relationships, practices, or programs? Organizationally, the paper will be divided into three sections. First, basic definitions of and approaches to mentoring will be presented. Second, a summary of semi-nondirected interviews with forensics coaches from one region of the country concerning their experiences with and thoughts about mentoring will be provided. Finally, conclusions and recommendations will be offered as to how the forensics community can use

mentoring practices and procedures to enhance the training and development of new coaches and judges.

### **Definitions and Approaches**

A review of the mentoring literature quickly reveals that mentoring has been defined in a variety of ways. Levinson et. al. (1978) offer one of the most restricted definitions, suggesting: (1) that a mentor is a teacher, sponsor, counselor, developer of skills and intellect, host, guide and example; (2) that a mentor's most crucial function is to support and facilitate the realization of a dream; (3) that a mentor synthesizes the characteristics of a parent-child relationship and peer support without being either; and (4) that a mentor relationship is an intense form of "love," that lasts two or three years (at most ten) and possesses an 8-15 year age difference between mentor and protege. Roche (1979), on the other hand, defines a mentor as someone who takes a personal interest in a person's career or who guides or sponsors a person. For the purposes of this paper, mentoring will be defined as "a relationship in which a person of greater rank, experience, or expertise teaches, guides, and develops a novice in an organization or profession" (Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike and Newnan, 1984, p. 327).

Actual applications of mentoring in the business, academic and adult development areas indicate further that it is possible to operationally view mentoring in two ways. Daloz (1986) uses a travel metaphor to distinguish the two approaches. First, a mentor can be viewed as one who makes a map for the protege. The mentor knows all the right people and the right paths to take. The mentor is a tour guide who has the travel tips necessary to smooth out a lot of bumps on a person's professional road. It is also possible, however, to view a mentor as a trusted guide who is more interested in developing the traveler than in fixing the road. The ultimate goal is to help to assure that the protege becomes a competent

traveler who can traverse assorted roads in the future. For the purposes of this paper, mentoring will be examined from both points of view: a person who knows the ropes and can acquaint and promote the protege and/or a person who develops the protege. A forensics mentor, thus, might be a person who supplies information to newer coaches about tournament practices and procedures, who introduces newer coaches to other coaches, who helps to develop the self-confidence of newer coaches, who promotes newer coaches to administrators on their own campuses, who helps newer coaches to develop ethical and philosophical positions related to the activity, etc.

We were interested initially in trying to ascertain the prevalence and nature of mentoring relationships in the forensics community. Given time constraints, it was decided to conduct semi-nondirected interviews with a limited sample of established and novice forensics coaches.

### **Methodology**

A telephone survey of five experienced and five novice coaches was conducted using coaches from one of the AFA-designated forensics districts. A telephone survey was used to allow for a more lengthy interview with respondents. The survey began by providing the definition of mentoring -- a relationship in which a person of greater rank, experience or expertise teaches, guides or develops a novice in an organization or profession. With this definition in mind, a different set of open-ended questions was asked of each group of coaches.

### **Survey Findings and Discussion**

Novice coach responses will be given first followed by the responses from the experienced coaches.

**Question 1: Do you feel that you had a mentor when you started coaching forensics, and, if so, what kinds of things did this person do for you?**

Answers from the novice coaches proved to be very interesting. All respondents answered yes to this question, with one coach stating that her mentor did not come from her own school, but rather from the surrounding area. In terms of what kinds of things this person did, there were a variety of responses:

- \* My mentor first and foremost trusted me.
- \* My mentor was willing to talk issues over with me, both good and bad.
- \* My mentor helped me to develop my own coaching techniques.
- \* My mentor showed me how to administer tournaments and work with a budget.
- \* My mentor made a special effort to introduce me to people in the district.
- \* My mentor was an important individual for me to bounce ideas off of.

**Question 2: How important to your satisfaction and/or success in coaching was having this mentor?**

The immediate response to this question was "a lot." When asked to assign a percentage to the question, most of the coaches responded fifty percent. One of the novice coaches went so far as to say, "I'm not sure I would have known what to do and I'm not sure I would have even been hired."

**Question 3: What would have made things easier for you as you began coaching?**

Those interviewed had a lot of advice pertaining to the preceding question. Most of their comments could be associated with "fitting in" kinds of issues and information seeking.

- \* It would have helped if I would have had a reputation myself.

\* I had low self-confidence when I began coaching. More people coming forth with information or offering information would have been beneficial.

\* Feeling more like I belonged. I almost felt like I had the label "new coach" tattooed on my forehead.

\* A guidebook containing a description of what all the different organizations had to offer.

\* A booklet containing coaching and judging tips.

\* Help with planning and fighting for a budget.

\* A description of what tournaments are on the "regular" circuit.

\* Help in dealing with my department's and administration's expectations.

**Question 4: What would you like to see happen for other new coaches?**

Answers to question number four were closely related to the comments which were received for question number three. The novice coaches did, however, provide a variety of responses for what they would like to see done for new coaches in the forensics community.

\* More easily accessible workshops which aren't so far away.

\* A pamphlet which explains what all of the acronyms mean; for example: AFA, PKD, NFA, etc.

\* A description of what the specific guidelines are for the different individual events. For example, can a student use his or her original work?

\* A list of burned out topics, authors and titles.

\* Help in administering a high school or college tournament.

\* A personal invitation to coaches' parties.

\* A call from the district chairperson welcoming them to the district.

\* It is important to "hear" the ideas of new coaches when they offer suggestions.

**Question 5: How would you feel if a more formal program of mentoring was established for novice coaches?**

All of the novice coaches interviewed felt that a more formalized process would be very helpful for new coaches. The following suggestions were offered and can be divided into the areas of developing specific relationships for novice coaches, providing specific and helpful information, and the national offices also doing their part for the novice coaches.

- \* Perhaps the establishment of a buddy system with a coach in the near vicinity to help answer questions which a novice coach may have.
- \* Ask for experienced coaches to volunteer to welcome and to help new coaches to fit in.
- \* Provide a sheet which would contain the names, phone numbers and addresses of all the coaches in the area.
- \* A pamphlet or workshop which would address a variety of questions which might most often be asked by novice coaches.
- \* A space which would be provided by the national offices which could be checked by new coaches when paying dues. Someone should be appointed by the national offices to contact new coaches and welcome them to the forensics community.

The more experienced coaches in our survey were asked the same first and second questions as the novice coaches, but the other questions were different.

**Question 1: Do you feel that you had a mentor when you started coaching forensics, and, if so, what kinds of things did this person do for you?**

**Question 2: How important to your satisfaction and/or success in coaching was having a mentor?**

Answers to experienced coaches to the first two questions did not differ significantly from those of the novice coaches; however, a difference was noted in their extended responses to what they felt their mentor had done for them. It was also interesting to note that most experienced coaches responded that they still felt that their mentor was a part of their coaching. Common responses to question number one included:

- \* This person gave me my coaching head, and he let me do my own coaching.
- \* My mentor presented me with options. He didn't tell, but he gave advice and direction.
- \* My mentor was heavy on encouragement and low on discouragement.
- \* My mentor allowed me to learn from my mistakes.
- \* My mentor taught me the nontangible "stuff" like how to create harmony among my team members.
- \* To this day I play the "what if" game with my mentor as I explore my coaching abilities.
- \* My mentor helped me with planning my budget and tournament administration.
- \* My mentor introduced me to others in the district and helped me plan my travel schedule.

The main difference for question two was that the more experienced coaches stressed a higher percentage (seventy-five to eighty percent) of their satisfaction and/or success in coaching was due to their mentor/protege relationships.

**Question 3: Do you feel that you've served as a mentor for others, and, if so, how was this relationship established?**

Most coaches felt that they had served as a mentor to others. When asked how this relationship developed, most felt that either because of their position or reputation they were more likely to be sought out by the proteges. A few examples

were also given where the experienced coaches felt that they had gone out of their way to establish a mentoring relationship with a new coach. Interestingly, most of the experienced coaches definitely felt that they fulfilled the mentor role for their students.

**Question 4: What kinds of things do you feel that you have done for your proteges?**

The general response of "mainly the same kinds of things that my mentor did for me" was given most often; however, when probed a bit further, most of the reactions to this question dealt with more philosophical and morale-building concerns.

- \* I helped them to generate their own philosophy toward coaching.
- \* I allowed them as much freedom as they could deal with at the time.
- \* I helped them to realize that it was okay to question a decision that they had made while judging.
- \* I complimented, complimented, complimented.

Interestingly, few of the responses received from experienced coaches discussed "showing the ropes" types of things to novice coaches.

**Question 5: What kinds of things are you aware of that are happening in your district or in the country to help to mentor new coaches?**

The above question was asked to provide a clearer picture of what might already be happening to provide a more formal approach to mentoring. The answer to this question was most often phrased negatively. For example:

- \* Not enough.
- \* I'm not aware of anything.
- \* Absolutely nothing. We are supportive informally but not formally.
- \* More seems to be being done on the high school level than on the collegiate level.

Most coaches did feel that the NFA and PKD journals were doing a good job of offering articles which help give information to new coaches.

**Question 6: What recommendations do you have either formally or informally for creating a mentoring model for forensics?**

Several recommendations were given by the more experienced coaches for setting up a mentoring model. Most felt quite strongly that the model should not cause us to lose informality, but that it would be very helpful for the forensics education of our novice coaches if something more formal were to be put into place. Some of the suggestions were as follows:

- \* A mentor has to give the protege a sense of self-esteem and accomplishment, not just information.
- \* A mentor should affirm the person's professionalism.
- \* Information should be offered by the mentor which cannot be learned in the classroom; for example, how to fight for a budget, training in administrative duties, and the interpersonal encounters one might come up against.
- \* Training is needed for ethical concerns of coaches and students.
- \* There should be the development of a forensics glossary that would explain what all of the acronyms stand for and mean.
- \* Provide an autobiography of all the coaches in the district or state; for example, include name, school, years of coaching, forensics offices held, education, etc.
- \* Prepare a bibliography of helpful forensics texts or articles.
- \* The district chairperson could make a phone call to welcome the new coaches in the district.
- \* A newsletter with names, phone numbers and mailing addresses could be sent to everyone in the district, province or state.

• Perhaps at a tournament or coaches' party, there could be an open discussion for all coaches on a topic like "what are we going to do to continue to grow as coaches."

### ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

Before proceeding to any conclusions or recommendations about mentoring in the forensics community, it is important to note that questions and concerns do exist about the mentoring research and literature published to date. Merriam's critical review of the mentoring literature (1983) suggests that a number of problems with research designs make any possible conclusions about the importance and effects of mentoring tenuous at best. She includes among the concerns: the use of varying conceptual and operational definitions of the mentoring construct, making comparison of research findings difficult; the fact that different research methods such as surveys versus interviews appear to produce different research findings; that limited research designs, mainly surveys, have been used with limited samples, often successful executives; and the existence of tenuous links between the existence of mentoring relationships and conclusions about the effects of those relationships.

Others have suggested that possible drawbacks or dangers of mentoring relationships have also not received enough attention in the research and literature (Levison, et. al., 1978). Dangers suggested include mentors who are exploitive, stifling or over-protective, the potential for the mentor to lose power or prestige as a result of the mentoring relationship, or dependencies that may develop in the protege.

Overall, however, the literature appears biased in favor of mentoring relationships. (Wilbur 1987) Any effort to formalize mentoring in the forensics community should, however, clearly be aware of potential problems with mentoring

relationships and be committed to the review of any mentoring efforts or programs to assess effects and desirability.

Based upon our reading of the mentoring literature, our experience as forensics coaches, and our interviews with experienced and novice coaches about their mentoring relationships, we offer the following conclusions and recommendations.

First, it appears that the answer to the first question posed by this study is affirmative. Mentoring relationships do exist in the forensics community. Experienced and novice coaches alike indicate the prevalence of mentors in their coaching careers. All of the interviews for this study were conducted in just one part of the country, so there is the potential question of whether other parts of the country mirror our findings. Geographic dispersion, the number of new coaches versus experienced coaches in a particular region, or the degree of competitiveness in a region might all be factors that would influence the existence and nature of mentoring relationships.

Second, although both experienced and novice coaches appeared to recognize the desirability of mentoring relationships, they differed in the degree of that recognition. Experienced coaches seemed to associate more activities and more variety of activities with mentoring. Additionally, more experienced coaches attributed more of their success as coaches to their mentoring relationships than did novice coaches. We can only speculate on the reasons for these differences. It may be that mentoring relationships are not as strong or productive today as they were a few years ago. It may be that novice coaches have less need than their predecessors for mentors, although their interview responses do not tend to support this conclusion. Or it may simply be that novice coaches have not at present benefitted completely from their mentoring relationships or come to realize the full impact mentoring has on their coaching satisfaction and success.

Third, experienced and novice coaches seemed to gravitate to different operational definitions of mentoring. Experienced coaches tended to see themselves and their mentors as trusted guides whose main goal was to develop the newer traveler on the forensics circuit. Novice coaches, on the other hand, seemed first and foremost to be seeking a mentor who would make a map for them and smooth out some of the bumps on the road to entering this profession. It is probably not surprising that "learning the ropes" may take precedence for new coaches trying to "survive" their entry into the forensics profession, but the difference in orientation between experienced and novice coaches may clearly have implications for program development.

Fourth, the answer to the second question posed by our study also appears to be affirmative. It is desirable for the forensics community to formally and informally encourage mentoring relationships, practices and programs. Although both sets of coaches recognized the value of informal approaches to mentoring, and although both sets of coaches did not want informal mentoring practices to suffer as a result of the development of more formal programs, there was a clear consensus that the forensics community should follow the lead of the business community and establish some formal mentoring programs. Wilbur (1989) reports that over one-third of all major companies in this country have now established some type of formal mentoring program.

Fifth, it seems clear to the researchers, although not mentioned by the interviewees, that the uneven distribution of men and women in the coaching profession may impact upon the existence, nature and success of mentoring relationships for women coaches. A concern of the mentoring research in business has frequently been the dearth of female mentors for up and coming businesswomen. (Sheehy, 1974) Bolton (1980) argues that women in business have traditionally had limited access to mentoring relationships and have, as a result,

suffered by comparison with their male counterparts in the areas of advancement and promotion. If the mentoring literature from business can be applied to the forensics community, it may suggest that special attention may need to be paid to fostering mentoring relationships for novice female coaches and to encouraging male experienced coaches to sponsor female as well as male proteges.

We make the following recommendations for consideration and discussion by the forensics community.

**Recommendation 1: Move to establish, through existing forensics organizations, formal mentoring programs.**

The previous summary of interviews provides ample idea of the types of activities that could be sponsored by a more formal mentoring program. The addition of a formal mentoring program would appear to have several advantages. First, a formal program helps to assure that all novice coaches who could benefit from mentoring relationships are reached. Current informal practices may limit the development of mentor relationships to those individuals who feel confident and comfortable enough to seek out such relationships, to individuals in areas of the country where mentors are geographically available or willing to volunteer as mentors, and to male versus female coaches who are more readily sought out or accepted as proteges.

Second, a more formal mentoring program would help to assure that the full range of mentoring activities is more likely to take place. Novice coaches tend to want mentors to teach them the ropes. Experienced coaches tend to want to develop the person. Both are needed and valuable. A formal program helps to bring to light the range of mentoring activities that are available and needed and helps to develop an appreciation for the full range of activities on the part of both mentors and proteges.

Third, a formal mentoring program enhances the possibilities for and probability of formal evaluation and review of mentoring activities. Given the research indictments and potential problems with mentoring relationships cited earlier, such review procedures would seem desirable.

Our home state of Minnesota provides an example of a formal program that has been instituted by high school debate coaches. First, every effort is made during the summer or early fall to identify and contact all new coaches in the state. A desire to make new coaches feel welcome as well as a desire to make offers of help available immediately underlie the contacts. In the fall, a three-day workshop for new coaches is offered with the cost being underwritten by the state high school debate association. Experienced coaches in the state donate their time to work at the workshop. "Learning the ropes" types of information, valued so highly by new coaches, are provided, but opportunity to interface with experienced coaches and initiate mentoring relationships is also provided. Additionally, the high school association publishes a booklet with valuable coaching and judging information and distributes videotapes that contain examples of contest events and coaching advice. One high school coach, in explaining their program, remarked, "We realize that this activity is only as strong as its coaches. We need to do a better job of recruiting new coaches, but, additionally, we must maintain our new coaches by helping to assure their success and satisfaction. We can only do that by making sure that the skills, talents and abilities of new coaches are optimized."

We will refrain from offering suggestions as to what a college forensics mentoring program should be. If formal mentoring programs are to meet the needs of newer coaches and gain the acceptance and support of both experienced and novice coaches, we suggest it is essential that these programs be developed via a planning process that incorporates experienced and novice coaches as well as representatives from the sponsoring forensics organizations.

**Recommendation 2: Move to retain and expand the existence of informal mentoring practices and procedures.**

The only drawback to the establishment of more formal mentoring programs cited by our interviewees was the potential that such programs could inhibit or detract from the already-existent informal mentoring practices. The mentoring literature cited earlier indicates that both mentor and protege benefit from mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring practices allow the opportunity for anyone who desires to serve in a mentoring role. It is important also that if formal programs are put into place that experienced coaches not start to assume that all mentoring needs are now being fulfilled. Novice coaches made it very clear in our interviews that they value the informal mentoring practices and do not want to lose them.

**Recommendation 3: Expand the promotion function which mentoring can serve for less experienced forensics coaches.**

Mentoring in the business profession frequently concentrates on the promotion and advancement of proteges by their mentors. Interviews with both experienced and novice forensics coaches did not isolate this as a primary mentoring function in the forensics community. We would recommend that formal programs and informal practices give more emphasis to the promotion function of mentoring for novice forensics coaches.

First, mentors need to promote new coaches on their home campuses. Members of their home departments as well as administrators on their campuses need to be made aware of the accomplishments of their new forensics faculty members. This function is especially important for new coaches who are coaching alone at their school or who are on campuses where other department members or administrators are not familiar with the forensics activity. Budget decisions, as



well as renewal, tenure and promotion decisions for new coaches, are all tied to the degree to which new coaches have been promoted on their own campuses.

Second, newer coaches need to be promoted in terms of offices and committee assignments in our established forensics organizations. Such positions allow increased opportunities for newer coaches to interface with more experienced coaches and, hence, promote mentoring relationships. Opportunities to serve in such positions also enhance the status of newer coaches on their home campuses, and, of course, our forensics organizations would clearly benefit from the ideas that would be presented from the perspectives of newer coaches.

### ***Conclusion***

This paper has attempted to investigate the potential of mentoring relationships and programs for the forensics community. It is the opinion of the authors that, although mentoring is appropriate for our profession, it is an under-utilized method of training and developing forensics coaches to date. We encourage forensics coaches and established forensics organizations to initiate discussions that would plan for the development and extension of mentoring practices and programs.

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