Mentors and Mentoring

The authors believe that mentoring programs can play an important role in recruiting and retaining minorities in the library profession. Our research has shown that many other professions and human resource professionals have found that mentoring is a useful tool in the struggle to find and retain young people in professions, including libraries. We would like to present some of the approaches that other professions have used in incorporating mentoring as a way to attract students and new employees to a profession.

Mentors

Mentoring is considered an important development tool in career advancement. It helps employees accomplish various business, career, and personal goals. It also assists in the identification of training and job opportunities through the provision of role models and business friendships. Moreover, mentoring programs address various issues related to organizational structure, diversity, and experiences. Some programs are designed according to cross-skill training and group, cultural, and formal needs. The process also allows minorities to overcome obstacles related to the advancement of their careers.
There is nothing new about mentoring per se. But over the years the trend has moved from the informal paradigm to a more structured format. Traditionally, mentoring has been ad hoc. An older, senior member of an organization, usually white and male, would spot an up-and-comer and take it upon himself to nurture and move forward the younger worker, also usually white and male, on the track to the top. The influx of women and racial minorities into the workforce has presented both problems and opportunities for the art and craft of mentoring.

Mentoring is becoming more structured. One of the more notable approaches is the Menttium 100 program, a year-long program developed by Minneapolis-based Menttium Corp. The program matches senior-level mentors, about half of whom are male, with 100 highly motivated mid-level women from different organizations in an urban area. Originating in Minneapolis in 1991, the program now operates in Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta, and San Francisco. More than 3,000 women executives and 1,000 companies have participated in the program. The twelve-month program includes a minimum of fourteen hours of one-on-one meetings with a senior level mentor from another organization. Those being mentored also participate in monthly or quarterly discussions and lectures by experts in leadership, ethics, and conflict resolution as well as the opportunity to network with other high-potential professionals. Mentors participate at no cost, and they receive coaching from Menttium staff on maximizing their mentoring experience. Exit surveys conducted for all Menttium 100 participants show a 97 percent success rate in terms of both mentor and protégé gaining benefits from their experience.

Group mentoring is another formal approach used by some organizations. One company developed a year-long mentoring program that includes several elements. The key piece is a learning group that's made up of five or six people and a mentor. The group members, not the mentor, control both the times and frequency of their meetings. The mentor provides perspective and insights on the organizational structure, politics, and how decisions get made and why. Human resources designs the groups, looking for diversity in race, gender, educational background, and experience. The mentors, also called “learning leaders,” are assigned as well. Once assembled, the groups had to work out problems themselves. The results of the program have all been positive to date. The members found out more about their areas of interest, and the mentors got more potential candidates for their various departments.

Nationsbank used mentoring to resolve the problem of having many of its talented, high-potential minority employees leave the bank. It found
that, as in many other organizations, minorities often feel they don’t have allies who can show them how things work and where to get help.

In response, Nationsbank inaugurated a program for twenty mentors. Most of the mentors are white males, and the forty protégés are mostly minorities. This diversity pairing challenges members of both groups to venture outside their comfort zones. The program offers one-on-one and group activities, including community discussion groups in which banking staff can explore both cross-cultural and cross-functional issues. Combining mentoring with the issue of increasing diversity highlights a potential strength of formal mentoring.

**Mentoring Is a Two-Way Street**

If your organization is considering a mentoring program, both parties need to clarify their expectations and roles. Some tips to help your program succeed:

**ADVICE TO MENTORS**

1. Let your students find their own path. All you can do is point them in the right direction.
2. People learn in different ways. Some need examples. Some need to talk over different approaches or strategies. Others need to try things out and see what works and what doesn’t. Find out how the people in your group learn best and emphasize their strengths and not their weaknesses.
3. Let your students do it their way. They will have more ownership in their progress if they find their own ways to be effective.
4. Choose your words carefully. People can just as easily be confused as inspired by what you say.

**ADVICE FOR MINORITY EMPLOYEES**

1. Know yourself. Identify your strengths and weaknesses, which will help you and your mentor create action plans to address areas that need improvement.
2. Clarify your goals.
3. Be creative in finding a mentor. If a role model doesn’t exist in your area of work, find one in another area or in another organization.
4. Stay in touch. Let your mentor know what’s going on and ask for help when you need it.

5. Mentor others. One of the best ways to learn is to teach.4

Contemporary organizations are increasingly turning to mentoring programs as a vehicle for creating opportunities for open communication between employees and for assimilating newcomers into institutional culture. These organizations range from professional associations to educational institutions, and their initiatives range from ad hoc committees on mentoring and the adoption of resolutions on mentoring programs to the inclusion of mentoring as a strategy for achieving institutional objectives in a university's six-year plan. Because of its current popularity as an organizational socialization technique, mentoring can initially appear as a panacea, a ready solution for many organizational communication problems. However, any type of effective management of diversity requires organizational change on at least three levels: cultural, involving changes that alter the organization's basic assumptions, values, beliefs, and ideologies that define its view of itself and its environment; structural, involving changes in the grouping of positions and departments within the organization; and behavioral, involving changes in behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions among individuals and work groups. All three levels of organizational change must occur before mentoring can be implemented effectively and operated optimally.

Mentoring is a practice that serves a number of roles or functions in the workplace: mentors provide career development roles, sponsoring advancement, protecting protégés from adverse forces, providing challenging assignments, and fostering positive visibility. These activities all build on and extend reciprocal and open communication between mentor and protégé.

This relationship and the activities that occur within its boundaries ideally allow the protégés to enter and adjust to the organization with much more ease than they would be able to do without the mentor. The properly mentored employee is able to make the transition from outsider to insider more easily, to become initiated into his or her job more quickly, to establish new interpersonal relationships more effortlessly, to discover his or her role in the organization more clearly, to find congruence between self-evaluation and organizational evaluation of his or her work performance more accurately, and to resolve conflicts more readily.

Given the many benefits for both the mentor and the protégé involved in the mentoring relationship, this process is definitely one avenue for addressing the perceived inequities associated with diversity in the workplace.
In spite of the benefits of such relationships, barriers sometimes inhibit the initiation, formation, or continuation of mentoring relationships. They can include organizational behaviors that impede diversified mentoring. Examples include organizational structures that promote segregation by rank, department, or specialization, thereby limiting minority access to relationships; restricted informal and social interactions with minority protégés by majority mentors, thereby making the mentors less comfortable interacting with minority than with majority protégés; the mentor's desire to identify with the protégé as a younger version of himself or herself; and the risk of negative exposure associated with mentoring a minority protégé. When these trends emerge, the negative effects of diversity—of perceived differences among the workforce—also emerge.

While potential barriers that can hinder the effectiveness of mentoring programs do exist, mentoring is a useful strategy. It requires adjustments and synchronization at cultural, structural, and behavioral levels in order to operate effectively.5

Unfortunately, contemporary organizations can no longer afford to narrowly view mentoring as only a role reserved for sages who sponsor new recruits or as a tool to deal with diversity issues. Mentoring must become the requirement of every leader in successful organizations. Managers acting as mentors to subordinates raises a special challenge. How does a subordinate comfortably pursue necessary trial and error in front of the person who will ultimately pass judgment on salary increases, promotions, and work assignments? Since learning requires experimentation and risk taking, how does a manager differentiate between an insight goal (such as creativity and discovery) and an in-charge role (command and control)? Power retards learning, so managers as mentors must demonstrate four qualities critical to leveling the learning field. They must be:

Purposeful. They must always take time to communicate the organization's vision and values. Associates should never be confused as to why they are learning a particular skill or receiving cross-training in different areas.

Humble. Humility entails relinquishing efforts to control the outcome. It suggests putting great effort into being authentic and mask-free. It implies a manager is devoted to learning, not just devoted to convincing. Humility is one of the most difficult and courageous interpersonal acts a leader can take with a subordinate. It is also the most powerful.
Curious. There are many by-products of curiosity. Most foster learning. Curious leaders ask a lot of pointed, get-behind-the-issue questions. Curious leaders are interested in people and consequently reach out in ways that are inclusive and show honest interest and positive regard for others.

Generous. Generosity means bestowing value upon another without expectation of reciprocity. A mentor’s primary gift is advice conveyed with passion for learning and concern for the learner. Such a gift exemplifies the core of the mentoring role. Advice-giving works only if the context is learning. Begin giving advice by letting the employee know the focus of your mentoring. Make sure you have a “meeting of the minds” in focus. Ask permission to give advice. Avoid phrases such as “you ought to.” Keep advice in the first person singular. See figure 2-1.

**FIGURE 2-1**
**Ten Tips for Being a Master Mentor**

1. Be willing to confidently reveal your own challenges and frustrations to your protégé.
2. Remove the mask of position as you demonstrate enthusiasm for learning.
3. Display enthusiastic inclusion and curiosity.
4. Avoid “why” questions.
5. Ask questions that make your protégé think—questions that ask for comparison, evaluation, and reflection.
7. Do not rely on power symbols—sitting behind an imposing desk, for example.
8. Support without rescuing.
9. Be a role model.
10. When it is time for your protégé to move on, celebrate and affirm.
Missions of Mentorship

Many African American children are underexposed to career options such as librarianship. African American librarians must take responsibility for exposing our young people to career options in the library profession. It is understandably difficult for them to prepare for a career that they don't even know exists. Some ways in which African American librarians can fulfill the mission of mentors:

- Arrange tours of various types of libraries for pupils at a local school.
- Recruit at least one college student for an internship at your library.
- Let a young person “shadow” you as you go through your workday.
- Sponsor student memberships in your professional organization.
- Join or organize a mentorship program for a school in your neighborhood.

The advertising industry echoes sentiments very similar to those heard in the library profession. A Black senior executive of a New York agency states: “The larger issue is the racism that exists throughout the industry and the unwillingness to recruit and train African Americans.” Some industry insiders are finally admitting that racism and apathy—not a lack of minority talent—are the causes of the industry’s lack of diversification. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, African Americans make up 10.1 percent of the nation’s workforce, but only 2.1 percent of managers in marketing and public relations and advertising positions.

A survey of 2,500 agency media employees by the trade publication Mediaweek in May 1992 showed that less than 1 percent of all workers are Black, and about 2 percent are Hispanic. The advertising industry has rarely kept any focus on minority hiring. From the industry’s infancy in the early part of the century until the late 1960s, it was a WASP-dominated profession in which white male captains of industry handed over accounts to the white males controlling the images of the marketplace.

With America’s changing demographics, the ad industry’s major trade associations, the American Association of Advertising Agencies and the American Advertising Federation (AAF), have decided to step up their efforts to increase the ranks of minorities in the advertising field. The AAF, consisting of 50,000 members, is recruiting minorities to join its professional ad clubs and two hundred college chapters. Members are trying to get into the schools, beginning as low as junior high, to talk about adver-
tising as an active and lucrative field. The association runs the Minority Advertising Intern program, which has offered summer employment to about 650 participants since its inception in 1973.7

**Mentoring Programs in the Teaching Profession**

The teaching profession has long recognized the importance of minority teachers because they (a) serve as role models, (b) may be better able to meet the learning needs of minority students, and (c) are often bilingual and can help students transcend language barriers. Since 1976, the proportion of minority students in public school classrooms has been climbing steadily. The minority teacher population, however, has remained static at around 10 percent.8 A study by the state of Wisconsin projected that by the year 2000 minority teachers will constitute about 3 percent of its teacher ranks, while the minority student population will be about 38 percent. With the limited number of minority teachers employed in the nation’s schools, it is possible for a student to complete high school without ever having had a teacher from a minority group.

Drawing a similar conclusion, the same can be said of libraries in some communities. According to one educator, “it is virtually impossible to truly educate a multicultural population with a homogeneous teaching force.” To this end, the teaching profession has established a wide variety of programs to recruit and retain minorities. Research has shown that one universal component of these programs is some type of mentoring.

**Electronic Mentoring**

**MentorNet**

MentorNet is the National Electronic Industrial Mentoring Network for Women in Engineering and Science. The network pairs women who are studying engineering or science at a participating university with professional scientists and engineers working in industry and helps them form e-mail-based mentoring relationships.

This organization states that e-mail is convenient, cost-effective, and easy to use. E-mail is also widely available. Using e-mail allows MentorNet program participants to transcend constraints of geography, time, and synchronous communication (that is, there is no need for both parties to be available simultaneously; they can add to the conversation at their conve-
An “e-mentoring” program allows participation of many professionals whose time schedules and constraints prevent them from participating in more traditional relationships with students. Women students from participating universities and mentors sign up for the program using an online application form. Information from the application enters a central database, and sorting software identifies several probable matches. The network’s mentoring specialist reviews and completes the match and launches the pair on their e-mail relationship. The mentoring specialist sends out regular electronic newsletters with suggestions for student/mentor pairs and is available to coach and assist participants who encounter difficulties.

Electronic Mentoring and Academic Guidance Network (EMAGN)

This pilot Electronic Mentoring project was launched in 1996 and targets eleventh-grade students at a high school in San Francisco. The program is offered through electronic communication using e-mail, electronic chat rooms, and video conferencing, and it offers a one-on-one relationship with business school undergraduate student volunteers who encourage youth to achieve academic goals and pursue higher educations.

Mentors help students identify college interests and goals and assist them in the decision-making process and the steps required to pursue higher education. The program is designed to help ensure broader access to educational opportunities through the use of communications technology, and it attempts to create a model that eliminates geographical constraints. The project familiarizes youth with interactive technology devices, encourages them to locate college and scholarship information on the World Wide Web, and enables student mentors to communicate more frequently by reducing the frustrations of phone tag, lost messages, and conflicting schedules. The project’s goal is to offer a program to increase the number of disadvantaged students who, with support from undergraduate business students, are able to obtain information and mentoring that will enable them to enroll and successfully compete at any university or college.

Hewlett-Packard E-Mail Mentoring Program

The Hewlett-Packard E-Mail Mentoring Program creates one-on-one mentor relationships between its employees and students and teachers from grades five through twelve. HP employees motivate students to excel
in math and science and to improve their communication and problem-solving skills. In addition, HP employees help students develop the skills they need to pursue their interests in a professional and successful way.

## Mentoring in the Library Profession

Research indicates that there have been several initiatives taken over the years to establish mentoring programs primarily at various academic institutions, but these programs have been the exception rather than the rule. To make a significant impact, the authors believe that a mentoring initiative should come from the national professional organization and perhaps at state levels as well. State library associations could spearhead statewide mentoring initiatives and meet as a unit at the national conferences for information sharing and workshops to provide support for their individual efforts.

The mentor program at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSEIS) paired information professionals with first-year library students in a mentor-student relationship. A core of UCLA librarians was joined by librarians from all over southern California. They were recruited from GSEIS alumni, the Southern California Special Libraries Association membership, the Los Angeles Public Library librarians (both adult and children's), and from volunteers who heard of the program and wanted to be involved. The program offers a wide variety of mentors from academic, business, law, medical, museum, public, school, and special libraries.9

Another initiative was started by the libraries in the state of Colorado by the Colorado Council on Library Development (CCLD). A statewide committee was formed, which included librarians and laypeople representing the various minority groups as well as representatives from every part of Colorado. The committee's original charge was to develop a statewide plan for addressing library services for "demographically diverse populations." This charge was further refined to focus on the visible minority populations—African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American. One of the areas of emphasis identified by the committee was personnel training. It was stated that one way to serve minority communities better was to hire minority staff who not only can relate to and understand diverse cultures but also can serve as role models to attract nonusers. A subcommittee designed a mentoring program for the retention and advancement of minority librarians and paraprofessionals, with at least four
mentoring teams operating the first year. The mentoring program was designed for seasoned minority or white librarians/mentors to share their knowledge and experiences with minority protégés who could benefit from their guidance and wisdom. The response from both mentors and protégés has been favorable.10

Changing Minds Always a Challenge

Lack of money, career gridlock, cultural differences, and personal inclination all contribute to the problem, but many librarians—most minorities, as well as some white librarians—are quick to point out that they feel most in the library profession are often simply inhospitable to those who are different. Minorities still struggle to make inroads in a historically inhospitable profession that has proven resistant to change.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 112-14.
4. Ibid., 40.