

Heartwarming and thought-provoking, Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic contains all you need to know for a successful mentoring experience. Combining rigorous research with a readable style, the book reads as if Darling is a friend chatting about what she has learned.

Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic, A Guide to Enhanced Mentoring

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**Praise for Lu Ann Darling's
DISCOVER YOUR MENTORING MOSAIC**

“Most people think of mentoring as a formal organizational process leading to a better job. However, few are ever involved in this formal process, yet we are mentored and mentor all our lives—most often not ‘naming’ the process. We have been mentored by a teacher, our child, our favorite grocery store clerk, a friend, and, of course, ourselves. Likewise, we have provided mentoring to numerous people, often never realizing the impact our words and actions had.

“In this exceptional book, Dr. Darling outlines the ever-changing, transformational and often subtle and hidden elements that form each person's unique Mentoring Mosaic, a process that is ongoing and evolving from childhood to old age. There are insights for every age group—with new perspectives on traditional mentoring, mentoring in later life, self-managed mentoring, and non-people mentors. Readers will benefit from well-researched information, tools, and strategies that can be used to improve both personal and professional effectiveness. It's a must-read.”

Suzanne P. Smith, Ed.D., RN, FAAN
Editor-in-Chief, The Journal of Nursing Administration and Nurse Educator

“*Discovering Your Mentoring Mosaic* offers a fresh perspective on mentoring. Based on sound research, Lu Ann Darling's book shows us the complete process of mentoring, illustrating it with extremely relevant examples. The women in management with whom I work in Japan and Korea both want and need to understand this process so they can apply it to their own careers and organizations. Dr. Darling describes the process of mentoring in easily understandable language that people can immediately apply. The book's unique approach and cross-cultural applicability make it a stand-out among mentoring books. It is a valuable addition to the literature.”

Jean R. Renshaw, PhD
Management Consultant and Author of
Kimono in the Boardroom: The Invisible Evolution of Japanese Women Managers

More Praise for *Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic*

"Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic puts the process of advice, guidance, coaching, and planning all together. I had a strong idea for a career path but was not sure which road to take at each junction. The many pieces in the puzzle are sorted out by Lu Ann Darling, who guides the reader in putting the pattern together in an expeditious manner.

"What are the varieties of mentors? Do they all have to be people? Can you self-mentor? All of the steps necessary to reach your goal are outlined with wonderfully touching examples. I recommend this book for those starting, choosing, thinking of switching, or even closing a career. In a way, this book should be required reading for everyone embarking on the journey of finding their place in the world."

Allan Ebbin, MD, MPH

VP of Healthcare Quality & Education at Sierra Health Services; and Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics & Family Medicine at the University of Southern California

"I have been mentored, and I've been a mentor. I have been lucky in both ways: to find people willing to guide me, and to find people who can value what I've learned and can share. Dr. Darling's book removes some of the elements of luck and happenstance and makes transparent the 'mystery' behind mentoring.

"The sciences have always relied on an apprentice process. The more unlike one is from the traditional participants in these fields, the greater is the need for mentoring through the professional life cycle. What is seldom realized is the role of mentoring in getting one to the point of daring to be a pioneer. Dr. Darling's book helps us understand the messengers and the messages that can lead to success and fulfillment of one's life work."

Shirley M. Malcom, PhD

*Director, Education and Human Resources,
American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)*

“In my role as president of a regional non-profit organization, New York Women Composers, which is in the process of reorganizing and re-energizing itself, I have found great value in *Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic*. I have been able to use the ideas presented in the book, both in seeking help from a leader of another group and in leading membership meetings. The thoughts on co-mentoring are especially valuable for women who rarely receive traditional mentoring if they venture beyond traditional careers. As a composer, I had only male teachers and nearly all male colleagues. Teachers preferred bonding with their male students, and I had no female role models and advice-givers to turn to. Also, as a geographical outsider, it was difficult for me to ‘learn the ropes.’ Dr. Darling’s book has helped me think of ways to use our organization to correct such problems.”

Marilyn Bliss
President, New York Women Composers

“*Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic* is a much-needed book and guidance tool. Most of the mentoring resources that we identified as part of our research on mentoring in the sciences are aimed at mentors, not the mentee. Also, many of the existing resources focus on mentoring during a particular educational stage or as part of a workplace program. *Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic* recognizes that mentoring is a continuous process that begins during the school years and continues throughout the career years.”

Yolanda Scott George
Deputy Director, Education and Human Resources and Program Director, Human Resources Programs, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

DISCOVER YOUR MENTORING MOSAIC

A Guide to Enhanced Mentoring

Lu Ann W. Darling

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Chapter 1

EMBARCKING ON THE MENTORING JOURNEY

Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic is an easy-to-follow guide for understanding and managing your mentoring throughout your life. It provides a framework that allows you to identify your unique mentoring pattern as well as to design a mentoring plan that best fits your life pattern, current mentoring needs, and available resources. The result is a self-empowering mentoring process that is creative, systematic, and timely for the 21st century.

Many books on mentoring focus on finding a mentor, being a mentor, or developing mentoring programs. In contrast, this book takes a comprehensive approach, covering experiences and environments that are mentoring as well as people who are mentors. Grounded in research, the book provides a structure for understanding mentoring as a lifelong process. As you read this book, you will discover:

- how your mentor-bonding experience impacts your mentoring process;
- how your mentor-bonding pattern shapes the form and characteristics of mentors in your life;
- how the kinds of mentors to whom you gravitate will change during your lifetime;
- why mentoring relationships are just a part of the mentoring process;
- how your own mentoring experiences can be as significant in your life as relationships with mentors;
- how people who have had no mentors are able to be very successful in their lives;
- how self-mentoring begins and how it can be developed;
- how mentoring needs continue throughout life;

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- the mentoring strategies most available and helpful in middle and later life;
- how self-mentoring strategies can help you manage your mentoring;
- the reasons for taking an active role in managing your mentoring; and
- the tools and strategies that are available to help you in the process.

In summary, this book provides you, the reader, with a basic structure—the **Mentoring Mosaic**—to use in tracking your mentoring history and in determining how best to manage your mentoring process to meet present and future needs as well as to enrich your life.

WHY MENTORING? WHY NOW?

In previous eras, many large organizations had well-defined pathways to success—definite rungs on the ladder to climb, preferred routes to take, tickets to be “punched,” and mentors available to advise and counsel the neophyte on the long career journey. This progression is no longer true. Changing cultures and organizations across the globe have disrupted previous patterns of mentoring, leaving us with far too few systems and supports to ensure charting a successful mentoring journey.

Few organizations have the vision or the resources to plan and direct effective mentoring. In the process of streamlining operations, entire layers of middle managers, those who traditionally assumed mentor roles, have been eliminated. This is not unlike what happened to the native peoples of the North American continent upon contact with the white man. In succumbing to European diseases, native cultures lost up to 90% of their “memorizers” —those elders responsible for transmitting

the culture to younger generations. The upheaval from organizational restructuring has been similar.

New technology companies have proliferated, many with inexperienced managers and minimal organizational infrastructures. Mentoring under these conditions has been catch-as-catch-can. The mentoring gap widened still further when hundreds of these companies folded with the collapse of the economic bubble at the end of the 1990s.

Twenty years ago, “mentoring” itself was an uncomfortable word. Now, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. One indication is the designation of the month of January as “National Mentoring Month.”¹ Although attitudes toward mentoring are changing and a groundswell of public-spirited ads and other promising moves are fostering mentoring programs, the numbers remain woefully small compared to the need. Present programs are usually geared to a narrow niche of the population, such as “gifted” or “at-risk” youth or people in specific professional fields. Few organizations have the interest or ability to manage an employee’s career or plan well-ordered career paths. As a result, individuals must plan much of their own career development.

The concept of self-managed mentoring actually may fit better with today’s culture of independence and self-reliance, not waiting or expecting a paternalistic “big brother” — whether a government agency, corporate organization, or philanthropic institution — to “do it for you.”² We are more educated, more resourceful, and more knowledgeable in

¹ So designated by the Office of the President on January 9, 2004, and now ongoing; see The White House: Proclamation Archives. Available at: www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040109-12.html. Accessed July 16, 2006.

² See, for example, Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

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this new century than ever before. We are better equipped than even the best of mentors to chart a course that is right for us. What anthropologist Margaret Mead said is even more pertinent today than when she made the observation several decades ago:

“Children today face a future that is so deeply unknown that it cannot be handled as a generation change within a stable, elder-controlled, and parentally modeled culture. ...We would do better to apply the pioneer model, the model of first-generation pioneer immigrants into an unexplored and uninhabited land. But for the figure of geographic migration, we must substitute migration in time. Within two decades, 1940 to 1960, events occurred that have irrevocably altered men’s relationships to other men and to the natural world. Until recently, elders could say, ‘I have been young, and you never have been old,’ but today, young people can reply, ‘You never have been young in the world I am young in, and you never can be.’”³

Younger people are indeed “pioneers” today. The wise, seasoned mentors of yesteryear cannot know what it is like to grow up, and grow old, in today’s world. Wisdom from the past must be preserved, treasured, and transmitted to current generations, but transmitted as rich information to be thoughtfully considered and acted upon according to its relevance today. As we manage our own mentoring through our lifetime, we want to cherish the values that are important to us and apply them in ways that are fitting for today and for tomorrow’s world.

Mentoring needs in early life—in school, work, and career—are more obvious, more discussed, and given more attention than any other part of the life span. The words “mentor” and “mentoring” rarely are used in later-life discussions, even though the mentoring process continues throughout our lives. Mentoring in later life is of particular interest as

³ Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*, Garden City, NY: Natural History Press/Doubleday & Co, 1970, pp. 62–63.

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huge numbers of Baby Boomers⁴ are approaching their 60s, as their Generation X children move into their mature years, and as vast numbers of seniors in second careers or active retirement live well into their 70s, 80s, and even 90s.

My research data underscore the reality of life-long mentoring. Although mentoring does not cease in later life, it transforms as needs change and different forms of mentoring are available to meet those needs. As we look forward to decades of life beyond retirement, mentoring takes on new importance. What is the process of mentoring in later life, what are our mentoring needs during these years, and how can they be met? What we learn now can help us manage our later life paths with sureness, agility, and confidence.

THE UBIQUITOUS NATURE OF MENTORING

As a first step, let's examine the terms "mentor" and "mentoring" as they are used in this book. Mentoring is a process we engage in, are involved with, and spend time on whenever we feel the need for learning, guidance, and/or support.

- We are mentored, we mentor others, and we mentor ourselves.
- We do this consciously and unconsciously.
- We vary in the success of our efforts.

We can't not engage in mentoring. It is as natural as breathing. We learn, develop, and grow; we share and pass along things we have learned. We support, encourage, and foster ourselves—and usually others. When things go well, we have positive experiences with mentoring. Sometimes

⁴ Baby Boomers born 1946–1954 are considered "leading-edge" Boomers; the 1955–1964 group is considered the "trailing" Boomers.

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we have had experiences. We differ in what life brings us, what we bring to our efforts, and in our degree of success.

Understanding the mentoring process makes it possible for us to consciously manage our own mentoring. We do not have to be passive. After we reach adulthood, who better? We are the only persons there, always, for ourselves. Not to say we don't reach out to others for assistance—we do. But we also can actively direct the course of our mentoring process. Although it is true that a mentor is traditionally viewed as a person older and wiser—a teacher, a leader, a guide—this view is limiting and does not explain the research data. Many of us have found other sources of mentoring equally rewarding.

Instead of focusing on the mentor, this book examines mentoring as an active process, a way of connecting with a source—whether with a person, an experience, a model, a book, or, most often, a combination of these—in order to find guidance, to learn, and to grow. The possibilities are almost endless. What is important to understand is that it is the mentoring process that provides meaning and guidance, not a specific person. Throughout this book, we will look at mentoring as an action-oriented, ongoing, dynamic process.

DISCOVERING YOUR MENTORING PROCESS

Becoming aware of and understanding your mentoring process is essential in managing your own mentoring. Bringing into your consciousness various aspects of your mentoring, of which you might be only dimly aware, will enable you to construct a historical time line of your mentoring life and of the people, events, situations, and relationships that have inhabited it. Patterns and connections will emerge. Yet that image has too static a quality. More apt is viewing mentoring as an ever-changing, never completed, transformational art

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form as each of us designs and reworks the main elements of our unique Mentoring Mosaic. It is a work in progress.

The design of your Mentoring Mosaic is shaped by your genetic material, your family, societal factors, and other external influences, and it is created, consciously and unconsciously, by you. This one-of-a-kind creation will be dense with design in some areas and thin, even skimpy, in others. It is constantly shifting and changing, though the underlying structure remains solid and firm. In this book, you will find ways to discover your Mentoring Mosaic.

MANAGING YOUR OWN MENTORING

To manage your own mentoring effectively, you need to understand the pattern of your Mentoring Mosaic as well as your current situation. You use awareness of that pattern and your present mentoring strategies to take charge of your mentoring. You become the director and coordinator of your mentoring, deploying the resources available to you, both internally and externally, in the way that you see fit. You also scan resources potentially available and determine how best to tap into the ones of most value to you and to expand your mentoring repertoire.

It is like managing your own health. You have general overall knowledge of your health and personal history. Like a good personal physician, you are concerned with your total health and well-being. You will seek out your doctor or other health professional to advise you and, when indicated, to refer you to a specialist for diagnosis and treatment. You monitor your progress and keep informed so you can decide when or if another course of action is needed.

Managing your own mentoring is like that. It is empowering in that you take charge. You are not dependent on someone else to make

decisions and provide for you. As you manage your total mentoring process, you will tap into available mentoring resources. Occasionally, you will decide to sit at the foot of a “master.” Other times, you will decide to learn on your own. Some of the things you will do:

- You will understand your mentoring pattern.
- You will use what comes naturally and determine what must be more consciously developed.
- You will decide when to focus on mentoring relationships and when not.
- You will survey mentor resources that are available or potentially so.
- You will find or develop mentoring relationships.
- You will identify the mentoring aspects of experiences and environments.
- You will be aware of and draw on your self-mentoring strategies.

THE FOUNDATION OF THIS BOOK IN MENTORING RESEARCH

I have been involved in mentoring research since the early 1980s. When I started, the term “mentor” was viewed as an archaic word, and “mentoring” was unfamiliar in many occupational fields. In the years that followed, a spate of literature developed, and “mentoring” became the new buzzword.

The term “mentor” goes back a long time. Originally, it was coined to describe the comprehensive role of Mentor,⁵ the wise and trusted counselor of Odysseus and the tutor of his son, Telemachus. His name is identified with a close, trusted, and experienced counselor or guide. The role of Mentor was apt in the ancient world’s traditional society and traditional roles.

⁵ Mentor, we are told, was really Athena in one of her many guises.

When I began my research, the pace of societal change was accelerating. New groups—women and minorities—were entering the labor force in significant numbers. I observed that many of these individuals were not content with being pigeonholed into narrow occupational roles; yet, they were not finding mentors or mentoring programs that could guide them. At the same time, there was a tremendous upheaval in organizations as whole layers of management were being eliminated. New organizational forms, roles, and structures also emerged from the technology revolution. Notions of traditional mentoring being available, whether fantasy or not, were no longer realistic.

However, the need to grow and develop, the yearning for positive guiding influences in our lives, did not disappear. The needs became even more apparent while the solutions became more elusive. The literature focused on the value of having a mentor, what to look for in a mentor, and what a mentor can do for you. Many articles expressed a sense of urgency. But nobody was trying to understand the process of mentoring or how it works. Just get a mentor, and all of your problems will be solved.

This gap between the idea of mentoring and the reality of mentoring was the motivating force and focus of my research. This book is a distillation of my findings about mentoring: what it is, how it works, and how you can use the information to manage your own mentoring.

These conclusions are drawn from my research of the past 20 years.⁶ During that time, I have conducted more than 200 interviews with

⁶ Most informants in the original sample were in professional or managerial roles in their mid-20s to mid-50s; two-thirds were women. The sample included physicians, nurses, and dietitians. All interviews were taped; they were open-ended, 1½–2 hours in length, designed to elicit each person's

people in the professions, academe, and business. The majority of the interviewees in the original study were in the helping professions; many were women. Subsequent interviews enlarged the database to include other occupational groups and more men. A related project has been a longitudinal study examining consistency and variability of mentoring patterns over time. I also have studied the mentoring patterns of men and women in their 70s and 80s to better understand mentoring with the aging of our society. Also, wherever I have cited interviews in the book, the names have been disguised.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

I intend this book as a practical source of information and enlightenment for anyone interested in mentoring, especially in managing their own mentoring—both as mentors and mentees—through career stages and into later life. Whether you are still in school, early in a career, contemplating a career change, or migrating to more meaningful work or a different combination of work and other interests, this book is for you. The book may be particularly apt for Baby Boomers now approaching late career stages and retirement. But it is also a useful guide for parents and for those responsible for developing and managing formal mentoring programs. Given the nature of the research sample and the examples given, the book may be especially pertinent for women and for people in health and human services. At a fundamental level, the book is for all of us.

mentoring history and to weave together the threads of that history into a pattern. My research is based on the grounded theory and methodology developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago: Addison-Wesley, 1967. Conclusions are also supported by data from later studies as well as by seminars and mentoring workshops.

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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Since the image of the Mentoring Mosaic is used to organize this book, a brief summary is indicated.

Each of us has a unique mentoring process that I call the Mentoring Mosaic—a one-of-a-kind design as unique as a fingerprint. Although many similarities exist from one person to another, the overall pattern is never repeated precisely. It is a *mélange* or tapestry that has some principal motifs and other designs less prominent.

The Mentoring Mosaic develops out of our mentor-bonding process; it is here that our pattern first becomes visible. The process of mentor bonding creates an immense divide between those of us who developed strong positive bonds with adult figures in early years and those who did not. Furthermore, how mentor bonding developed influences the way our Mentoring Mosaic evolves.

In the first part of the book, emphasis is on the seven basic elements or motifs of the Mentoring Mosaic. We start with Mentor Bonding (Chapters 2–4), establishing this process as an overall framework. The succeeding sections examine various elements of mentoring through the lens of the mentor-bonding experience. These elements are Mentoring Messages (Chapters 5–7), Mentoring Models (Chapters 8–10), Mentoring Relationships (Chapters 11–14), Mentoring Experiences and Environments (Chapters 15–16), and Self-Mentoring (Chapters 17–18).

Below is a graphic map that shows the component parts of the Mentoring Mosaic and the sequence in which they are discussed in the book. Mentor bonding is in the center to emphasize the primacy of the mentor-bonding experience in our mentoring lives. Surrounding it, from left to right in a clockwise direction, are the six elements that complete the Mentoring Mosaic.

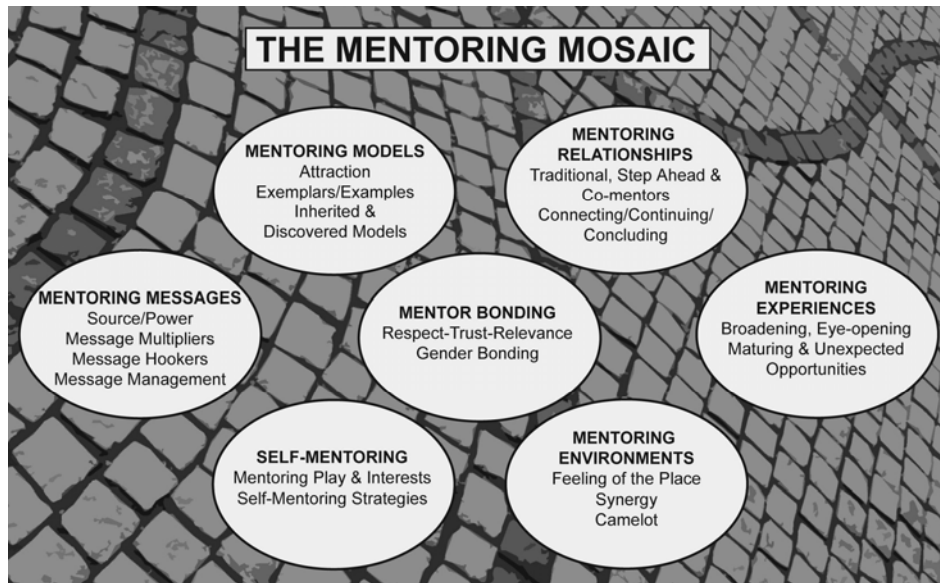


Figure 1. The Mentoring Mosaic

The emphasis in the book's second part is on Enhancing Your Mentoring. The first section, Taking Stock, looks at ways of "Identifying Your Mentoring Mosaic" (Chapter 19), "Mentoring Needs and Life Stages" (Chapter 20), "The Mentoring Mosaic in Later Life" (Chapter 21), and "Life-Long Mentoring Vignettes" (Chapter 22). The Trends section surveys "Trends Impacting Mentoring" (Chapter 23) and "Networking and Mentoring" (Chapter 24). We then turn to strategies for Taking Action: "Managing Your Mentoring—as a Mentee" (Chapter 25), "Managing Your Mentoring—as a Mentor" (Chapter 26), and "Enhanced Mentoring" (Chapter 27).

Whatever your reading purpose, I suggest that you start with the Mentor Bonding section and then turn to the chapters that interest you.

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- If you are a browser, you can hop around sections of the book without too much difficulty. The chapters do build on each other, but I believe you can jump around without a serious break in the thought process.
- If you are interested in the mentoring discovery process for yourself or others, I suggest you go through the book systematically in order to build continuity and foster insight development.
- If you find you are one of the non-bonders among us, you might want to skim through the chapters on mentoring relationships and focus more heavily on the chapters dealing with non-people mentors.

In order to link the book chapters together, you will find at the end of each chapter a bridging paragraph briefly summarizing the content of the current chapter and looking ahead to the next.

BRIDGE

This chapter summarizes the purpose and organization of the book and ways it can be helpful to you. The concept of the Mentoring Mosaic is introduced as a creative structure containing the elements of each person's evolving mentoring pattern. The next section examines mentor bonding, that important base element of the overall mentoring design: what mentor bonding is and how it comes about.

Chapter 2

IT ALL STARTS WITH MENTOR BONDING

“I never had a mentor ...”

In this chapter, we explore mentor bonding, what it is, how it evolves, and why it is key to understanding the mentoring process. The discussion includes the essential requirements for mentor bonding to occur, degrees of bonding, and characteristic behaviors of bonders compared with non-bonders.

I learned about mentor bonding early in my research. One of my early interviews was with a successful entrepreneur who had been a pioneer in the cable television industry. I really was looking forward to what I would learn from him, but we were only 10 minutes into the interview when he told me he wasn't sure how much help he could be to me because he never had a mentor!

I was dumbfounded, thinking, There goes my research. But instead of packing up and going home, I listened intently to what he was saying. Out of that interview and many others has come my understanding and appreciation of the mentor-bonding process. So much so that sometime later, when the director of women's studies in a major university declared firmly and positively during a seminar I was conducting that she never had a mentor, I could readily respond. I told her that about 15% of the people I've interviewed report having no mentoring relationships with people. Yet, they, like her, are functioning very well. How does this happen?

Mentoring starts with the early relationships with adults in our lives in a process I call mentor bonding. This is the great divide that affects

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how each of us goes about mentoring and where people fit into the process. So, if we are to make sense of mentoring, we need to look at mentor bonding—where it all starts.

Most of us have bonded or connected with adults early in our lives and continue to do so throughout our lives. A small number do not bond at all with adult figures. Our early experiences with adults influence the nature and extent of our connections with people mentors. General understanding of the values, knowledge, and acceptable ways to get along in the culture are handed down from our elders. When this happens in an accepting, valuing atmosphere, trust develops, and the young person can easily turn to adult figures for advice whenever it is important to do so.

However, when the young person experiences a lack of relevance, trust, or respect with adults, bonding is not likely to occur. Such persons commonly report having no mentors. Although there are many reasons for non-bonding or limited bonding, this occurs most frequently with children of immigrant parents, regardless of country of origin. Because of the dislocation of the family from the original culture, the wisdom of the elders does not seem relevant to the young person, who develops a number of self-mentoring strategies instead.

Understanding mentor bonding is key to understanding mentoring relationships, the kinds and types of mentors we are drawn to, and whether we have any at all. This is where mentoring starts.

I've had the opportunity to watch the mentor-bonding process in action with my young grandson, Ricky. Here is how I described that process:

Ricky is 3, and he has a thousand questions about the world in which he lives. He is blessed with parents who respect him and answer his questions at an appropriate level. "Where does the (electric) light come from?" "Why is ... ?" I am always at a

It All Starts with Mentor Bonding

loss to answer such questions, but his mother patiently explains as much as she feels is appropriate at his level, and my son does the same.

Ricky likes to be around where his dad is working, wanting, even insisting on “helping.” “I want to do that,” “Let me,” and “I want to help” are common expressions. When I see him with his dad, who might be fixing something or working around the house or yard, I think of the classic imprinting studies of ducklings, who will follow an imitation mother even of another species, so strong is the instinctual imprinting process. So Ricky follows along, wants to do whatever Dad (or Mom) is doing. Ricky is lucky; the adults around him don’t dismiss his efforts, but they instead help him participate and try out skills. Feeling respected and valued—or the reverse—starts very early.

Parenting relationships are usually the beginnings of mentor bonding. Alternately, the bonding could be with a parent surrogate—someone with whom the child connects with emotionally, such as a grandparent, an older sibling, or a non-family member close to the household. Lucky for Ricky, all of the necessary ingredients for mentor bonding are there: respect, trust, and relevance. We can answer “yes” to all of these questions:

- Is the adult respectful of the young person?
- Is the adult reliable and trustworthy?
- Is the information or advice relevant to the life of the young person?

When the answers are affirmative, positive mentor bonding is almost assured.

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THE ESSENTIALS FOR MENTOR BONDING

Whether or not we bond at all with adult figures in our lives depends on what we experience, consciously or unconsciously, regarding these three factors of respect, trust, and relevance. If we experience the advice of our elders as relevant to our world, if we trust the elders and feel trusted and respected, we are likely to bond naturally and turn to elders for advice, guidance, and help. In this way, we gain access to the “wisdom of the tribe.” If we find one or more of these missing, we are likely to turn away from adult figures to someone who is safer, more respectful, or more relevant. We might turn more to peers or people slightly older than ourselves, or we could turn away from people completely and elect to go it on our own.

Our relationships with adults start very early in life and influence the extent to which we connect emotionally, gravitate toward, and feel comfortable with adult figures. The pattern of age, gender, and personal characteristics of adults we seek out as mentors is generally formed during those growing-up years. Those early relationships provide the continuity and set the stage. They provide the first glimpse of our mentors-to-be and also our first glimpse of people who would not be acceptable as mentors.

Respect

Respect cuts two ways: respect for the adult figure, and respect from the adult for the young person. Respect must be present for bonding to occur. Admiration, love, valuing, and appreciation are all terms we use in describing important adult figures when respect for the person is present and mentor bonding takes place. We need to receive respect from figures in our world if we are to bond effectively with people. When a child feels like “nobody listens to me,” bonding is hard to develop. The absence of respect provides poor soil for mentor bonding

to occur, either lack of respect for the adult figures, or lack of respect from them.

Lack of respect for adult figures:

- Wil's immigrant parents did not measure up to his expectations; they weren't as capable as he wanted to be. His lifelong motivation was to surpass his father.
- Ray said his relationship with his father was "non-existent" because his father traveled most of the time. "Even when he was in the room, we would ask my mother, 'Where's Daddy going next?' We wouldn't direct the question to him; he wasn't an approachable person."
- Russ never wanted to go any place alone with his father. "In some way," he said, "I was clearly rejecting my father. Without being explicit, I was saying that he didn't measure up. I was searching for someone I respected to give me unconditional positive regard and also to study as a model."

Lack of respect from the adult for the young person:

- Respect is what Fran did not get from her parents, but she found it from her brother and cousin.
- Nor Diane, from the relatives with whom she was forced to live and who treated her as a poor relation.
- Nor Molly, from her mother who treated her as "a klutz."

Trust

Is the adult figure trustworthy? Two aspects of trust figure here: being available and approachable, and not turning against you. Can the young person count on the adult being there on a consistent, dependable, and reliable basis? Not causing injury or harm, not betraying you, not violating your trust?

Lack of trust examples:

- Barry couldn't count on his mother. Her violent mood swings, linked to a diabetic condition, made her very erratic and unpredictable.
- John learned he couldn't count on people to be there for him. His father died when he was a teen, and later, several mentors died just as he had formed a relationship.
- Lewis found it wasn't "safe" to learn from other people.
- Farveez's father frequently exploded with emotional outbursts, and Farveez could not reason with him.

Barry, John, and Lewis became largely self-mentoring; Farveez turned away from his father and instead bonded with his trustworthy grandfather.

Relevance

Is the advice, counsel, instruction, or direction from the adult figure relevant? Does it fit with reality as the young person sees it—with the culture the young person lives in or imagines living in? Does it fit with the personality and style of the young person?

Limitations to relevance can result from a variety of causes:

- Advice given is not seen by the young person as useful in the current situation and is either discounted or dismissed.
- The young person has a good mentor-bonding base through positive connection with adult figures, but the adults do not have the resources, skills, or motivation to be helpful in the specific instance of need.
- The young person has never had experiences where adults were a resource, so they are not sought out.

Advice Not Seen as Useful

Well-meaning parents can provide gratuitous advice that they believe is relevant to the young person without questioning its relevance for the young person today. “When I was your age ... ” or similar comments that point to the adult as all-knowing can quickly be a turn-off, as many parents have discovered. When that advice is delivered in a heavy-handed way, respect between parent and child can be seriously undermined, and resistance or rebellion is likely.

The factor of relevance is increasingly important in our rapidly changing world. Margaret Mead pointed this out some years ago with reference to the nuclear age into which children were being born.⁷ A more recent book on the digital economy asserts, “For the first time in history, children are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society.”⁸

Relevance is especially difficult for immigrant parents and children who must move quickly into the new culture. Immigrant children have to sift through the advice of their parents. Much of the advice relevant in the home country does not fit the new environment. Also, home country customs can alienate immigrant children from other kids. Wil was “an immigrant kid and dressed funny,” so instead of playing with other kids, he would “hang out” in the town library.

The relevance factor looms so large for children of immigrant parents that I’ve included Chu’s story for illustration. Chu’s mother, born in China of a wealthy family, went to college in Beijing but never expected to support herself. In 1947, her physician husband came to the United States on a fellowship, and the rest of the family stayed with the mother’s parents.

⁷Mead, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸Don Tapscott, *The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence*, McGraw-Hill, 1996, cited in *Future Survey* 18:1/037.

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Two years later, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chu's father was caught on one side of the Cold War alignment and her mother on the other. Her mother was left to fend for herself and her children for eight years before the family could reunite.

Later, when the whole family relocated to the United States, Chu's mother was an important mentor in encouraging her daughters to have careers so they could fend for themselves. Chu did follow her mother's career advice but learned to disregard other messages that did not fit her situation:

"My mother was a good influence if you had problems or became discouraged. She was a good person to talk with, but I needed to think for myself and make decisions for myself. I had to keep in mind that my mother was not brought up in this country, and certain things in this country were quite different than where she came from. Her idea was that the right time to get married was when your education was behind you—then, magically, there was always going to be somebody just right for you. That's what it was like in China, but in the United States, that's not the way it is. So I got married while I was still in medical school, and it took her quite a few years before she totally approved."

Advice Not Available

A young person can be actively searching for a mentor but not able to find one who fills the need in the situation at hand. This is especially true for those who want to enter new or unusual fields. If there is a mentor-bonding base of respect and trust for adults, the person is likely to be receptive to mentor connections later when someone does appear who can provide the needed information, instruction, resources, or guidance. This was true for Don and Kay:

- Don lived on an isolated farm in the Midwest. He had good relations with his mother and stepfather, but he had interests far beyond his school's and family's resources. He filled the gap by taking correspondence courses, then going away to

college. When an appropriate mentor appeared in a graduate school of architecture, he connected immediately.

- Kay wanted to work in the realm of public policy, a field that, at that time, was traditionally not open to women. Unable to find anyone available or motivated to guide her, she plotted her own course. Some years later, in a large organization where there was a well-developed mentoring tradition, she was able to connect easily to male mentors.

Adults Not Seen as Mentoring Resources

Young people who have had to assume adult roles or responsibilities early in their lives become used to making decisions on their own, so seeking the advice of elders might not even occur to them. In some cases, the reversal of normal parent/child roles might be so pronounced that the young person ends up in a parenting role.

- Brenda learned Spanish before she learned English. From the age of 6, she served as translator for her Anglo parents when the family was living in Mexico. In the process, she often made decisions on her own without telling them.
- Alice was the oldest of six children, responsible for managing all the younger children and the house when her mother was at work.
- Joan was thrust in the role of marital counselor to her mother from the age of 10.
- From the age of 15, Fernando provided for his two aunts as well as himself; there was no one else.
- As a teenager, Al was the one in his family who went to school to talk to the teacher about his younger brother and later told his parents they should get a divorce.

Unless they had other mentor-bonding relationships, such young people are not likely to seek the advice, opinions, and counsel of adult figures. The idea would not occur to them. They are more likely to go on their own, possibly finding other adult figures as useful resources.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BONDERS AND NON-BONDERS

Compared with bonders, non-bonders are unlikely to see people as mentoring sources. Instead, they learn from observation, books, experiences, or by experimenting and developing self-mentoring strategies.

Mentor Bonders	Non-Bonders
Accustomed to seeking help from others	Accustomed to doing it on their own
Tap into people as rich sources of guidance and support	Tap into people for information only
Find other people good sources of information	Rely on books and other impersonal sources of information
Comfort and familiarity in seeking out others	Comfort and familiarity in seeking own answers
Receptive	Selective
Willing to be guided and influenced	Avoid influence of others
Actively seek and develop relationships	Generally avoid building relationships
Relationships broad, can be far-reaching	Relationships with others carefully limited

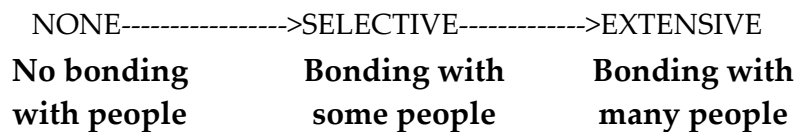
DEGREES OF MENTOR BONDING

Mentor bonding is rarely an all or nothing proposition. We range from none at all to extensive bonding. Most of us are somewhere in the middle. Looking at mentor bonding as a continuum makes visible the degrees of mentor bonding.

The gradations of mentor bonding follow a bell-shaped curve with few people on either end. About 10% to 15% of the people interviewed said

they had no mentors. There is almost an equal number at the other end—people who have many learning and growth-inspiring relationships with people of both genders and a variety of ages and experience. Most of us are somewhere in between, finding a few or a cluster of people to be good mentoring sources. We enlarge our mentor group to the extent we have positive experiences with people and we find their advice trustworthy, respectful, and relevant. Our mentor collection does not stay static: There is a steady inching toward the right side of the continuum as our comfort with people increases.

Mentor-Bonding Continuum



EXPLORING YOUR MENTOR-BONDING HISTORY

How can you identify your mentor-bonding pattern? Often, the pattern is very apparent, and we easily recall early relationships with parents and other adults who were important to us. Many times, though, the pattern is more elusive. Gayle's bonding pattern was obvious; Cory's was not.

Gayle's Mother

I knew Gayle had had a very special relationship with her mother, and I wanted to learn more about it. "If 'mentor' means someone who encouraged you and was a role model and nurtured you, then I would say that my mother was my first and most important mentor," Gayle told me. I asked her to explain. Here is Gayle's story of her early mentor bonding, a tribute to a remarkable mother:

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“She was an extremely loving woman, very emotionally connected. I got a lot of very good feelings about myself, which is key and core for me. I always felt I was everything that she wanted in a daughter. I always felt complete approval and acceptance. She gave me an extraordinary amount of freedom to be who I was. I remember, as a child, she let me have all the freedom to dress as I wanted to dress. I was very strong-willed, and I would only wear certain dresses or dress in my brother’s cast-off clothes and play with the boys. I have pictures of myself in cut-offs with a boy’s haircut because it was cool and comfortable in the summer, and I wanted to be included with my brother. I never had any expectations or thoughts that little girls can’t do ‘this,’ or little girls had to be ‘that,’ which was common for girls.

“She was not overprotective. I rode horseback all over our little town from the time I was 3. I was out in the caves with my brother and his friends and swimming in the little canal. She said that it was one of the hardest things for her not to be overprotective. But she didn’t want me to be fearful, so I grew up feeling competent.”

Gayle’s mentor bonding with women started with her mother and was reinforced by her Mexican “second mother,” who was a key member of the family when they lived in Brownsville, Texas. Sometimes, however, our mentor-bonding pattern is less obvious, even obscure. We might need to start with a look at our mentoring in our adult life and work backwards; this was true for Cory.

Cory’s Cluster

I had nearly finished my interview with Cory, but I was puzzled. He reported a veritable stream of mentors who had been important in his life: five men, one woman, and later, two mentors who were his peers. Yet Cory said he grew up without much guidance or parental

It All Starts with Mentor Bonding

interaction. His father was “always working and never got involved.” His mother was very loving and warm, but, he said, “I don’t think either of them were terribly interested.” *So, how did this rich mentor-bonding pattern develop?* I wondered aloud. It had to come from somewhere in his past. Here, in his words, is what we teased out:

- “My grandfather was a Russian immigrant, a very neat guy, very warm.”
- “My uncle was an army officer in the artillery. He was glamorous. I had a relationship with him whenever he was visiting.”
- “I was in love with a teacher in elementary school, Mrs. Dunn; I suppose because she was loving.”
- “My neighbor used to take me fishing out on the Berkeley pier. Maybe I was 10. He must have liked me, because he took me with him, and I knew his son.”
- “My chemistry professor in high school liked me. He gave me free rein in the laboratory.”
- “I admired my girlfriend’s father. He was a good friend of mine, like a contemporary. He was involved with the teen group, played piano, and was very approachable. I was part of that family all the way through high school.”

So it turns out that Cory had a stream of early relationships that were warm and nurturing and set the stage for later connections. Relevance, trust, and respect were all present in these early adult relationships, even though they did not stem from close mentoring relationships with parents.

The multitude of adult figures in Cory’s life seemed to fill his parent void. The transition from early nurturing relationships to mentoring relations was a natural progression. Mentor bonding took place and was continuous, in contrast to Wil, the entrepreneur we met at the

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beginning of this chapter, where mentor bonding was absent. But as we have seen, most of us experience something in between.

Teasing out your own mentoring history can be as easy or difficult as the examples suggested. In Chapter 19, you will find guides to help you think through your mentor-bonding history.

BRIDGE

Mentor bonding is the base element in our Mentoring Mosaic. It is the ground on which all other mentoring elements come into play, interact, and rest. We start our ever-changing art form, our mosaic, from this base. Not to say that it is fixed permanently and cannot change; we will find otherwise. But it does shape the way we approach mentoring—the way we use, develop, and apply all the other elements in our Mentoring Mosaic. In this chapter, we looked at the three key requirements for mentor bonding to take place: respect, trust, and relevance. The next chapter focuses on another striking finding from the data: the gender and age patterns among our mentors. We will explore what they are and how they come about.

Heartwarming and thought-provoking, Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic contains all you need to know for a successful mentoring experience. Combining rigorous research with a readable style, the book reads as if Darling is a friend chatting about what she has learned.

Discover Your Mentoring Mosaic, A Guide to Enhanced Mentoring

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