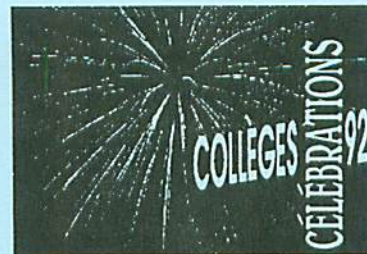


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**Empowering Faculty :  
Strategies that Work**

par

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## Empowering Faculty: Strategies that Work

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### *Case Study: Dr. Ralph Levinson*

Our presentation is a three part ethnographic report, in which each of us will describe, in a "case study", our perspective of how the mentoring relationship works. We have agreed on the topic and approach, but have not coordinated our cases. I will therefore be interested in hearing how my coworkers describe our working/mentoring relationships.

### Background

Olds College is a two year community college located one hour north of Calgary. It is known for its excellent agricultural programs. We have 1000 full time students in 25 programs with 80 full time faculty members. I'm the Dean of Business and Academic Support Programs in which there are 300 students, 35 full time faculty, 8 programs. There are six coordinators (faculty with administrative responsibilities).

### Mentoring Style

My colleagues describe our work relationship in terms of "mentoring". I enjoyed a wonderful mentor relationship at university which continues today. I was somewhat surprised when my colleagues described our relationship as a "mentoring" situation. I was just looking for good people who wanted to work. I was not conscious of modeling nor teaching. I was also looking for people who could help bring about change. It would be my view that our relationship, is one of networking in which I assist with the planning and by facilitating. The characteristics of my relationship with these coordinators are: close, personal and trusted relationships.

Some of the functions I perform are those of connecting my staff to people who can be resource persons, empowering faculty verbally and with written communications in the college community. Generally, I perform the function of removing barriers to enable projects or work to be completed.

### How we work

I spend a considerable amount of time discussing what we will do and how we will do it. We do this for large or small projects, and at the general and specific levels. Most of the ideas come from the coordinators and their staff. This stage is a prerequisite to meaningful implementation of projects: Through the

development of the plan, the coordinators develop a sense of ownership. My job is to contribute to the development of the idea and the process of accomplishment. Once we have agreed on the project, I empower the coordinators, giving them the authority to do the work, thereby removing the barriers to achievement.

### Rules:

We have simple rules.

1. We have mutual respect.
2. We keep work in school hours.
3. We work at work.

We negotiate the vision and the view evolves. At this stage, the resources and organizational flexibility and personal needs are also marshalled. Generally then, the model is of tight goals and evolving roles.

Creating a success presentation of the project is important in that it gives the coordinators the power to act. It is necessary to advise colleagues that the project has been developed, and that the coordinator will call on them. The environment created is supportive, demonstrating a shared commitment, a prerequisite to successful ownership of projects and their successful completion. We have created a supportive environment with shared commitment and belief that the project can be successful.

### Generally

The empowering/mentoring system I use is very informal and personal. It "happens" over a period of time, in which communication and an involvement of mutual respect grows. About 2/3 of the coordinators I have had during the 10 - 12 years I have been the Dean, have been this supportive mentoring/networking relationship. Mutual commitment and support work together. This type of relationship is not for all people, but for those who accept and join in it and become involved, it appears to be a very mutually happy, satisfying and productive situation.

### **Case Study: Beverly Blakely**

#### **Background to Bev's Case**

About three years ago I moved to Olds College from another province. I have been a curriculum designer (instructional designer) for about 15 years. I use a specific process/system to develop the curriculum. The process is called a competency - based approach. This involves moving from traditional, fuzzy goals to accountable, clearly defined cognitive, affective or psychomotor concepts. The process is challenging and a threat to some individuals. It is very important to have support as a change agent in an institution.

The mentoring relationship that I have with Dr. Ralph Levinson is informal and "Serendipitous" in that it developed out of a "Boss : Worker" relationship. (Fleming, 1991)

The stages of a mentoring relationship according to Fleming (1991) are:

- Stage 1: Get Acquainted
- Stage 2: Cultivator Stage
- Stage 3: Separation Stage
- Stage 4: Reestablishment of mentoring.

Using this framework, I will describe the evolution of my relationship with my mentor Dr. Ralph Levinson.

#### **Stage 1: Get Acquainted**

At my initial interview, we discussed who I was and what I did. We talked informally when Ralph took my friend and I to lunch. Early in my employment, we also had an informal discussion and discovered that we read similar books, had similar interests and shared many similar experiences. After this time, we began to develop a more informal relationship or "informal network" (Fleming 1991) as Ralph introduced me to people who shared our interests, and could be resource or complimentary persons in our tasks at the college.

#### **Stage 2: Cultivator Stage**

With understanding as a basis of our relationship, we began to work on projects. Ralph made suggestions, asked questions and "coached" us. An informal network of high achievers planning and writing courses and proposals for the college began to develop. Ralph introduced new members to our group in task oriented situations. He also provided views of the organizational eccentricities and politics, and by discussion and idea sharing helped set standards within the working milieu.

**Result:** The result of this one year relationship was a high satisfaction level at work and development of an efficient work group. I also maintained a very high productivity level.

#### **Stage 3: Separation Stage**

During my second year at the college, Ralph left on a sabbatical year. This year became a very difficult year for me. There was lack of understanding of Instructional Design as a change agent process and a subsequent lack of political support. There was little communication and no discussion.

**Result:** Many instructors were assisted to develop courses. Presentations and publishing at the international level was done. Productivity remained high, but the political environment was very negative.

#### **Stage 4: Reestablishment of Mentoring**

When Ralph returned from leave, he assisted in the reestablishment of goals. As a change agent himself, he began the coaching and support of the process of curriculum design as a changing force. He provided support for academic growth and suggested new thrusts.

**Result:** Our relationship has matured. I now view my mentor with deeper values of trust and respect. The environment has become more settled and less negative.

#### **Generally**

Women typically have a very difficult time finding mentors (Mertz, 1987) and therefore receive less mentoring. After 20 years of working in government and the college systems, I've encountered only two other men who showed an minimal interest in working with women. Dodgson (1986) states that women need mentors, and "... women in top administration positions are not willing to mentor younger women." This is certainly true of my experience.

Fleming (1991) discusses the sexual connotation attached to the mentor relationship. "Since the process and relationship can be intense, it is important to pick carefully," Fleming (1991) feels that a formal system helps protect the individual mentors. She suggests that males are leery of helping women because of the potentials of this situation. We did not have a formal system, but operated at a very professional level. Since we had the guidelines of "working at work" as Ralph described, we have had a very comfortable mentor : mentee relationship.

### Advantages of Mentoring

1. Assisted in professional growth and support for professional conferences and research as described by Loyd and Redlick (1991).
2. Burlow (1991) describes the mentoring supports "as one who provides guidance, support, knowledge and opportunities for a period of time.... One person helping another person progress through life." (Burlow, 1991) Moving to a new job and a new province alone could have been lonely. Ralph's support lightened this for me.
3. As a change agent, there are practices within the college that will need to change: objectives, some modules, criteria referenced testing to support: a) excellence in teaching, b) accountability, c) industry input/client needs.  
  
"Taking a stance that goes beyond the safe harbor of maintaining existing practices can be a lonely business." (Playco, 1991 - describing school administrators) The same is true for Instructional Design in a typically traditional system. So it was very important for a mentor to assist in the college wide process of change and acceptance.
4. "Provide invaluable information on specific concerns." Shelton (1991) describes the politics of change and the support of the mentor as being "very necessary." This was certainly true at Olds College. Ralph provided the political and social references for development.
5. As a new member of the community with no contacts - mentoring support provided access to information, goods, services and people (i.e. dentists). This was very important.
6. I've published, spoken at conventions and travelled - broadening my horizons since my mentor encouraged me and gave support to my efforts.
7. Olds College gained and maintained a very experienced curriculum developer.
8. Maintenance of high achievement levels. Most proposals that were developed, edited and researched were successful.

### Disadvantages of Mentoring

1. Some social concerns of other faculty who did not work as hard or as long of hours as we did.
2. When projects were completed some faculty tried to downplay the importance or achievement.

### Generally

Often mentoring is described in the business sense: decisions around board tables or situations of climbing the corporate ladder. I'm not interested in this. I prefer interesting, varied challenges and research. Ralph recognizes this and provides academic challenges, developmental tasks and research projects that are varied and stimulating. I do this as well as my regular pursuits of instructional support and curriculum design. I've grown personally and academically with carefully selected and planned development and meeting with a wide diversity of people. The college has benefited by having a person with a wide variety of experience and knowledge which continues to grow.

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### **Case Study: Pat Bidart**

#### **What exactly is a mentor? Characteristics.**

Mentors are usually a half a generation older (8-15 years) than the protege; are not usually blood relatives of the protege; are more mature and experienced than the protege; occupy a position of authority or prominence in the organization, is able to influence promotion decisions; is willing to spend a great deal of time with the protege; and is willing to take responsibility for the growth and development of another person. Obviously, the role of mentor takes a great deal of dedication. For these reasons the person must be a participant by choice. The great demand on the mentor is one reason why there are not an abundance of them." (Mentoring - Is it the key to opening doors for women in educational administration? by Karen A. Fleming, Education Canada Fall 1991.)

"Mentoring is usually a chance relationship based on common goals and interest. The mentor enters a person's life at a time when changes are imminent, helps the person through the changes, and then either departs, or develops a lasting friendship."

#### **Background to Pat's Case**

In my first teaching position I was fortunate to have an informal mentor who worked with me to develop a specialized program. This informal mentoring was very important to me in developing my teaching and counselling style. The trust and respect that was shown me as a "green" teacher allowed me the freedom to try my ideas and develop new programming.

When I moved to Olds College I missed this mentoring relationship. I was in a new group of faculty who were very involved in what they were doing and maybe not as open to discussing new ideas and future programming. My supervisor was not interested in the program in which I was involved, and was quite happy if he didn't have to discuss the program. After three years, our program and myself were transferred to Business and Academic Programs under the leadership of Dr. Ralph Levinson. During the past 8 years that I have worked in cooperating with Ralph, my duties and responsibilities have grown and developed.

#### **How did the mentoring relationship develop?**

I saw in Ralph, someone who had many new ideas, was supportive, cooperative and willing to take a chance with what I was doing and someone who felt our program was important. As in the definition, he was willing to take the time with me to

listen, make suggestions, or recommendations but not demands.

#### **How has the mentoring relationship continued?**

It has continued in somewhat of an "apprentice" manner. We discuss many new ideas and proceed with some of them. Any time I develop proposals, Ralph reviews, edits and makes comments. When dealing with staff he is always supportive and offers recommendations and suggestions. Ralph does not criticize but rather suggests alternative methods. He is accepting that sometimes we may disagree on items. As the relationship has developed I have felt more comfortable in providing alternative ideas to how things are being done at the College.

#### **What has been the result of the mentoring relationship?**

1) Programming: Our working together in a mentor-mentee relationship has seen the development of Academic Upgrading, Correctional Education, College Accessing and a more integrated special education program.

2) College decision making: Through Ralph's encouragement, I have been a part of various decision and policy making bodies on campus: College reorganization, faculty development, faculty evaluation, and college orientation.

3) Personal growth: Confidence to make decisions, to deal with government departments, to know that I can accomplish the task I have set out to do, to act on my ideas and that "I can do" many things. I have taken on many projects that I never would have thought I could do but because the support and confidence was present in my mentor, I was able to succeed. Support in professional development/sabbatical plans.

4) Involvement with other responsibilities: Have taken on other roles in a leadership capacity based on the confidence I have developed, ie. Chair Provincial Adult Special Education Coordinators Committee, Academic Upgrading Coordinators Committee, President of ECS, Board Member - Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, Attendance Advisory Committee for Department of Education.

#### **What does the mentor receive in this relationship?**

Ralph and the college gain an eager faculty member who is willing to work cooperatively on many projects. I hope he has satisfaction in knowing that he has had a very large role in the developing a very satisfying career path. Ralph also has someone to trust and to feel comfortable discussing issues and ideas with.

**What does the mentee receive in this relationship?**

I have received an apprenticeship that I could not have received from university, an abundance of skills to take with me forever. The unconscious development of skills, an opportunity to develop, take it or leave it. I was fortunate enough to take it.

**Are there any negative points about the mentor-mentee relationship?**

The relationship is hard to describe. Some people may see the situation as a male-female relationship as opposed to the "apprentice". While others made comments about the amount of work I did as a negative thing, where I saw it as a positive challenge. I had initiated the tasks and did not feel I was being taken advantage of. *The relationship is hard to describe to outsiders as they are seeing the framework but not the body.* Work is work!

**When does the relationship end?**

Hopefully we will be friends and work together for a very long time.